

MA Thesis – M. Soares; McMaster University – English

BURNEY'S FROLICS: VIOLENCE, LAUGHTER AND SHAME IN
CAMILLA; A PICTURE OF YOUTH

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of “the frolic” in Frances Burney’s *Camilla*. Frolics take the form of light-hearted pranks centered on ritualized public humiliation; they are comically framed and particularly painful, encouraging a discussion about the ethics of laughter and the dynamics of power operating in both *Camilla* and Burney’s world. The purpose of this study is twofold: firstly, this project seeks to qualify current emphasis on politeness in the eighteenth century by tracing a history of violent comedy, engaging with jestbook humour, print culture, conduct literature and theorists such as Fielding, Hobbes, Smith and Locke. This study suggests that *Camilla* responds to popular debates about laughter and propriety, pushing the boundaries of comic acceptability with violent pranks and the use of animal and deformity humour. Secondly, this study explores the structure of the frolic itself, its function as a system of domination and control. The prankster, a socially transgressive figure able to displace the rules governing propriety through a prank, is also a social tyrant – seizing complete control over others, causing humiliation and shame. The frolic is based on plotting, secrecy, deception and public exposure, and Burney aligns the prankster with other transgressive figures in the novel, such as guardians and mentors, who exert the same type of power over the vulnerable and the weak. Burney’s pranks bring as much pain as they do laughter, becoming an important satiric device that explores both the politics of laughter and the social forces at work in her novel.

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BURNEY’S FROLICS: VIOLENCE, LAUGHTER AND SHAME IN
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Chapter 1: “Matters of Etiquette”: Laughter in the Age of Sensibility.....	1
Chapter 2: “A Mere Trick! A Joke! A Frolic!” Pranksters and the Dynamics of Power..	29
Chapter 3: “Dumb Creturs”: Animals, Laughter, and the Plight of Women.....	53
Chapter 4: “The Little Hump-Back Gentlewoman”: Deformity, Ridicule and the Dynamics of Shame.....	81
Conclusion.....	107
Bibliography.....	111

List of Figures

Figure 1. Bowles & Carver, *Catchpenny Prints*.....9

Figure 2. William Heath, *Made Duval Dancing a Minuet at the Hampstead Assembly*...19

Figure 3. Robert Sayer, *An English Jack-Tar giving Monsieur a Drubbing*.....23

Figure 4. Sayer & Bennett, *English Funn or Docking the Macaroni*.....24

Figure 5. William Hogarth, *First Stage of Cruelty*.....57

Figure 6. William Hogarth, *Second Stage of Cruelty*.....59

Figure 7. William Hogarth, *Cruelty in Perfection*.....60

Figure 8. William Hogarth, *The Reward of Cruelty*.....61

Figure 9. Thomas Rowlandson, *The Monkey Room in the Tower*.....76

Chapter 1

“Matters of Etiquette”: Laughter in the Age of Sensibility

*Directions for Coughing, sneezing, or moving
Before the King and Queen*

In the first place, you must not Cough. If you find a cough tickling in your throat, you must arrest it from making any sound: if you find yourself choacking with the forbearance, you must choak: But not cough.

In the 2d place, you must not sneeze. If you have a vehement Cold, you must take no notice of it; if your Nose membranes feel a great irritation, you must hold your breath; if a sneeze still insists upon making its way, you must oppose it by keeping your teeth grinding together; if the violence of the repulse breaks some blood-vessel, you must break the blood-vessel: But not sneeze.

In the 3d place, you must not, upon any account, stir either hand or foot. If, by chance, a black pin runs into your Head, you must not take it out: If the pain is very great, you must be sure to bear it without wincing... If, however, the agony is very great, you may, privately, bite the inside of your Cheek, or of your lips, for a little relief; taking care, meanwhile, to do it so cautiously as to make no apparent dent outwardly. And, with that precaution, if you even gnaw a piece out, it will not be minded, only be sure either to swallow it, or commit it to a corner of the inside of your mouth till they are gone, – for, You must not spit. (Burney, *Journals and Letters* 230)

In the above letter to her sister Hetty, Burney comically outlines a few “matters of etiquette” which she must abide by as Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte (229).

“You would never believe the many things to be studied for appearing with a *proper propriety* before crowned Heads,” Burney explains, and her letter reveals just how unnatural and ridiculous the self-restraint required by “proper propriety” can be (230). As Margaret Anne Doody notes, Burney’s court satire reaches a “crescendo of self-wounding” – choking, teeth grinding, the popping of blood-vessels, and even the gnawing of oneself – to illustrate the meaningless pain caused by an “intense and absurd

repression” of the human body (Doody, *The Life in the Works* 169). “The body becomes imprisoned in itself,” Doody states, and this self-repression causes self-torture, with the “disposal of the bitten piece of the cheek” being “a disturbing image of self cannibalizing ‘self-dependence’” (169). To have complete control over oneself, to be entirely “self-dependent” and deny the body’s natural impulse to cough, sneeze, and even move because of proper propriety is here presented as an absurdity, and *Directions for Coughing, sneezing, or moving Before the King and Queen* can be read as a sardonic parody of the many conduct manuals condemning similar natural impulses – such as the urge to laugh.

Burney offers an earlier version of her court satire (not limited to “crowned heads” alone) in a letter to her sister Susana, where she initially plays with the idea of writing her own conduct manual, a “Book for Instruction” that will “contain all *the newest fashioned regulations*” (Burney, *Journals and Letters* 27). As with her court satire, Burney’s “Book for Instruction” outlines the absurd ways in which the body is restricted by propriety, yet in this case she makes a direct link between coughing and laughter, stating “in the first place, you are never again to Cough...it being as much a mark of ill breeding as it is to *Laugh*, which is a thing that Lord Chesterfield has stigmatized” (28). And certainly, Lord Chesterfield does stigmatize laughter in *Advice to His Son* (1775), a series of letters complete with “every instruction necessary to form a man of honour, virtue, taste and fashion” (2). Chesterfield denounces laughter as a “disagreeable noise” that occasions a “shocking distortion of the face,” warning readers “never [to be] heard to laugh while you live” (68). Believing that “there is nothing so illiberal, and so ill bred, as audible laughter,” Chesterfield reasons that it can be “easily restrained, by a very little

reflection” and that “people do not enough attend to its absurdity” (68). And yet, as Burney’s parodies suggest, there is nothing more absurd than restraining a laugh. “Whatever is Natural, plain or easy, *is* entirely banished from polite Circles,” Burney jests, and her work offers a critical look at the irrational yet spirited conflict between laughter and propriety in the age of sensibility (28).

Laughter and Propriety

Burney’s journals and letters are filled with stifled laughs and shameful chuckles, revealing an almost guilty violation of “proper propriety” and the social anxiety hidden behind laughter. She recalls sitting in “agony, almost killing myself by restraining my laughter” (83), and details moments in which “every body seemed *afraid* to Laugh, too, and *studying* to be delicate, as if they had been *cautioned*” (104). And indeed, conduct literature *did* caution readers against audible laughter, warning them about the dangers of high-spirited behaviour and derisive laughs directed at others. Laughter, as Bakhtin explains, “knows no inhibitions, no limitations,” and it was this “limitlessness” that was the source of so much anxiety for conduct writers and moral theorists throughout the century – laughter was a sheer breach of self-restraint, and this reckless abandonment was subversive, even considered “low” (Bakhtin 90). For example, young women who indulged in “overflowing spirits,” as Hester Chapone explains in *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, ran the risk of being associated with the “vulgar” because laughter causes people “to suspect, what is too often true, that they themselves are the subjects of your mirth” (106). Similarly, Chesterfield associates laughter with the vulgar and the low, a “characteristic of folly and ill manners” born from an unbridled love of

mocking others (Chesterfield 68). Chesterfield even goes as far as to suggest that verbal wit is the only permissible form of amusement because “true wit, or sense, never yet made any body laugh,” unlike “low buffoonery and silly accidents” which always “excite[s] laughter; and that is what people of sense and breeding should show themselves above” (68). He explains:

A man’s going to sit down, in the supposition that he has a chair behind him, and falling down upon his breech for want of one, set a whole company a laughing...when all the wit in the world would not do it; a plain proof, in my mind, how low and unbecoming a thing laughter is. (68)

A gentleman well versed in matters of etiquette and able to control his “overflowing spirits” would never laugh at a man falling on his backside, Chesterfield claims, and he reiterates how “vivacity and wit make a man shine in company; but trite jokes and loud laughter reduce him to a buffoon” (157). And so, as Chesterfield, Chapone and countless other conduct writers suggest, audible laughter is deemed unreflective and ill mannered – a rebellious display of one’s uninhibited emotions and a mark of bad character that was incompatible with good nature and sensibility.

The latter half of the eighteenth century has often been considered an age of sensibility and feeling, with essayists, moralists, novelists and poets showing great interest in sensitivity and making use of natural emotional responses like swoons, tears, and sighs. Laughter, however, was a far more ambiguous act and became the subject of intense debate. Works like Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, for example, offered a comprehensive view of morality and sympathy that addressed the sheer incompatibility between laughter and compassion. Smith explains that sympathy is defined by our ability to imagine ourselves in the body of the suffering other, our ability to “become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his

sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (12). Agonies and joys are “brought home to ourselves,” and it is this experience of “fellow-feeling” that inspires us to care and sympathize with others (12). “Nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast,” Smith asserts, “nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary” (17). Because “low buffoonery” and ridicule excited loud, ungovernable and derisive laughs, laughter was often considered a “shocking” experience that was both insensitive and impolite. Jokes made at the expense of others were “unsupportable,” according to Smith, because they both mortified and humiliated the object of ridicule – laughter was a reckless abandonment of self-restraint that could potentially embarrass and harm others, and in an age where propriety and sensitivity were of the utmost importance, such insensitive laughter is notably out of place (130).

Recent scholarship has presented a rather generalized view of politeness in the eighteenth century, considering it to be a period of fashionable benevolence defined by Enlightenment rationality and good manners. This “generalized view” has largely been attributed to a shift in national consciousness linked to the development of an “elusive middling sort,” a newly prosperous trading class born from a booming consumer culture aiming to create an identity of its own (Dickie *Cruelty and Laughter* 2). As Simon Dickie notes, “the gradual process by which this ‘class’ gained a sense of identity and achieved moral and cultural authority to match its economic power has been one of the three or four great questions of modern British history,” and the most popular answer has been the development of a “self-conscious politeness and sentimentality that enabled the newly prosperous trading class to differentiate itself at once from the mob below and the corrupt

aristocracy above” (2). Writers like Chesterfield, Chapone and Smith were therefore responding to new interests and catering to a new market wishing to be schooled in matters of etiquette, with sensibility becoming a fashionable subject for those aiming to separate themselves from the immoral “high” and the unruly “low.” And yet, as Simon Dickie notes, the popularity of these conduct manuals, pamphlets, charity sermons and sentimental novels demonstrates “less the *dominance* of this sensibility than the sheer prevalence of older and less sentimental pleasures, their stubborn resistance to reform” (4). Campaigns for politeness were pushing against deep-seated habits, with violence, intolerance and schadenfreude continuing to creep into literature throughout the century. Simon Dickie’s work on jestbook humour and David Fairer’s survey of eighteenth-century poetry have actively contested the prevailing “idealized picture” of politeness in this period, with Fairer concluding that the eighteenth century was not a polite world, but rather an “impolite world that talked much about politeness” (qtd. in *Cruelty and Laughter* 3). Politeness may have been a fashionable subject, with laughter being heavily theorized and eagerly debated, but middle class readers were still just as capable of laughing at “low” material as country rustics or even high-society wags, and Burney seems to be fully aware that a reformation of manners did not happen over night. Burney’s work often stresses that there is no real difference between “high” and “low,” with social climbers like the Branghtons and aristocrats like Lord Merton in *Evelina* delighting in the same type of “low buffoonery” and cruel humour commonly associated with the low. “Ridicule and inflicting pain were everyday amusements,” Dickie notes, and cruel laughter became a lingering source of anxiety that existed across class lines despite efforts of reform (1).

Jestbook humour, which reached its greatest circulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, offers great insight into the persistence of “low” comedy that continued to invite loud and derisive laughter. It may be easy to assume that jestbook humour was largely associated with the “low” – a culture of vulgar tastes that the “politer” classes were attempting to separate themselves from – however, as Dickie proves, these “nasty witticisms” and cruel jests did not just come from the cheapest forms of print. Jestbooks and comic miscellanies were produced for middle and upper class readers, and “they were far beyond the reach of a popular audience” (Dickie “Hilarity and Pitilessness” 3-4). This “low” comedy was enormously profitable in the eighteenth-century book market, and they often presented a “frank delight in human suffering” (1). These jests reveal a mirthful past that Simon Dickie observes shared “an automatic and apparently unreflective urge to laugh at weakness simply because it is weak,” providing insensitive jokes about deformity, disability, old age and the poor (1). The carefree pranksters and acerbic wits of these jests seem to delight in the lowering of the already low, as with the following prank from *Joaks Upon Joaks* (1720):

The Lord Mohun and the Earl of Warwick being on the ramble, they took notice of an old woman, who early and late was boiling codlings [apples] near Charing-cross; one day they bought some of her, pitied her poverty, and promised to send her a bushel of charcoal for nothing. I thank your honours, replied the old woman. In the morning a porter brings a bushel of charcoal, at which the old woman was very joyful; but their lordships had filled up the hollow of the charcoal with gunpowder, and sealed up the ends with black wax and stood at a distance to see the effect of their project. The old woman’s fire beginning to decay, she supplied it with the charcoal which was sent her. In a little time, bounce went the charcoal like so many crackers, down went the kettle into the street, and away flew the codlings about the old woman’s ears; and she getting no hurt, their lordships were well pleased with the frolic. (*Joaks Upon Joaks* 11-2)

As Dickie notes, these jokes are “surprisingly genial and good-humoured,” with frolickers being called “arch Rogues,” “good imprudent fellows,” or “diverting wags”

(“Hilarity and Pitilessness” 1). Lord Mohun and the Earl of Warwick are notably on a “Ramble” – a walk for pleasure – and after all, their little frolic causes the impoverished old woman “no hurt” (*Joaks Upon Joaks* 12). Burney’s frolics display this same pleasant and light framing yet, as we learn, there is nothing more discomfiting than a prank. However, what is most unsettling is the fact that these frolics were not just imaginary scenarios. Dickie states that “one routinely comes across them in elite diaries and letters,” with young, often upper-class bucks rambling about town and wreaking havoc (*Cruelty and Laughter* 131). In the summer of 1733, for example, the Duke of Richmond describes a “ramble” in Hampshire where he finds some “game” in the form of a drunken pauper, robbing “without waking him” and only leaving behind “a few half pence and a tobacco stopper” to everyone’s amusement (qtd. in *Cruelty and Laughter* 131). In addition to these jests and diary entries is the proliferation of “buckish violence” in miscellany prints, presenting cruel amusements as a common everyday thrill. As Simon Dickie observes, the lottery sheets put out by Bowles and Carver offer a caption reading “The Beau’s Frolic, - to cure the Cholic,” accompanying the image of young bucks cudgeling a man for sport next to panels depicting lamp lighting and country maidens (Fig 1). Dickie notes that “every spark knew that drink and riot were reliable ways of reviving the spirits,” and in catchpenny prints like Bowles and Carver this “therapeutic violence” is given disturbing equivalence to cats catching mice, fishing, and cheating street performers (138). Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* reminds us that “nothing pleases us more” to find “fellow-feeling” in our fellow man, “nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary” (17). Insensitivity might bring shock, but the popularity of jestbook humour and “rambling beau’s” show that insensitivity in the



Figure 1. Bowles & Carver, *Catchpenny Prints* (1790). Hand-coloured etching. The British Museum #1858,0417.9

eighteenth century was still capable of bringing laughter.

Comic Theory and the Dimensions of Laughter

As a comic writer, Burney was keenly aware of the debates around laughter and the need to apply comic material with care. Comedy could easily slip over the bounds of propriety, and laughter was becoming difficult to defend in an age trying to separate itself from older, rougher habits. Joseph Addison's *Spectator No. 35* similarly acknowledges the sheer unpredictability of comic writing, observing a tendency for authors to run away with their own "delirious mirth," concluding that "among all kinds of writing, there is none in which authors are more apt to miscarry than works of humour" (100). There are some "raving incoherent pieces" of work that Addison claims are "rather the offsprings of a distempered brain, than the works of humour," and in an attempt to vindicate laughter of all its negative qualities he offers a clear distinction between proper and improper sources of laughter, referring to it as "Humour" and "False Humour" (100-1). Humour is considered to be a legitimate source of laughter, while False Humour, which was to be avoided at all times, encouraged insensitive laughs at bawdy, rude or inappropriate material. By offering his analysis "after Plato's manner" and "supposing Humour to be a person," Addison gives an allegorical reading of Humour's legitimacy by giving him the following genealogy:

Truth was the founder of the family, and the father of Good Sense. Good Sense was the father of Wit, who married a lady of a collateral line called Mirth, by whom he had issue Humour. Humour therefore being the youngest of this illustrious family, and descended from parents of such different dispositions, is very various and unequal in his temper; sometimes you see him putting on grave looks and a solemn habit, sometimes airy in his behaviour, and fantastic in his dress: insomuch that at different times he appears as serious as a judge, and as jocular as a merry-andrew. But as he has a great deal of the mother in his

constitution, whatever mood he is in, he never fails to make his company laugh. (101)

Humour, being a man of “various and unequal temper,” is here considered to be quite versatile, able to sport a “grave look” or be a “merry-Andrew,” yet never failing to make his company laugh (101). Descended from Good Sense and Mirth, Humour’s lineage is presented as legitimate and well balanced, unlike those works indulging in “delirious mirth” born from that “imposter” False Humour (101). Addison presents False Humour as a kind of con artist, taking the name of Humour and “willingly pass[ing] for him in the world” (101), warning readers to avoid being “imposed upon” by such a cheat by determining if he is really a “counterfeit” (102). Unlike Humour, who “generally looks serious, while every body laughs about him,” False Humour can be easily distinguished by his “loud and excessive laughter,” since he is “always laughing, whilst every body about him looks serious” (102). Notably, Addison claims that False Humour can be identified by his indulgence in “little apish tricks and buffooneries,” the same type of buffooneries that Chesterfield so adamantly rejects, which enables him to “ridicule both friends and foes indifferently” with excessive laughter (104). These characteristics, we learn, can all be accounted for by “looking into his parentage,” since False Humour:

Descends originally from Falsehood, who was the mother of Nonsense, who was brought to bed of a son called Frenzy, who married one of the daughters of Folly, commonly known by the name of Laughter, on whom he begot that monstrous infant of which I have been here speaking. (102-3)

By associating False Humour with a lascivious mother cheekily “brought to bed” of her offspring, Addison suggests that uncontrollable laughter can be quite tempting, and that his illegitimacy stems from an inability to control one’s passions. Laughter, as discussed, was a source of anxiety because it represented an indulgence in “overflowing spirits,” the

abandonment of self-restraint, and Addison pushes this association further by relating these ungoverned passions to sexual promiscuity. Addison's conclusion is not much of an exaggeration given that laughter was generally considered to be a mark of abandonment, and his work on Humour and False Humour relates to larger concerns over the conflict between self-restraint and self-indulgence. In a similar way, *Camilla* can be read as a meditation on Addison's distinction between legitimate and illegitimate laughter, relating to more general concerns over acceptable and transgressive behaviour; light-hearted sentimental laughs are contrasted with the more obscene, uncontrollable and "vociferous laughter" of those indulging in the humiliation of others (260). Interestingly, Macdersey, *Camilla*'s hot-tempered Ensign who experiences this "vociferous laughter" first hand, claims that "there's no one thing upon earth I hate like a joke; unless it's against another person; and then it only gives me a little joy inwardly" (261). Macdersey's observation seems to lay bare the conflict that lies at the core of *Camilla*, as well as Addison's theory – the conflict between "proper" or polite laughter, and the more tempting "vociferous" laughter directed at others, which gives one a little "inward joy."

Like Macdersey's "inward joy," Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) details what he calls the feeling of "sudden glory," or rather, the natural human inclination to feel sudden triumph at the "apprehension of some deformed thing in another," to which by comparison we "suddenly applaud" ourselves (34). "Sudden glory" is "that passion which maketh those *Grimaces* called laughter," and it is an act of "Pusillanimity" which gives the laugher petty comfort in finding fault in others (34). Hobbes' "sudden glory" offers a rather frank analysis of the baser instincts at work behind a laugh, offering an explanation for the pleasure derived from pranking impoverished old women with exploding coals, or

the robbing of drunken paupers – it is an affirmation of the prankster’s superiority. Henry Fielding’s “Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men” puts forward the same Hobbesian claim, maintaining that everyone is “pleased with seeing a Blemish in another which we are ourselves free from,” observing that not many people can restrain a laugh when a well-dressed person falls over “in a dirty place” (Fielding, *Miscellanies* 192). Such laughter is an instinctive response, a “convulsive Extasy, occasioned by the Contemplation of our own Happiness, compared with the unfortunate persons,” a “spontaneous Motion of the Soul” that few notice “and none can prevent” (192). Fielding’s suggestion that laughing at others is an instant physiological response, a “spontaneous motion of the soul” that is impossible to restrain, calls to mind the same uncontrollable laughter put forward by Burney in her court satire. Laughter, like a sneeze, is something that few notice and “none can prevent,” and being forced to restrain what is only natural is enough to make the laugher a prisoner in their own body. There is no shame in letting out a laugh, Fielding suggests, and he clarifies that what matters most is that the laugher “come[s] to reflect on the Uneasiness this Person suffers” because “Laughter, in a good and delicate Mind, will begin to change itself into Compassion” (193). As Simon Dickie notes, “it never becomes clear whether this ‘Compassion’ is a competing benevolent impulse or a civilized response,” but what Fielding *does* make clear is that “it was hard not to laugh, that no one could avoid all ill-natured raillery, and that he wasn’t trying to stop people enjoying themselves” (*Cruelty and Laughter* 169). Yet because ill-natured raillery was so impolite, what results is a constant push and pull between laugher and new standards of etiquette, with comic theorists trying to justify cruel delights by legitimizing illegitimate humour.

In his popular and oft-quoted Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding puts forward his “Affectation” defense: a theory that attempts to justify derisive laughs by establishing legitimate sources of ridicule. Fielding distinguishes between what he calls “the true ridiculous” and the more contemptible, malicious forms of laughter, by reasoning that from “affectation arises the ridiculous – which always strikes the reader with surprise and pleasure” (7). There are two main sources of affectation: vanity and hypocrisy. “Vanity,” Fielding explains, “puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause” while hypocrisy “sets us on an endeavor to avoid censure by concealing our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues” (6). In this way, derisive laughter can be seen as less of a social problem and more of a social corrective, a form of “social policing” that rightly lowers vain or hypocritical characters through comic debasement. Only an “ill-framed mind” would “look on ugliness, infirmity, or poverty, as ridiculous in themselves,” Fielding explains, but “when ugliness aims at the applause of beauty, or lameness endeavours to display agility; it is then that these unfortunate circumstances, which at first moved our compassion, tend only to raise our mirth” (7). Fielding is not the only one to suggest that there are proper objects of ridicule deserving laughter. Hester Chapone admits that there are “some characters in the world, which I would freely allow you to laugh at – tho’ not in their presence,” advising women to “conceal” their chuckles or at least leave the room to avoid offending the guilty party (Chapone 110). And yet in some circumstances, laughing directly at the person’s “trifling errors” can be “agreeable and useful,” as long as it is “offered in perfect kindness and sincere good humour” (109). Fielding and the many other comic writers indulging in this

mocking laughter seemed to justify cruel material by making it “agreeable and useful,” a way of correcting truly ridiculous behaviour (109).

Fielding develops various characters that fit snugly into his category of “the truly ridiculous,” Mrs. Slipslop from *Joseph Andrews* being the most graphic and unforgiving. Mrs. Slipslop is described as a forty-five year old maid who is “somewhat red” and “pimpled” in the face, with a nose “rather too large, and her eyes too little” (27). She is said to resemble a cow in both breath and stature – as well as in the “two brown globes which she carried before her” – along with having one leg shorter than the other “which occasioned her to limp as she walked” (27). “This fair creature,” we learn, attempts to seduce Joseph Andrews on numerous occasions, in which “she had not met with quite so good success as she probably wished” despite all the “allurements of her native charms” (27). The reader is invited to laugh openly at the incongruity of a cow-like, pimply, red-faced woman past her prime pursuing the young and handsome Joseph Andrews, always prepared to “lay her violent amorous Hands” on him like a “hungry Tygress” (29). Yet what encourages even more laughter is her vanity and pride; being a “mighty Affecter of hard Words,” she makes humorous malapropisms and treats those who she considers to be below her harshly (21). Mrs. Slipslop is one of the many stock eighteenth-century caricatures of undesirable and lustful old maids, offering a grotesque and insensitive image of the single, middle-aged woman. Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, for example, takes up the same trope, depicting a lusty and unattractive woman named Tabitha Bramble, who like Slipslop is an available “maiden of forty-five” (60). Smollett depicts Tabitha as lean and scraggly, “raw-boned, aukward, flat-chested, and stooping” with exaggerated features and “a long neck shriveled into a thousand wrinkles” (60). As

with Slipslop, Tabitha is “proud, stiff, vain, imperious, prying, malicious, greedy and uncharitable” having a “natural austerity...soured by disappointment in love; for her long celibacy is by no means owing to her dislike of matrimony: on the contrary, she has left no stone unturned to avoid the reproachful epithet of old maid” (60). Such representations of physically grotesque and desperately amorous older women may be unsympathetic, but Fielding encourages readers to laugh openly at such vain and prideful behavior (7). It is this comic tradition that Burney actively draws from, with ridiculous characters being lowered through laughter; however Burney’s use of violent comedy tends to push such social policing uncomfortably far.

Burney’s Violent Comedy

Doody notes that in some of Burney’s comic scenes “the action spills over the boundary lines of comic acceptability,” and when this line is crossed (usually through violence or humiliation) the discomfort is enough to signal to the reader that something is wrong (56). While Burney applies Fielding’s Affectation theory and indulges in Hobbes’ “sudden glory” by creating characters that are comically acceptable, laughter at their expense becomes problematic once they are subjected to violent comedy. “Violent comedy,” as Bilger explains, is “a comic mode in which brutal and painful events are described in a setting or tone that invites laughter,” and even when violence is not present in the scene itself this humour does violence to the reader by asking them to laugh at an idea or concept that normally causes pain (Bilger “Goblin Laughter” 323). Burney seems to be fully conscious of acceptable sources of humour, applying traditional stock characters like vain old maids and fops in her fiction that welcome comic attacks, but by

placing these characters in cruel and violent situations, laughter at their expense makes the reader rethink the social codes justifying this type of cruel “social policing.”

Nothing seems to illustrate the contentious divide between malicious and amiable laughter more than Burney’s own Madame Duval in her earliest novel *Evelina*. Madame Duval, Evelina’s estranged maternal grandmother, is easily an object of ridicule – she is vain, rude, affects a French accent and dresses far younger than her advanced years, making Evelina “amazed, frightened, and unspeakably shocked” to discover they are related (57). As Doody explains, Madame Duval has “forgotten that she is not really French; as a tavernmaid who married a Frenchman she has found her assumed nationality a useful camouflage for her errors,” and she “believes her assumed identity is true, just as she assumes her rouge makes her young” (52). Her pride and affected identity makes her “comically invincible,” as Doody explains (52), a laughing stock even by conduct book standards: like Fielding’s affectation theory, Chapone explains that “extravagant vanity, and affectation, are the natural subjects of ridicule, which is their proper punishment” claiming that “when you see old people, instead of maintaining the dignity of their years, struggling against nature to conceal them, affecting the graces, and imitating the follies of youth,” you are “welcome to laugh...I do not wish you to be insensible to the ridicule of such absurd deviations from truth and nature” (110-1). And indeed, Madame Duval stands out as a figure “deviating from truth and nature,” aiming to conceal her old age and low social status. In the Hampstead scene, she oversteps the bounds of propriety by dancing a minuet, and Evelina recounts that she dances “in a style so uncommon” that “her age, her showy dress, and an unusual quantity of *rouge*, drew upon her the eyes, and I fear, the derision of the whole company” (248). Inspiring numerous prints and sketches

with laughable detail long after publication, like William Heath's *Made Duval Dancing a Minuet at the Hampstead Assembly* (Fig. 2), it seems clear that Burney's *Evelina* offers a resonating character meant to amuse – and people were definitely laughing. Burney recalls with great pleasure the support for *Evelina*, with Lady Miller admitting “I never Laughed so much since I was born – I was *sick* with laughing,” and many others were “repeating various speeches of Madame Duval” to the enjoyment and laughter of surrounding crowds (Burney, *Journals and Letters* 159, 105). The Hampstead dance was even recreated by the Burney family in a moment of spontaneous theatre, with Samuel Crisp taking on the role of Madame Duval and making everyone “very merry” (Doody 50). Madame Duval stands out as an absurd figure, her attempts at looking younger and appearing richer make her, according to Fielding and Chapone, “truly ridiculous.” With the help of Captain Mirvan, ridicule becomes her “proper punishment,” but in a very troubling way (Chapone 110).

Madame Duval may be a great source of amusement for readers, but encounters with Captain Mirvan, her comic equal in rudeness and pride, brings on uncomfortably violent scenes. The burly Captain “shocks” *Evelina* with his “surly, vulgar, and disagreeable” behavior, indulging in “rude jests” and unforgiveable pranks that quickly degenerate into physical violence (42). Disguised as a highwayman, the Captain holds up Madame Duval and *Evelina*'s coach on a lonely road, tearing Madame Duval from the carriage and dragging her kicking and screaming into a ditch. He proceeds to violently shake her by the shoulders, making her “out of joint all over,” and while Madame Duval is being “bumped about” outside the carriage, *Evelina* is detained within it (167). Cornered by Sir Clement, a persistent baronet who pursues her relentlessly, *Evelina* is



Figure 2. William Heath, *Made Duval Dancing a Minuet at the Hampstead Assembly* (1822). Hand-coloured etching and aquatint. The British Museum #1927,1126.1.19.33

trapped and forced to endure his advances while her grandmother is being tormented outside. Both women are in distress, and even the footmen overlooking the scene are tormented, but for a rather different reason – they experience “torture from restraining [their] laughter,” and are “ready to die with laughter” after seeing Madame Duval’s disheveled appearance (162, 166). In Burney’s work the prankster often brings pain, and like the footmen overlooking the scene even the reader is in distress, forced to uncomfortably negotiate between laughter and displeasure.

The ditch scene is a difficult episode to decipher, teetering between comedy and violence in a way that is hard to grasp. Even Evelina, the moral center of the novel, struggles with the frolic, admitting that the “narrative” of Madame Duval’s literal shake-down by the Captain “almost compelled me to laugh, yet I was really irritated with the Captain, for carrying his love of tormenting – *sport*, he calls it – to such barbarous and unjustifiable extremes” (166). Evelina’s assessment captures the scene succinctly. The reader, conditioned to dislike Madame Duval, is compelled to laugh but the treatment she receives is excessive. Evelina finds her “sobbing, nay, almost roaring, and in the utmost agony of rage and terror” which makes her highly sympathetic (164). And yet our sympathy is challenged because of her comically irrational behavior – she “beats the ground with both hands” in wailing juvenile cries, and even slaps Evelina’s face after she helps her from the ditch, believing she had “voluntarily deserted her” (165). But what is likely to incite the greatest discomfort is Evelina’s description of Madame Duval emerging from the ditch:

So forlorn, so miserable a figure, I never before saw. Her head-dress had fallen off; her linen was torn; her negligee had not a pin left in it; her petticoats she was obliged to hold on; and her shoes were perpetually slipping off. She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her face was really horrible, for the pomatum and

powder from her head, and the dust from the road, were quite *pasted* on her skin by her tears, which, with her *rouge*, made so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human. (165-6)

Accompanied by the stifled laughs of the footmen, Madame Duval's appearance can be read as a carnivalistic decrowning, a comic debasement through group laughter. The same carnival logic of self-appointed elevation, the comic act of decrowning in the public square, and a falling downward is made clear – Madame Duval's self-created, illusory status as a young, beautiful Frenchwoman of high social standing is shattered when she is lowered from her high state (decrowned) by the Captain, who literally knocks the curls from her head to the delight of the laughing footmen. As Bakhtin explains, group laughter characteristic of carnival involves the "debasement of the higher" in a "coming down to earth" that both "degrades and materializes" (21), and Madame Duval is quite literally brought down to earth. She is placed into the ditch, and emerges from it completely transformed into something that "hardly looked human" (166). Her carefully formed masks are destroyed: her hairdressings have fallen off, her rouge is smeared and smattered with dirt, powder and filth, and her dress is ruined. The Captain's frolic serves to rightfully shake her, to destroy the affected identity she has assumed by breaking her sense of "highness." Yet the prank, as we learn, fails to bring her back down to earth permanently; as with carnival, her lowering is a temporary state and she returns to her lodgings, running to fix her makeup, "the labour of the toilette" being "the chief business of her life" (173).

While Madame Duval invites laughter because of her pride and artificiality, her public decrowning also has political significance. As Doody observes, one of the reasons the Captain makes Madame Duval the object of his "sport" is because she is a woman

and a foreigner; their conversations are always “supported with great vehemence” due to the Captain “roughly maintaining the superiority of the English in every particular, and Madame Duval warmly refusing to allow of it in any” (63). Because the Captain is a “social buccaneer,” as well as a man of the navy, his role in the novel as a French-hating misogynist is politically motivated (Doody 57). John Hart has explored the significance of the Captain’s Francophobia, linking it to longstanding hostilities between the French and the British over colonial hegemony, and connecting Burney’s comic violence to a series of popular satiric mezzotint’s that show interest in the same rough comedy as the ditch scene. These prints shed light on the popularity of violent humour and brutal pranks delighting in the torment of the French, and Burney seems to deliberately tap into this comic tradition. *An English Jack-Tar giving Monsieur a Drubbing (1788)* is a particularly interesting example, with a sailor beating a pleading Frenchman as a boy looks on in amusement (Fig. 3). The Frenchman is depicted as a rather foppish and effeminate character next to the brawny English sailor, with a British ship named “Victory” placed strategically in the background. A second image, *English Funn or Docking the Macaroni (1774)* seems to be channeling Madame Duval directly, with a butcher cutting the tail of hair off a passing Macaroni to the delight of two female onlookers (Fig. 4). Like Madame Duval, who laments the loss of her curls – “My God! What is become of my hair! – why the villain has stole all my curls!” – there’s a suggestion of British superiority over the vain French (166). Hart explains how “the prints reveal that Burney draws upon humorous materials in vogue during the period” and that “if the surviving prints accurately reflect the comic life of their subjects, the brief duration of a joke’s risibility may indicate that Burney plays on social contests – tensions, divisions, and incongruities

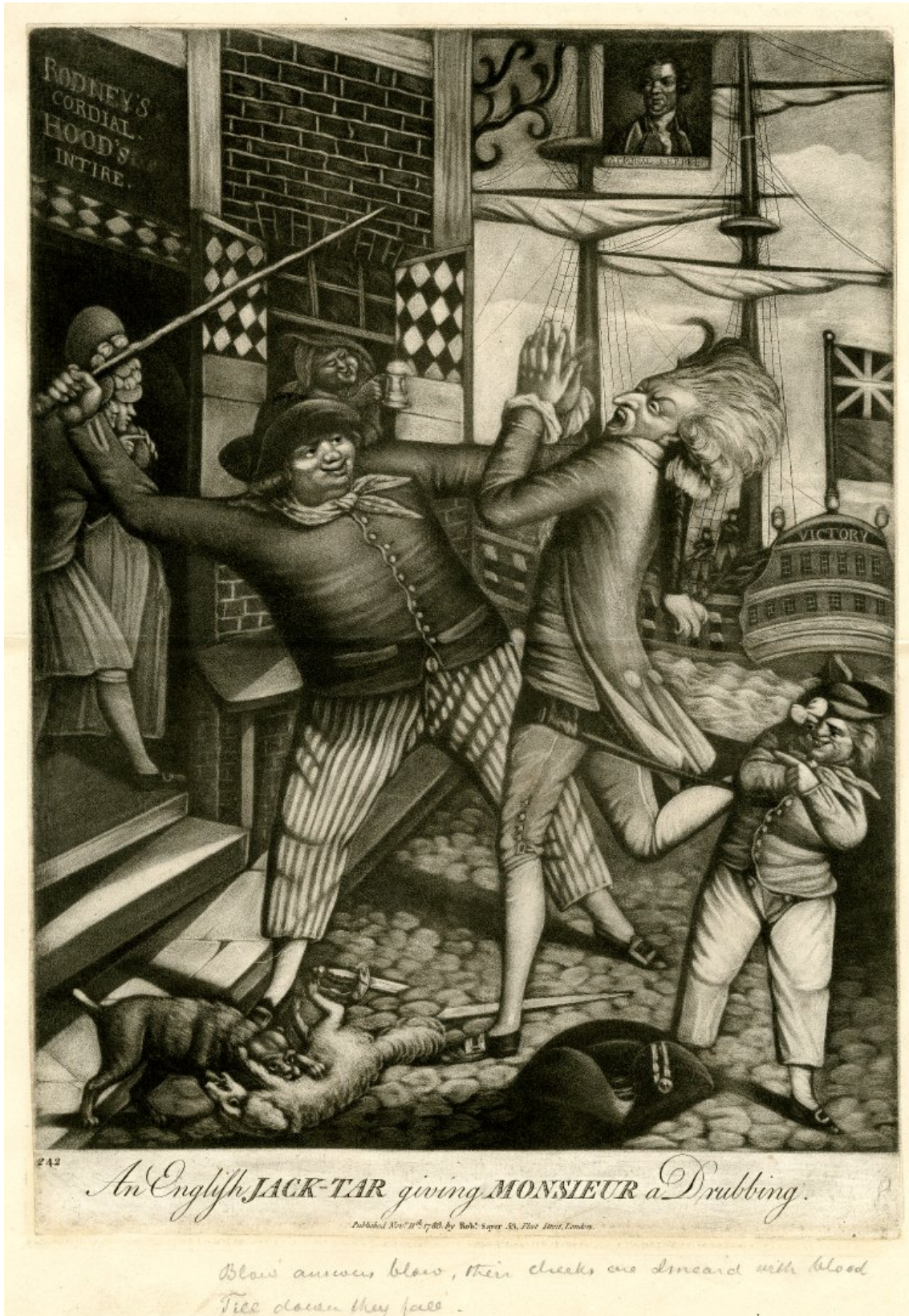


Figure 3. Robert Sayer, *An English Jack-Tar giving Monsieur a Drubbing* (1788). Mezzotint. The British Museum #2010,7081.1003



Figure 4. Sayer & Bennett, *English Funn or Docking the Macaroni* (1774). Mezzotint. The British Museum #J,5.38

– specific to the 1770s” (63). The same can be said of proper propriety, with these mezzotints reflecting a history of comic violence that the Captain happily indulges in, showing the ease with which pranksters can violate codes of conduct.

Evelina is a novel primarily about politeness, with Evelina’s social blunders being the focus of most of the novel’s comic energy. But while Evelina engages in social foibles that spark endearing laughs, the Captain’s violation of proper propriety actively deters laughter. Because he is described by Evelina as “surly, vulgar, and disagreeable,” the reader is made to reject the Captain and his frolics as cruel, and the fact that he manages to get away with such violence is a frightening example of the systems at work in the novel (42). Burney, as Doody explains, “makes us all warily conscious of both the coercive nature of ordinary social controls” and the “ease with which those controls can be set at naught. The practical joker for a moment seizes all the power present in the group, and shows us in extreme form the part played by aggression in social relationships” (57). The practical joker is a tormentor working under the guise of light-hearted amusements, exerting complete control through a prank. As such, Madame Duval in the ditch becomes the picture of female helplessness – her violently disheveled appearance and torn linen have the hint of sexual violence, and given that Evelina is left unprotected in the carriage with a persistent rake at the same time, female vulnerability in the novel is made all too clear. Evelina’s encounters with Sir Clement are always quite invasive; he essentially kidnaps her earlier in the novel, trapping her in his carriage after the opera where the threat of sexual assault is always looming. *Evelina* is a novel about a “young girl’s entry into the world,” about the education of a young woman initially denied legitimacy by a rake, and made into an orphan when her mother dies from the

shame of rejection. Because so much of the novel's focus is on the physical and psychological torment of women at the hands of men, it seems that Burney offers a critique of the dynamics of power operating in *Evelina*'s world through the framework of a frolic. Like the Captain who has "no delight but in terrifying or provoking" Madame Duval, there are men in *Evelina* who have no delight but in terrifying or provoking women on various levels (170). As with *Camilla*, there is a sense that the frolic is used as a means to critique the ways in which pranksters are free to break social codes and exert complete power over others for their own enjoyment.

Violent comedy is difficult to decipher, making the reader struggle between laughter and disgust. As Bilger notes, such scenes are "simultaneously comic and not at all funny," with the reader negotiating between the pleasure in seeing prideful and vain characters being brought down, and the sheer discomfort in witnessing them fall victim to the hostility of pranksters that lack feeling and exercise violent control over others (129). These pranks achieve various ends: they are socially corrective by lowering ridiculous characters through laughter; they allude to a dark tradition that delights in cruel amusements; and they allow for a feminist critique by problematizing the dynamics of power operating in the text. Prank scenes are unsettling because they are strategically ambiguous, and Burney's social critique runs the risk of being lost on a mirthful audience. Yet because Burney's violent comedy so deliberately oversteps boundaries, the frolic stands out as a satiric tool that provokes a conversation about the absurdity of existing power structures allowing for this type of violence to pass. So much scholarship has been devoted to politeness and sensibility, with works tracking Britain's transformation into a polite and commercial society – this project aims to qualify this

transformation by placing Burney within the context of her time. *Camilla; A Picture of Youth* responds to legitimate concerns about cruelty and laughter, offering a picture of eighteenth-century society as it tries to negotiate between new values and older freedoms.

This study will work through some of the key themes introduced in this chapter by analyzing the role of the frolic in Frances Burney's *Camilla*. Attention will also be paid to violent comedy more generally, particularly cruel witticisms or jests that in some way does violence to both the character and the reader. Beyond the politics of laughter, this project will also address the role of the prankster, or rather, the pain-bringer. Courtship, as presented in *Camilla*, becomes the ultimate practical joke with mentors and guardians seizing as much power as the practical jokers who torment through pranks. In a similar way, Burney's treatment of animal cruelty and deformity humour alludes to these power structures and acknowledges a culture of violence that delights in spectacle and abuse. In *Camilla*, the frolic is as much a reflection on laughter as it is a reflection on the uninhibited social aggressors that dominate the novel's social world.

The second chapter of this study will introduce *Camilla*'s pranksters. Focusing on Camilla's brother Lionel, this chapter will deconstruct the personality of the practical joker, concluding that the frolicker is an egoist – a shameless and insensitive pleasure-seeker who causes a ripple effect of pain. In the same vein, Sir Hugh, Camilla's good-natured and sweet-tempered uncle can be understood as a prankster figure of sorts. His light-hearted yet careless whims result in emotional and physical distress, which spirals out of control. Pranks are never quite jovial and innocent, despite their comic framing. They are more than just isolated comic episodes in the novel, offering a way of

understanding how systems of power operate, entrap and terrorize individuals on both a psychological and physiological level.

The third chapter will shift focus from the human realm to the animal realm, and will investigate Burney's critique of animal cruelty. Works like Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* considered animals to be "unfeeling" objects, and seemed to legitimize animal cruelty, while campaigns for politeness like Hogarth's *Four Stages of Cruelty* pushed against such deep-seated habits. Burney uses violent comedy to critique the mistreatment of animals, alluding to other systems of tyranny and exclusion that exist in the human world. Representations of animals in the novel parallel Burney's representation of women, who similarly become trapped and suffer under tormenters that derive some form of amusement from their suffering.

The fourth and final chapter, "The Little Hump-Back Gentlewoman," will investigate Burney's critique of deformity humour. Laughter around deformity, like the mistreatment of animals, was not uncommon in eighteenth-century jests, and Burney complicates this brand of humour through her use of violent comedy. Laughter causes pain, and Camilla's sister Eugenia, who suffers from facial disfigurement, a curved back, and a visible limp, experiences chronic shame after being made an object of spectacle and ridicule. Deformity humour in *Camilla* provides great insight into the stigma around deformity in the eighteenth century, as well as the serious emotional and physical scarring caused by pranksters indulging in what they consider to be a "mere trick."

Chapter 2:

“A Mere Trick! A Joke! A Frolic!” Pranksters and the Dynamics of Power

In *Camilla*, there is nothing “mere” about a frolic. Practical jokes have disastrous and lasting effects, with the potential to cause serious emotional and physical trauma, as well as derail the plot in unexpected and disastrous ways. Because Burney weaves both light and dark into her novel, with comic, sentimental and even gothic scenes vying for the reader’s attention, it can be easy to regard pranks as isolated comic episodes simply meant to amuse the reader. Yet in tandem with *Camilla*’s overarching theme of self-reliance, the frolic takes on much deeper meaning. Burney’s fiction, as the above reading of *Evelina* suggests, is filled with pranksters and wits who offer much more than just comic relief. Their role in Burney’s work is to make us conscious of the social world of the novel, and the ease with which pranksters can break social rules. For *Camilla* in particular the prank is a way of understanding the novel as a whole, illustrating the fallibility of mentors and guardians who, like the prankster, cause great discomfort by exerting complete authority over others.

Camilla; a Picture of Youth is a novel about the youngest members of the Tyrold family. The plot follows Camilla Tyrold and her eligible young suitor Edgar Mandlebert as they navigate the taxing world of courtship. The novel has often been called an “educational work,” a conduct novel of sorts, about a young girl who makes various mistakes and eventually learns prudence to become the perfect match for her mentor-husband. And certainly, at first glance, *Camilla* can easily be considered a reflection on “the natural heedlessness of youth unguided” as the novel itself claims (913). However I

would suggest that the novel is more a reflection on “the natural heedlessness of youth *guided*” – Camilla and Edgar have their courtship hijacked by guardians and mentors, whose bad advice leads to a series of comic misunderstandings that separate the young couple. There’s a sense that Camilla and Edgar’s courtship is structured like a frolic – the guardian, like the prankster, commands total control over the couple, fuelled largely by their own desires, which results in Camilla and Edgar’s separation (and their torment, as a result). The novel is deeply ironic, with pranksters generating pain instead of laughs, and guardians hurting rather than helping. This “educational work” quickly loses its conduct value as the plot unfolds, and a closer look at the story itself naturally exposes the irony that exists at every turn of the page.

Camilla’s Mentors

The Reverend Mr. Augustus Tyrold and his wife Georgiana have four children: Lionel, Lavinia, Camilla, and Eugenia. Regretting not having a family of his own, Sir Hugh Tyrold, Mr. Tyrold’s older brother and owner of the Cleves estate, decides to “collect himself a family in his own house” by having some of his brother’s children live with him at Cleves (12). Despite being, by his own definition, “a sheer blockhead” who is persistently accident-prone and makes bad decisions, Sir Hugh has good intentions and an open heart (39). He takes great interest in the well-being of his brother’s children, Camilla in particular, who he decides to make his heir. By making Camilla his heir (on a whim, since she is his current favourite), he notably disinherits his orphaned niece and nephew, Indiana and Clermont Lynmere, although he still supports them financially;

Clermont is sent abroad for his schooling and a Grand Tour,¹ while the beautiful yet vain Indiana lives with Sir Hugh at Cleves under the tutelage of her self-interested governess Miss. Margland. After a string of unfortunate events, for which the mirthful Lionel and Sir Hugh are largely to blame, Camilla's youngest sister Eugenia is left scarred by smallpox and crippled for life. In the "deepest despondence," believing he is entirely responsible for her injuries, Sir Hugh declares Eugenia his new heir (29). Together, the family grows up in close association with one another at the Cleves estate, along with Edgar Mandlebert, an orphaned ward of Mr. Tyrold and owner of the neighboring estate at Beech Park. Hoping to secure a good fortune for Indiana and Clermont after disinheriting them both, Sir Hugh intends to have Indiana marry Edgar, and Clermont marry Eugenia, the new heir of Cleves. This scheme, however, is thwarted when Edgar and Camilla develop feelings for one another and Clermont comes to adamantly reject Eugenia.

The main focus of the novel is, as discussed, Edgar and Camilla's courtship plot. Edgar falls in love with Camilla, and Camilla loves Edgar in return; however, Edgar is determined to marry a woman who he believes will make a suitable wife. Under the guidance of Dr. Marchmont, his tutor (and a noted misogynist), he is advised to "study her" before committing himself, and instructed to hide his infatuation entirely (159).

¹ The Grand Tour was a cultural tour of Europe undertaken by young men of a certain social standing as part of their formal education. Clermont's experience abroad is one of the more obvious examples of irony in the text – in fear of him "turning out a mere coxcomb" Sir Hugh sends him on the Tour (43), but the trip essentially *turns* him into one: a vain man personifying "effeminacy in its lowest degradation...too conceited to admire any thing but himself" (569). Burney's portrait of Clermont responds to eighteenth-century anxieties over the Grand Tour and its threat to "Britishness" since luxury, extravagance, and foreignness were said to be corrupting British youth and threatening masculinity. For a more detailed look at the socio-political implications of the Grand Tour and travel writing, see Chloe Chard's *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour*.

“Forbear to declare yourself, make no overtures to her relations, raise no expectations even in her own breast,” Dr. Marchmont advises, “and let not rumour surmise your passion to the world, till her heart is better known to you” (158). Hoping to save Edgar from “all danger of repentance” by guaranteeing Camilla’s reciprocated feelings, Dr. Marchmont believes he is protecting Edgar from potential coquettes who he suspects are clamoring after his estate (160). In the meantime, Mr. Tyrold learns about Camilla’s own love for Edgar from Miss. Margland (who suspects Camilla after spotting her embarrassed blushes), and he expresses great concern over his daughter’s open heart and visible feelings. He warns that she must exercise “self-command” to avoid scandal, which “should dignify every female who would do herself honour” (348). In a lengthy letter that occupies its own chapter, appropriately titled “A Sermon,” Mr. Tyrold urges Camilla to “struggle against” her feelings, “as you would struggle against an enemy,” advising her to keep her passions secret from both Edgar and the world (358). There are “boundaries which custom forbids your sex to pass,” he claims, and to be considered passionate is entirely damaging to a young woman’s character – the world would consider “unreturned female regard” to be a mark of “ungoverned passions” and he asks: “can the woman who has permitted [her feelings] to go abroad, reasonably demand...consideration and respect from the community?” (361).² As Doody notes, Mr. Tyrold’s sermon is “so evidently a conduct-book showpiece” that it became easy for readers to forget that his advice, along with Dr. Marchmont’s, is what creates the biggest obstacle for Camilla and Edgar’s

² Mr. Tyrold’s “Sermon,” which is critiqued in *Camilla*, was ironically reprinted in full by the *Critical Review* and praised by the *Monthly Review*. The “Sermon” was also included in a reissue of Dr. John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, a work which Margaret Anne Doody notes opposes female education and takes up similar views that are satirized in *Camilla* (Doody 246).

relationship (231). Not only is the couple completely unaware of their feelings for each other, but Camilla must also make a series of social blunders to strategically hide her feelings and distance herself from Edgar. Camilla begins a friendship with Mrs. Arlbery, a lively widow and eccentric wit who Edgar warns to avoid, and by deliberately disobeying him and exercising complete “self-command” Camilla’s reputation begins to suffer. At the request of Mrs. Arlbery (and unknown to Camilla) Sir Sedley Clarendel begins to court her in order to spark Edgar’s jealousy, and Camilla also travels with Mrs. Arlbery to Turnbridge Wells and Southampton where she begins to accumulate debt – a debt that is notably exacerbated by her brother Lionel – in addition to unintentionally attracting a string of suitors along the way. In Edgar’s eyes, Camilla begins to develop into a coquette – a self-fulfillment of Dr. Marchmont’s own suspicions. This is the fodder for most of the novel’s humour, with comic misunderstandings and social errors made at every turn, which pushes her and Edgar further apart. But when the moneylender Camilla takes a loan from makes a claim against her father, resulting in his arrest for debt, Camilla undergoes an intense experience of sickness, sorrow, and repentance that takes a serious turn.

As Margaret Anne Doody notes, this is “the *ironic* model of the story” (219). Practicing “self-command,” as her father demands, results in a series of bad decisions and ends in Camilla’s torment; the novel notably creates “tensions and double meanings which disconcert the reader who wants the story to give a straight rendering of conduct manual maxims” (Doody 120). Bad advice prompts the reader to conclude that self-*reliance* rather than self-command should be the current maxim, because Camilla’s “good sense” and “delicacy,” which Mr. Tyrold himself notes are the “champions with which to

encounter” any problems, should be enough for a young woman to make her own sound decisions (358). Further, the idea of “governed passions” which causes Camilla so much pain calls to mind Burney’s own critique of excessive self-restraint in her court satire, where self-governance leads to a “crescendo of self-wounding” (Doody’s words, 169). Like the court etiquette of Burney’s satire, Camilla’s “governed passions” (and propriety more generally) leads to her own crescendo of self-wounding, with circumstances leading to anxiety, fear and eventually physical sickness that leaves her close to death. Yet while Burney offers a critique of these “conduct manual maxims,” the chances of breaking down the “boundaries to which custom forbids [Camilla’s] sex to pass” are notably impossible (361). Self-reliance leads to a social death – Camilla is inclined to model her principles on the “pure and practical tenets of her exemplary parents” (52), and to disobey them would prove disastrous for her, since “the least idea of disgrace” is enough to “totally [break] her spirit” (348). The novel seems to be advocating self-sufficiency, but harbours serious doubts about the possibilities of achieving it. The authority of the mentor, like the authority of the prankster, has the ability to remove the subject’s agency entirely. Mentors may mean well, but as the narrator observes, “even the noble principle which impels our love of right, misleads us but into new deviations, when its ambition presumes to point at perfection” (9). The same can be said for the pranksters who indulge in seemingly harmless frolics, presuming to point at “comic perfection” by amusing themselves and inciting laughter, but ironically causing pain instead.

The Prankster

Camilla is a diverse work, often called a sentimental fiction, a romance, or a novel of manners; but at its very core it is a comic novel *about* comedy – fully immersed in debates about laughter and sensibility, with characters reciting comic theories and repeating polite sentiments. In agreement with Chesterfield, who warns that laughter is impolite and something that “people of sense and breeding should show themselves above” (68), Mr. Dubster claims that “people’s laughing and whispering...is not one of the politest things, I know, for polite people to do; and, in my mind, they ought to be above it” (88). Similarly, Fielding, believing that certain habits make people ridiculous and tend “only to raise our mirth” (7), shares the same comic spirit as Mrs. Arlbery, who believes that “it’s a delightful thing to think of perfection; but it’s vastly more amusing to talk of errors and absurdities” (253). And lastly there’s Macdersey, who’s feeling of “inward joy” mimics the Hobbesian feeling of “sudden glory” caused by mocking others. Beyond just courtship and manners, *Camilla* stands out as a thoughtful meditation on laughter, with different characters bringing together different key perspectives on comedy in vogue during the eighteenth century – it is dialogic and self-reflexive, responding to popular issues of taste and sensibility, and actively challenges them by offering violent scenes that put these theories into question. Just as conduct manuals are critiqued and ironically deflated by bad mentors, Burney’s prankster manages to turn comic theory onto its head with violent comedy.

Like the rambling beau’s making “sport” of paupers in jestbooks and catchpenny prints, Burney’s pranksters delight in lowering others, but she remains critical of these aggressive displays of power. On an “expedition” to see Edgar’s new cottage, Lionel, Camilla’s brother and the novel’s most dedicated prankster, embarks on a frolic involving

a “mad bull” that problematizes Hobbes’ “sudden glory.” The target of the frolic is Miss Margland, Indiana’s governess who has a mind “proudly shallow” which “kept her unacquainted with her own deficiencies,” making her quite ridiculous by Fielding’s standards (45). The prank begins as a form of social policing – the standard lowering of the prideful old maid – but it quickly degenerates into a far more dangerous prank. As the group walks to the cottage, they encounter the lone bull in a field behind a gate. Hoping to frighten “that scare-crow Miss Margland” (123), Lionel secretly torments the bull, sending up a “prodigious roar” from the animal to which he exclaims “with the appearance of terror”: “Save yourselves all! Miss Margland in particular; for here’s a mad bull!” (132). With comic speed reminiscent of Smollett, the entire group scatters – Miss Margland, “forgetting all her charges,” scrambles over a fence to protect only herself while Camilla rushes to aid her uncle. Meanwhile, Bellamy, a fraud and fortune hunter, takes advantage of the chaos to aid Eugenia, and the group comes dangerously close to losing her forever (132). Bellamy takes Eugenia to a remote farmhouse during the scramble under the pretense of rescuing her, and he is in the “utmost confusion” when Edgar discovers them, explaining that he had ordered a post-chaise in the hopes of returning her to Cleves (137). His attitude awakens in Edgar “doubts the most alarming of the destination of view for the chaise which he had ordered; and he believed that Eugenia was either to have been beguiled, or betrayed into a journey the most remote from the home to which she belonged” (137). And indeed, the scene foreshadows Bellamy’s future, more successful kidnapping. The prank causes a ripple effect, with Lionel’s comic plot giving way to Bellamy’s more sinister plot of forced marriage. The prank lays bare the way that a seemingly harmless joke has the potential to cause a great amount of harm.

The mad bull scene is also instrumental in establishing character traits, which are steadily developed throughout the novel. Bellamy's dishonesty, Edgar's heroism, and Camilla's good nature are all exhibited through the scene. On a more comic level there's Miss Margland, who showcases her own self-interest by scurrying over the fence and failing to protect her young charge Indiana. Similarly Dr. Orkbourne, Eugenia's tutor, fails to protect his charge as well by remaining comically glued to the spot, completely absorbed in his studies and entirely unaware of the frolic unfolding before his very eyes. Miss Margland and Dr. Orkbourne's inaction serves as a blatant reminder of the way mentors fall short, the pupils themselves exhibiting far more sense during the chaos. The prankster also falls short, as Lionel sparks fear rather than laughter. In a moment of self-reflection, Lionel feels his "heart smite him" when he sees the "extreme terror" and physical exhaustion of Sir Hugh (133). But this feeling is short-lived; as always, Lionel is "ready for some new enterprise the moment the difficulties of the old one subsided," and he later diverts his attention to another frolic after fleeing the scene (239). The prankster may feel his "heart smite him" rather than "sudden glory," but the compulsive need to indulge in other pranks still exists. The prankster is an unapologetic, often egocentric figure, whose desire to satisfy his or her own amusement frequently leads to destructive behaviour.

Camilla is filled with pranksters and wits, and as with *Evelina*'s Captain Mirvan, their violence limits our inclination to laugh. Unlike *Evelina*, however, *Camilla* is far more self-aware. Wits and pranksters defend their love of False Humour, with Mrs. Arlbery claiming its "vastly more amusing to talk of errors and absurdities" (253), while Lionel admits "I always preferred being flogged for a frolic, to being told I was a good

boy, at the expense of sitting still, and learning my lesson” (729). What comes to define the prankster in Burney’s fiction is insensibility. Sympathy, as Adam Smith observes, is our “fellow-feeling for the misery of others,” and “horror arises” at the sight of someone’s suffering (Smith 12). Burney’s pranksters have a dwindling sense of compassion; rather than “horror” it’s often laughter that arises from witnessing someone’s discomfort and humiliation. And yet while pranksters are certainly insensitive pain-bringers, they are described as light-hearted and jovial characters, merely suffering from a compulsive need to satisfy their own whims. For example, the “light-hearted” and “mirthful Lionel” is “a stranger to reflection and incapable of care,” but he is “not radically vicious nor deliberately malevolent” (79). Rather, he is merely the victim of his own “egotism,” which “urged him to make his own amusement his first pursuit, [and he would] sacrifice his best friends and first duties if they stood in its way” (79). Lionel notably indulges in the same “False Humour” that Addison so adamantly opposes – False Humour, as Addison notes, would “bite the hand that feeds him,” and “ridicule both friends and foes indifferently” due to having “but small talents” and, as a result, “must be merry where he *can*, not where he *should*” (Addison 103). Lionel’s heedless mirth is certainly one of his greatest talents (however small), yet he is also highly skilled in the way he compartmentalizes shame. Burney’s pranksters are always shameless, able to cast proper propriety aside and break social codes without fear of repercussion or guilt. Yet while the prankster can be seen as a transgressive, even defiant figure, they are not entirely without blame.

The prankster can be considered shameless, but that does not mean he or she is without shame. Shamelessness, as Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark explain, can best be

described as a defense against shame and “not a liberation from it” (16). Burney’s claim that Lionel is a victim of his own “egotism” is therefore quite apt given that the ego “critically observes and passes judgment on the self” (Adamson and Clark 10-11). As a result, the denial of shame, as Nathanson explains, manifests itself in sheer narcissism – the ego protects against “violations of inner boundaries in the self and of sensitive areas of human life that should not be subjected to exposure” (qtd. in Adamson and Clark 17). In other words, feeling guilt and shame, which normally arises from causing others pain, is blocked by the prankster, whose ego defends against self-judgment. In fact, Lionel actively avoids any opportunity for self-reflection – after recounting a particularly damaging frolic Lionel asks Camilla to tell him “something diverting to drive it a little out of my mind” soon after admitting with “glistening eyes” that he is “heartily repentant” (226). But as with the mad bull prank, “the tide of penitence and sorrow was turned in his buoyant spirits, and he was only restored to his natural volatile self” not long after (229). Such is the method of shame-avoidance, which Nathanson explains is one of the many strategies to “reduce, minimize, shake off, or limit shame affect” (Nathanson 313). Avoidance takes many forms, but for Lionel in particular, it involves the engagement in “defensively hedonistic activity,” which, ironically, produces even more shame (313). “Without any ill temper, he spared no one’s feelings,” Burney states, making laughter the necessity of his existence; he pursues it “at all seasons,” and indulges in it “upon all occasions” as a way to cope with shame and feelings of inadequacy (*Camilla* 739). Shamelessness triggers yet another “crescendo of self-wounding,” sparking frolic after frolic in an attempt to avoid opportunities for self-judgment, but this self-wounding is quite capable of wounding others. “What have you done with your

heart?” Camilla asks, “Has it banished every natural feeling...served but to amuse you with ridicule and derision?” (739). Lionel answers:

You wrong me! You think I have no feeling because I am not always crying. However, shall I tell you the truth? I hate myself! And so completely hate myself at this moment, that I dare not be grave! Dare not suffer reflection to take hold of me, lest it should make life too odious for me to bear it. I have run on from folly to wickedness for want of thought and now thought is ready to come back, I must run from that, for want of fortitude. (739)

It can be easy to regard Lionel’s love for frolics as part of his naturally mirthful character, and it can be difficult for readers to sympathize with a character that, like the Captain, causes so much torment. But Lionel’s self-hate and reckless behaviour can be seen as a legitimate response to feelings of inadequacy. As the son of a clergyman, who is also the “best of fathers” (739), Lionel’s contrast is striking – he admits having “no manner of natural taste for study,” affirming that he is a “light and airy spark...not quite so wise as I am merry” (241). Being born a spark, Lionel’s natural mirth and egotism causes him to turn from “folly to wickedness” because, as Lionel explains, attempting to imitate his father “is as great a joke, as if you were to dress Miss Margland in Indiana’s flowers and feathers, and then expect people to call her a beauty” (241). Lionel may be as shameless as the Captain, and cause as much pain, but there is a conscious effort in *Camilla* to offer a motive behind the tormenting: Lionel’s shame-avoidance, Sir Hugh’s attempt to “collect himself a family in his own house” (as will be discussed), and Mr. Tyrold’s promotion of conduct-manual maxims – all are scenarios calling for sympathy and understanding, with well-meaning pranksters and guardians hoping to amuse or gratify themselves but unintentionally causing great pain instead (12). Yet shame-avoidance and the engagement in “defensively hedonistic” activities like frolics have a tendency to spiral out of control, and they are certainly not without criticism (Nathanson 313). “The

violent spirits of Lionel always carried him beyond his own intentions,” and his attempt to protect himself from the pain of self-judgment causes those around him far greater harm (245).

The Frolic

In *Camilla*, the prankster always causes more damage than intended; the initial prank spirals out of control and causes more distress, a ripple effect of discomfort. When Lionel is caught extorting money from his sick and wealthy uncle Relvil in the form of a little “frolic,” his father criticizes him not just for committing fraud, but also for the sheer terror he causes. Lionel and his fellow “merry blades” from Oxford send letters to his uncle anonymously, threatening that if he sent them “a little cash” his “brains might keep their place” (225). His uncle, being prone to vapors, is sent into a terrible fright by the plot and flees the country in deteriorating health. “You can’t suppose there was gunpowder in the words” (225), Lionel states in his defense, and he’s aghast at how “a mere trick! A joke! A frolic! Just to make an old hunk open his purse-strings for his natural heir” could cause so much damage (*Camilla* 239-40). And indeed, the damage from this “silly joke” is extensive (242). Lionel dangerously increases the infirmities of his uncle and drives him to a foreign country, where his mother must pursue him to ensure that Lionel is not disinherited for this act of cruelty. And the frolic runs still deeper; Camilla is denied the support and aid of her mother, forced to struggle through the trials of courtship on her own with only poor substitutes that lead her down the wrong path. Pranks are never innocent in *Camilla*, and Mr. Tyrold notes that Lionel’s frolic “was not only robbery, but a robbery of the most atrocious and unjustifiable class; adding

terror to violation of property, and playing upon the susceptibility of the weakness and infirmities, which he ought to have been the first to have sheltered, and sheathed” (257). Pranksters who are supposed to be protectors or mentors break rules and seize power through a prank, terrorizing people and letting them down. Lionel certainly plays with the weak and the infirm, terrorizing rather than sheltering members of his own family, tormenting Camilla and Eugenia in particular.

At the Northwick ball, Lionel immediately begins stirring trouble by greeting a large party of officers, telling them that one of his party is “the rich heiress of Cleves...though no! upon farther thoughts, I will only tell you she is one of our set, and leave it to your own integrity to find her out” (60). What results is a hoard of fortune hunters and strange “Caricatures” all clamoring for a chance to dance with one of the young ladies from Cleves (66). In addition to exposing his sisters to the penetrating gaze of hungry fortune seekers, Lionel begins enticing the young men with misleading hints about Cleves’ true heiress, causing great confusion among the group. The Northwick ball is notably Eugenia’s first encounter with Bellamy, who she is unable to shake from that point onward and who, as discussed, eventually kidnaps and forces her into marriage. As for Camilla, Lionel intends to set her with a “delightful creature” who Sir Sedley notes wears clothes so tight “he can’t turn round his vastly droll figure, except like a puppet with one jerk for the whole body” (69). This man is an “immense treat,” attracting all eyes at the ball for his “conspicuously awkward” attitude, and Camilla has the misfortune of catching his eye due to a nudge from Lionel (69). He introduces himself as Mr. Dubster, and like Bellamy, he consistently manages to torment Camilla with his presence. Alongside Dubster, Camilla looks “extremely foolish,” and she successfully manages to

avoid dancing with him thanks to Dubster's obsession with finding his missing glove because, according to Dubster, a gentleman would not be seen without them (70). As an adamant social climber Dubster can be considered one of Fielding's "truly ridiculous," affecting his "highness," regurgitating polite sentiments, and contradicting himself with his "low" habits: laughing is "not one of the politest things, I know, for polite people to do," Dubster states, yet he engages in the lowest form of ridicule by making cruel witticisms about Eugenia's deformity (88). Lionel, who hopes to partner Camilla "with a figure distinguished only as a mark for ridicule," manages to make her uncomfortable throughout the novel – purposefully orchestrating uncomfortable social situations involving Dubster and planting the idea of marriage into his head, publicly humiliating her by finding every opportunity to draw them together (69).

Lionel's pranks, as discussed, have the capacity to cause more damage than intended – pranks spiral out of control, with Lionel's little fun at the Northwick Ball setting in motion Eugenia's torment under Bellamy. Camilla's experience with Dubster is Eugenia's comic parallel – like Bellamy, Dubster is a fortune seeker hoping to marry up, and he is a fraud of sorts, affecting social class. But unlike the trivial social discomfort caused by being caught with an embarrassing dance partner like Dubster, Lionel's antics become far more dangerous for Camilla once he forces her into debt – which notably functions as another comic link to Eugenia's own experience with Bellamy. After "painful rumination upon his own unworthiness" (228) as a result of his frolic with uncle Revil, Lionel approaches Camilla in what can properly be described as his second attempt at fraud, executing it with a "gay and frisky" attitude "as usual" (496):

"My dear girl...I am come to beg a favour. You see this pen and ink. Give me a sheet of paper." She fetched him one. "That's a good child," cried he, patting her

cheek; “so now sit down, and write a short letter for me. Come begin. Dear Sir.” She wrote – Dear Sir. “An unforeseen accident, – write on, – an unforeseen accident has reduced me to immediate distress for two hundred pounds.” (496-7)

Camilla “let her pen drop” and attacks her brother for his second plot, which he explains is meant to extract more money from his uncle Sir Hugh, under the guise of his favourite niece, Camilla (498). Unable to convince Camilla to write to Sir Hugh he resorts to empty threats, claiming that without the funds, he would be ruined with only suicide as an option: “I have no great *gusta* for blowing out my brains. I like the little dears mighty well where they are” (498). Lionel’s light-hearted threat resembles Bellamy’s, who on more than one occasion pressures Eugenia with a pistol to his own head in an attempt to extract her inheritance from Sir Hugh. “This is no child’s play,” Bellamy claims, and when the pistol accidentally goes off within his own waistcoat, killing him after forcing Eugenia into submission, it becomes clear that these threats by both Lionel and Bellamy have serious consequences. Eugenia is aware that Bellamy “had no design against either his own life or her’s” and that he meant “but to affright her into consent,” and the same can be said of Lionel (887). When Camilla refuses, Lionel pleads and begins to consider other avenues for funds: “I once thought Edgar Mandlebert had a sneaking kindness for you,” suggesting she “marry out of hand yourself, there’s a good girl, and have a family at once, that I may share the same privilege. I shall like it of all things; who will you have... Major Cerwood?” (498). These jokes take on real meaning when Sir Sedley Clarendel, who learns about Lionel’s debt and is eager to win Camilla’s hand, gives him the sum he requires. Hoping to “share the same privilege” as Camilla, Lionel attempts to bring Sir Sedley and Camilla together, orchestrating a meeting in the park “by means so forced and indelicate, that she was scarcely more afflicted at the event, than shocked by

its circumstances” (527). Lionel “only laughed at the repugnance of Camilla” while she “hung her head in speechless shame,” forced to endure yet another uncomfortable situation where, as with Dubster, she must reject someone’s advances (526-7). The entire scene is comically framed, with Lionel dancing around in “mad ecstasy, chanting ‘Lady Clarendel, Lady Clarendel, my dear Lady Clarendel!’” in convulsive laughter – the similarities between Lionel’s frolics with Dubster and his design to marry Camilla to Sir Sedley reveal the tyrannical power of the prankster, who is willing to satisfy his every need (laughter, money) at the expense of those they love (526).

Camilla actively draws links between the prankster figure and the guardians existing within the novel. The effect of Lionel’s plotting, alongside having to “govern her passions” and deal with countless breeches of social conduct as a result, all have “equal shares in tormenting Camilla” (501). To add to these torments, Camilla accumulates her own debt in Southampton because she is unable to meet her expenses after giving her entire allowance to Lionel. As Doody observes, Camilla’s losses are “largely the result of her brother’s taking her money from her, as well as of his accepting loans in her name from somebody else,” and she notes that “if Camilla had not had debts forced on her by her brother, and had been allowed to keep her travel money, she would have been in debt for personal expenditure to the tune of about eighteen pounds – which is the sum her sisters can raise to help her out” (213). Instead, Camilla keeps her debt from her father and takes out a loan from the moneylender, in part because she does not want to add to the family’s already mounting troubles: Lionel’s secret debts, Clermont’s unrevealed debts which must be met by Sir Hugh, Mr. Tyrold’s own growing poverty after lending his life savings to his brother to help with Clermont’s dues, and Bellamy’s frequent

demands after his forced elopement with Eugenia. In addition to the monetary troubles of the Tyrols is the shame Lionel brings to his family when he is forced to leave the country to avoid being implicated as co-respondent in a divorce case. This all culminates in Camilla's eventual breakdown when her moneylender makes a claim against her father and he is taken to Winchester Prison. Camilla is full of remorse and is unable to face her parents' displeasure, becoming "weak from inanition, confused from want of sleep, harassed with fatigue, and exhausted by perturbation" (832). Wishing for her own death, she falls fatally ill and "solemnly believed her fatal wish quick approaching," before she is discovered by Edgar who restores her to her forgiving parents (832). The gothic scenes around Camilla's declining health occupy five "*Udolphoish* volumes" of *Camilla*, with Camilla seeing specters and even a corpse (later revealed to be Bellamy's) at the inn where she seeks refuge (Doody 251). The gothic theme carries significant meaning given that in almost comic-Radcliffian style Camilla becomes a vulnerable heroine who is tormented by pranksters and guardians alike.

Beyond Frolics

Understanding how frolics work offers great insight into *Camilla* as a whole. The prankster's relentless pursuit of laughter can easily be translated into a relentless pursuit of power – "the practical joker," as Doody makes clear, "seizes all the power present in the group, and shows us in extreme form the part played by aggression in social relationships" (57). Like the Captain, Lionel's frolics can be read as an aggressive display of power, a need to satisfy his own whims and wants, which shows the ease with which the insensitive, egocentric prankster can break the rules. And there are notably many

different kinds of “pranksters” in the novel – the overt jokester, the well-meaning mentor, the thoughtful guardian – all of which have a habit of tormenting others, either intentionally or unintentionally, by having their own way. Sir Hugh is another such prankster figure of sorts. Like Captain Mirvan, who calls tormenting Madame Duval his “sport,” Sir Hugh passes his time at Cleves by making his nieces his own “sport” (*Evelina* 166). Sir Hugh derives great pleasure from arranging his nieces’ marriages and, as a result, causes them great emotional, even physical discomfort. Despite having a temper that was “unalterably sweet,” with a heart “laid open to the world with an almost infantine alertness” (11), he possesses the same qualities as Lionel who, from “wanton folly,” causes great pain (241).

Sir Hugh, we learn, had “a passion for field sports” at a young age which ironically left him quite “stationary” in comparison with his brother, whose “religious duties, prudence, and domestic affairs” had “detained him at his benefice” and always kept him busy (9). “A dearth of all sedentary resources became, when his youth passed away, his own constant reproach,” and after falling off his horse and sustaining an injury to his side he finds himself “at once deprived of all employment, and destitute of all comfort” (9). The “happier lot of his brother, though born to almost nothing” fills Sir Hugh with “incessant repentance of his own mismanagement” (12) caused by “the unfortunate privileges of his birth-right, which, by indulging him in his first youth with whatever he could covet” prevented him from settling down with a family (11). Hoping to “atone” for this “mismanagement” of his youth, he decides to literally “collect himself a family in his own house” by having his brother’s children live with him, making the management and enrichment of his nieces and nephews his chief amusement (12).

“Having proved the bad of knowing nothing in my own case,” Sir Hugh claims, he has “the more right to intermeddle with others” (12). Yet Sir Hugh’s “insuperable want of quickness” which leaves him “wholly uncultivated, and singularly self-formed” makes him quite irrational and impulsive (10). As in his youth, when his birthright gave him “whatever he could covet,” he is granted his every wish, possessing almost tyrannical control over the lives of others despite being unable to properly manage them (11).

Sir Hugh’s “infantine alertness” and good heart have both comic and catastrophic consequences, and he possesses such endearing qualities that to consider him a tormenter like Lionel can be difficult. However, the way Burney consistently aligns Sir Hugh with trickster figures suggests a direct link: both aim to amuse themselves and achieve their own ends by orchestrating plots, and both radically affect the lives of others. Lionel is able to place Camilla in an “indelicate” situation with Sir Sedley, calling her “Lady Clarendel” as if legitimizing the union (527), just as Sir Hugh, with a grave pause “as if settling their future destinies” declares that Indiana must marry Edgar and live at Beech Park while Camilla is heir of Cleves because “nothing can be a greater pleasure to me than having two such good girls, both being cousins, live so near that they may overlook one another from park to park, all day long, by the mode of a telescope” (20). Burney invites us to criticize mentors who, like the shameless prankster, seize control for the sake of their own “pleasure.” Eugenia, who possesses the “best principled virtues,” suffers the greatest from the incompetence of mentors, with a series of preventable accidents due to poor judgment resulting in a buildup of physical and psychological pain (51).

During a birthday celebration for the “happy young heiress” Camilla, Sir Hugh, his nieces and nephews, and Edgar, decide to take an outing and discuss visiting the fair

(16). Lavinia then realizes that she has unintentionally disobeyed her parents who have instructed her not to let Eugenia “stir out from Cleves because of the small pox” since she has not been inoculated (21). With Lavinia’s entreaties to return, Sir Hugh commands the coach to turn back to Cleves, but Lionel, “protesting he would not lose the fair...put spurs to his horse, and galloped off” (22). Having to retrieve him, the group follows Lionel to the fair while Sir Hugh remains in the coach with Eugenia. The group is “no sooner gone...than the little girl cried to follow” and Sir Hugh owned “she had as good a right as any of them, and declared it was a hard thing to have her punished for other people’s particularities,” letting her leave the coach (23). The irony is that Eugenia is *indeed* punished for other people’s particularities – due to Lionel’s desire to see the fair, and Sir Hugh’s poor judgment, she encounters a boy with small-pox and contracts it. “Other people’s particularities” also leads to her stunted growth when the “once more happy group” enacts “various gambols” after the fair incident (27). All their games are conducted with “as much security as gaiety, till Lionel proposed the amusement of riding upon a plank in the park” (27). Trusting her to “nobody but himself,” Sir Hugh places Eugenia on his lap, but “becoming exceedingly giddy” he involuntarily loosens his hold on Eugenia, “who fell from his arms to the ground” (27). Lionel, who “took care of himself,” leaps instantly off the plank, while Sir Hugh “extremely bruised” cannot get up without pain (27). Eugenia’s “incessant cries” raises everyone’s attention, and the “mischief,” all taken together, makes her “grow up with one leg shorter than the other, and her whole figure diminutive and deformed” (33), in addition to the excruciating pain caused by small pox which wreaked “dreadful havoc” on her face, leaving “not a trace of

beauty” behind (29). Eugenia is left physically scarred, and these scars affect Eugenia psychologically when she “comes out” into society and is made into an object of ridicule.

Considering himself the most “sinful of all created beings,” Sir Hugh hopes to redeem himself for the pain he has caused Eugenia by making her his heir (29). “A guinea for every pit in that poor face will I settle on her out of hand,” he claims, and he vows that he will “atone what he could for the ill he had done her, by bequeathing to her every thing he possessed in the world, in estate, cash, and property, without the deduction of a sixpence” (30). Further, Sir Hugh aims to keep Eugenia unaware of her defects, taking Edgar aside after a long absence from Cleves and asking that he “would not seem to notice the ugliness of Eugenia” which “was never mentioned in her hearing by his particular order” (56). And lastly, Sir Hugh decides to have Eugenia educated in the classics to have her and Clermont “educated exactly to fit one another” so they will marry and live happily with shared interests (48). “I shall order Clermont to think of nothing but his studies,” states Sir Hugh, but all his “orders” yield contrary results (48). His plans cause Eugenia even more torment by making her the target of fortune hunters like Bellamy, and his decision to keep her ailments a secret, even to Eugenia herself, does not aid her either – as Eugenia states, she is not properly “prepared” for “the attacks to which I am liable,” as she goes out into the world unaware of the “extent of [her physical] misfortunes” (296). And indeed, Eugenia is openly attacked for her disfigurement and deformities, faced with cruel jests about her appearance as well as her classical education that leaves her hurting – physical scars develop into emotional wounds that are just as difficult to heal.

Burney, in effect, aligns guardians with pranksters because they both yield the same results: they cause a crescendo of pain. Whether they are well meaning or intentionally cruel, the prankster and guardian seek to amuse only themselves. And not all pranksters/mentors are male – Mrs. Arlbery is a prominent wit that engages in several of her own frolics; she is a prankster, who also doubles as a mentor, guiding Camilla down the wrong path by making her appear a coquette. Bilger has argued that female tricksters like Mrs. Arlbery possess “bold manners” that contrast her freedom “with the restrictions placed upon the conduct of the heroine...each female trickster contributes to her novel’s romance plot by breaking social rules” (Bilger 100). Mrs. Arlbery’s independence is certainly advocated, and can rightly be considered feminist in scope. Yet as a mentor, Mrs. Arlbery is still just as guilty as those male mentors in the novel that offer bad advice and poor judgment – rather than suggesting Camilla be just as eccentric and coquettish as Mrs. Arlbery, Burney advocates good sense and the freedom of choice when breaking social rules. Frolics lose their comic appeal when they cause more pain than laughter, and similarly, conduct manuals and mentors advocating obedience, disobedience, “self-command” and matters of etiquette begin to lose their legitimacy when they cause more distress than pleasure.

Camilla, as we have seen, is frequently the victim of her brother Lionel’s cruel whims. He forces her into debt, orchestrates uncomfortable social situations involving the absurd Mr. Dubster, and often embarrasses her publicly. The same can be said for Eugenia, who is left physically scarred, crippled, and emotionally tormented by the whims of bad mentors. But far more troubling is the treatment of animals in *Camilla*. Brittany Taylor suggests that Burney makes Eugenia a “pathetic figure” who is both

passive and accepting of the abuses against her “creating an editorialized illustration of the common violence present in the domestic sphere and the expected deference, even servility, of women before their male superiors” (Taylor 34). In a similar way, animals are the focus of violent scenes that illustrate an “expected deference, even servility” of animals before their masters (34). Animals reveal the power-relations operating in *Camilla*’s world, and what makes these scenes particularly unsettling is their comic framing. Rabid bulldogs are called onto old spaniels for sport, learned bullfinches are pinched when they give a bad performance, and performing monkeys are beaten with sticks in front of a laughing audience to be kept in tune. Animals highlight polite anxieties about the cruel delights and flawed social codes that exist in both the human and animal realm, aligning the plight of humans with the plight of animals.

Chapter 3:

“Dumb Creturs”: Animals, Laughter, and the Plight of Women

This oran-outang or pongo is only a brute, but a brute of a kind so singular, that man cannot behold it without contemplating himself, and without being thoroughly convinced that his body is not the most essential part of his nature. (Buffon, 41)

The beast and I were brought close together; and our countenances diligently compared, both by my master and servant, who thereupon repeated several times the word ‘Yahoo.’ My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable animal, a perfect human figure. (Swift 244)

As both the Comte de Buffon’s *Natural history* and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* would suggest, eighteenth-century people used animals, both real and imaginary, to consider the world and their place in it. The Comte de Buffon cannot help “contemplating himself” when describing the biological makeup of the orangutan, just as Gulliver sees himself in the satiric portrait of the Yahoo. Animals in eighteenth-century literature offered a way of reading “the human” in a distinctly new way, with *The Spectator* using nature to critique the decidedly *unnatural* extravagances of female fashion, in which “The Peacock, in all his Pride, does not display half the Colours that appear in the Garments of a *British Lady*, when she is dressed either for a Ball or a Birthday” (531), and numerous it-narratives, like Dorothy Kilner’s *The life and Perambulations of a Mouse* (1785) depicting animal adventures that reveal a cruel and insensitive world ruled by humans. Saturated with references to animals, literature invited readers to rethink their relationship with the nonhuman, showing just how prominently animals came to exist at the forefront of people’s consciousness.

Laura Brown argues that popular ideas about animals were dramatically reshaped by two specific events in the eighteenth century: “the discovery of the hominoid ape and the rise of widespread bourgeois pet keeping” (Brown 20). Pet keeping became a popular practice, “an antidote to the alienation and commodification of modern urban life” (20), which actively ushered animals into the domestic sphere. On a much grander scale, the Royal Society and the work of Edward Tyson in particular marked what H.W. Janson has called “the formal entry of the anthropoid ape into the consciousness of Western civilization” (qtd. in Brown 28). Animals entered human lives in a distinctly new way, on both a deeply private and vastly public level, and this awareness prompted new philosophical debates and discourses that sought to reevaluate the relationship between human and nonhuman, bringing animals into more sympathetic realms.

Animals occupy a curious space within discourses on sympathy and moral philosophy in the eighteenth century. Sympathy, as discussed, was the subject of intense analysis, and in Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) animals were considered “far from being complete and perfect objects, either of gratitude or resentment” because of their uncertain status as “feelers” (112). Sympathy, as discussed, involves imagining the experience of the suffering other, our senses allowing us to “enter as it were into his body” and “thence form some idea of his sensations” (Smith 12). According to Smith, animals were proper objects of sympathy, but it was unclear whether they were capable of “entering into a human body” and feel sympathy in return. The potential for reciprocated sympathy is central to Smith’s theory, and so for Smith, animals become “less improper objects of gratitude and resentment than inanimated objects” (Smith 111). For modern readers, the idea that animals are equated with

“inanimate objects” raises a series of ethical concerns about the presumption of human superiority. Yet as Markman Ellis observes, such ethical concerns began to creep into contemporary thought as well, citing the rise of bourgeoisie pet keeping, and lapdogs in particular, as applying pressure to popular theories about animals as “things.” Pet owners began to treat their animals with unprecedented care and respect, however such affection lavished on lapdogs also sparked anti-sympathetic literature that regarded the “tenderness between humans and animals as an excessive regard for things,” aligning pets with the corrupting influence of luxury and fashion (Ellis 100). Smith’s theory and Ellis’ lapdog example provide great insight into contentious debates over sensibility and the divide between humans and non-humans, “feelers” and “non-feelers,” which complicated a persistent culture that delighted in cruel amusements.

Animal cruelty, as Robert Darnton notes, was a popular form of amusement in early modern Europe. Rather than sadistic fantasies, “the literary visions of cruelty to animals expressed a deep current of popular culture” that never completely went away (Darnton 90). Bear baiting, for example, remained a popular blood sport until the nineteenth century and carnival, a time for the suspension of social and behavioral norms through riotous processions, saw the passing around of a cat in Burgundy to tear its fur and make it howl along with music (Darnton 83). Beyond such regular amusements the torturing of animals also had symbolic meaning – the Reformation in London prompted a Protestant crowd to shave and dress a cat in mock vestments, later hanging it at the Cheapside gallows (83), and Darnton also focuses on a particular episode involving the cat-killers of the rue Saint-Séverin who were not just enjoying everyday amusements by massacring cats – they were manipulating symbols of authority to protest against poor

working conditions. These examples, to name a few, present animal cruelty as a deep-seated cultural norm, and its persistence is particularly felt in Hogarth's "Four Stages of Cruelty" (1751) where violence against animals is depicted as an everyday experience tied to systems of domination and control. Part of a mounting campaign against animal cruelty, Hogarth's series condemns violence against animals, suggesting a direct link between humans and nonhumans and presenting animals as "feeling beings" rather than "inanimate objects."

Hogarth's "Four Stages," meant to address an audience that possessed "hard hearts," was created with the aim of "correcting that barbarous treatment of animals, the very sight of which renders the streets of our metropolis so distressing to every feeling mind" (Hogarth 65). The series responds to growing concerns about violence, depicting different stages in the fictional life of Tom Nero who is shown torturing a dog in "The First Stage of Cruelty" by inserting an arrow into its rectum (see Figure 5). Other boys in the print engage in similar acts of cruelty: two boys burn the eyes of a bird with a hot needle and a pair of fighting cats are suspended by their tails, taunted by a group of gawking children. With a badge on his arm indicating a pupil of the charity school, Tom emerges as a critique of the moral education of lower-class youth. Aiming to check "the progress of cruelty," Hogarth targets what he considers to be a persistent, and characteristically "lower class" culture, that derived enjoyment from cruel acts in the age of sensibility (Hogarth 65). The series aims to correct such violence by virtually shocking its audience into morality, striking direct parallels between humans and animals throughout the series in an appeal to viewer sympathy. In "The Second Stage of Cruelty," a much older Tom is depicted as a hackney coachman who beats his overloaded horse



Figure 5. William Hogarth, *First Stage of Cruelty* (1751). Etching and engraving. British Museum #Cc,2.166.

into submission (see Figure 6), while “Cruelty in Perfection” marks the transition from animal to human violence when he murders his pregnant lover (see Figure 7). A bludgeoned lamb in “The Second Stage” mirrors the image of the fallen lover in “Cruelty in Perfection,” and this configuring not only suggests that violence against animals degenerates into violence against humans, but also that both crimes are equally depraved. By aligning the human with the nonhuman, the lover with the lamb, the viewer is effectively placed “in the body of the suffering other” as Smith’s theory would have us do. In the final plate, “The Reward of Cruelty,” Tom experiences both temporal and divine punishment for his sins, as he is hanged and his body is offered for dissection. Denied a proper burial, this “second punishment” functions as a kind of poetic justice for his moral monstrosities since he experiences the same pain he inflicted on others (Steintrager 39). The torture of a dog in the first engraving leads to his heart being eaten by a dog during his dissection, the arrow he forces into the dog follows the same “angle of attack” as the physician’s rod, and the extraction of his eye parallels the removal of his horse’s eye in the second plate (see Figure 8). Unable to feel sympathy for animals in life, Tom is essentially made to share in their suffering through death.

Hogarth’s work seems to be a direct response to Smith’s theory by virtually aligning animal suffering with human suffering, calling for viewer sympathy and the condemnation of such cruel acts. Campaigns for politeness, from Hogarth “Four Stages of Cruelty” (1751) to Jeremy Bentham’s *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), which objected to animals being “degraded into the class of *things*,” present a growing consciousness that thought of animals not as “objects” but as “feeling beings” not much different from humans (qtd. in Ellis 107). Comparisons to animals in



Figure 6. William Hogarth, *Second Stage of Cruelty* (1751). Etching and engraving. British Museum #Cc,2.167.



Figure 7. William Hogarth, *Cruelty in Perfection* (1751). Etching and engraving. British Museum #Cc,2.168.



Figure 8. William Hogarth, *The Reward of Cruelty* (1751). Etching and engraving. British Museum #Cc,2.169.

pamphlets, poetry and prose represent keen interest in the external anatomical proximity between humans and animals that led to a rethinking of their interior – their status as “feelers.” In literature, sentimental scenes actively brought animals into more sympathetic realms, and readers were witnessing more images and narratives that pushed against popular interest in animal cruelty and cruel delights. In *Camilla*, frolics involving animals are uncomfortable scenes of abuse that critique derisive laughter, and the “poor little inoffensive animals” subjected to the cruel whims of their masters call to mind the human targets of humiliating pranks and dangerous plots found throughout the novel (Burney 493). Like the Comte de Buffon’s *Natural history* and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, animal encounters offer a way to understand “the human” in *Camilla*, providing a framework to better comprehend the logic behind perverse systems of control. Rather than just “dumb creturs,” animals in the novel are highly sympathetic and raise questions about social conduct, the marriage state, and domestic roles that essentially “cage” women (493).

The Bulldog

In *Camilla*, Sir Hugh proposes a stroll along with his nieces, encountering Edgar as well as a butcher’s boy along the way who “from a wanton love of mischief gave a signal to his attending bull-dog, to attack the old spaniel that accompanied Sir Hugh” (538). The spaniel, a “proud old favourite, though unequal to the combat, disdained to fly,” and the scene becomes chaotic as onlookers shriek and Edgar steps in, “recovering all his vigour from his earnest desire to rescue an animal so dear to Sir Hugh” (538). The “wicked” butcher’s boy is forced by the group to call off his bulldog “who, with all his

might, and all his fury, obeyed the weak whistle of a little urchin he had been bred to love and respect, for bringing him his daily food” (539). The boy’s frolic is a brief scene that occupies its own chapter, yet it is a critical episode that brings together some of the novel’s central concerns: unsympathetic amusements, spectacle, and codes of conduct.

The narrator invites our criticism of the butcher’s boy, calling him “wicked” and a “little urchin” – in stark contrast to the more “genial and good humoured” titles given to those “diverting wags” or “facetious gentlemen” who torment the poor and disabled in popular jestbooks (Dickie “Hilarity and Pitelessness” 1). The boy also provokes the scene due to a “wanton love of mischief” as well as, undoubtedly, an interest in taking a jibe at his social betters. Yet rather than the playful foolishness “mischief” suggests, the danger of his plot is made all the more clear through references to Sir Hugh’s genuine fright and the “broken fragments” of his walking stick (Burney 538). In essence, the scene calls to mind the same graphic violence critiqued in Hogarth’s “First Stage of Cruelty,” where a dog is seen violently attacking a cat for sport. *Camilla*’s butcher’s boy may be enjoying the same amusements as the boy’s in Hogarth’s “First Stage,” but it’s important to note that unlike Hogarth, *Camilla*’s scenes are not just about the “popular” enjoyments of the “lower class.” For Burney, cruelty is not restricted to class; everyone is capable of causing pain. In the Southon episode, for example, a “peer of the realm,” a man of “superior birth and riches,” and a young perfumer are all equally amused by the sight of Camilla and Mrs. Mittin as they walk through the town, making playful wagers that they are “two women, one melancholy, and one stark wild, that had just...escaped from their keepers” (612). Mr. Hadler and Lord Valhurst are both “undoubtedly beneath” the young perfumer in both “decency and conduct,” and their questionable morals make the

entrapment of their “beautiful prey” Camilla and the absurd Mrs. Mittin in a bathhouse even more frightening (613). Camilla, undoubtedly an “old favourite” of Sir Hugh’s, is left without a “keeper” and becomes as helpless as the old spaniel, but this “beautiful prey” is similarly spared an attack due to Edgar’s intervention (613). After Edgar’s rescue, a second encounter with Lord Valhurst leaves the sensible Camilla on edge, but Mrs. Mittin’s absurdity is made clear when she discovers he is a peer: “to find him a nobleman was to find him innocent; for, though she did not quite suppose that a peer was not a mortal, she had never spoken to one before; and the power of title upon the ear, like that of beauty upon the eyes, is, in its first novelty, all-commanding” (657). Even Mr. Tyrold is guilty of this “all-commanding” power of title, reminding Eugenia that the laborers who mock her are simply examples of the “insolence of the hard-hearted, and ignorance of the vulgar” (304). Yet while Burney stresses that all classes are capable of being “hard-hearted,” animals in the novel are frequently subjected to violence at the hands of the laboring class as a means to highlight comparative violence among humans, both physical and psychological, enjoyed across class lines – noblemen included.

The violence enjoyed by the butcher’s boy in the bulldog frolic notably brings to light comparative thrills initiated by Lionel, who like the butcher’s boy shows little respect or regard for authority. Sir Hugh’s “old spaniel” is attacked, showing the same disregard for elders as Lionel, who frightens Sir Hugh with the threat of a mad bull and terrifies his sick and elderly uncle Relvil with his extortion plot (Burney 225). “There is nothing on earth more shocking, and withal more common, in but too many Families, than to see Age and Grey Hairs derided and ill used,” warns Defoe in *The protestant monastery*, and this treatment, “directly opposite to the Dignity and Decency of Human

Nature, calls aloud for Redress” (Defoe 10). Burney’s butcher’s boy and Lionel both share a “wanton love of mischief” that is careless and cruel, and it’s this form of amusement derived from preying on the vulnerable and the weak that can be found at all levels of society, “calling aloud for redress” (*Camilla* 538).

While the bulldog frolic is an episode that critiques cruel delights, it’s also a scene that contributes to Burney’s critique of mentors. When Edgar rushes forward to separate the spaniel from the bulldog armed with Sir Hugh’s walking stick, his role as a mentor-protector is made quite clear (538). Edgar intervenes on numerous occasions, described as a “spirited and manly boy” (17), and he is the only one with the “presence of mind” to scoop Eugenia in his arms and return her to the carriage after encountering the boy with small pox at the fair (24). He is also the one who poises the balance of the seesaw with “great exactness,” and “superintends” all their childhood games with great care (27). Yet Eugenia is still crippled for life after falling off the seesaw and she still contracts small pox, consequences which, as Doody notes, illustrates that “male elders can let girls down” and “cool judges may think they are poising the balance true, but such exactness is unlikely” (Doody *Life in the Works* 235). The fallibility of “cool judges” extends to all mentors in the novel, particularly Dr. Marchmont and Mr. Tyrold, with the bulldog frolic highlighting their misguided attempt at aiding Camilla and Edgar. Camilla is “roused at once from her sullen calm to the most agonising sensibility” when she sees the bulldog direct its fangs at Edgar, and “with a piercing shriek” she approaches him just as the bulldog is being called off by the butcher’s boy (538). Edgar is elated: “he could hardly trust his senses, hardly believe he existed; yet he felt the pressure of her hand upon his arm, and saw in her countenance terror the most undisguised, and tenderness that went

straight to his soul” (539). “Abashed, astonished, ashamed,” Camilla withdraws her hand and “sought quietly to retire” (539), but her self-display is evident: “the interest she had shewn for his safety seemed to admit but one interpretation” (540). The bulldog frolic results in Camilla’s shame in violating her father’s advice because a woman, as we are told, must never reveal her affection for a man until an “unreserved declaration, that is, a proposal of marriage” is made (Doody *Life in the Works* 230). The paradox, as discussed, lies in the fact that Edgar is also instructed by Dr. Marchmont to “forbear to declare yourself” and “raise no expectations even in her own breast...till her heart is better known to you,” which causes a stalemate in their courtship and highlights the absurdity of these social codes that stifle their romance (*Camilla* 158).

Having to expose one’s innermost feelings because of a frolic, and the shame that results, is a common theme in Burney’s work. In *Cecilia*, Lady Honoria engages in a light-hearted prank that similarly exposes Cecilia’s true feelings about Mortimer with a frolic involving a dog. Lady Honoria steals Mortimer’s dog Fidel and leaves him with Cecilia to draw the couple together. Like Camilla in the bulldog scene, Cecilia displays her inmost feelings by confiding in Fidel, but is left vulnerable and ashamed when she discovers Mortimer has overheard her declaration: “the wild rambling of fancy with which she had incautiously indulged her sorrow, rushing suddenly upon her mind, she felt herself wholly overpowered by consciousness and shame, and sunk, almost fainting, upon a window seat” (*Camilla* 547). Like Edgar, Mortimer is “filled with wonder and delight” upon hearing Cecilia’s affection for him, but Cecilia’s intense shame foregrounds not only the social rules governing behavior and the danger in violating them, but also Lady Honoria’s insensitivity (however vindicated) in orchestrating such an uncomfortable

prank (*Camilla* 547). *Camilla*'s bulldog frolic occupies a short chapter, but it's a loaded scene that exposes a series of concerns about the twisted social dynamics, moral standards and crude forms of entertainment that shape *Camilla*'s world.

The Bullfinch

The learned bullfinch scene addresses similar issues of taste and propriety, but in a much broader way. *Camilla* is amazed by a trained bullfinch that sings "various little airs, upon words of command," but is struck by the "severe aspect" with which the showman issues his orders (*Camilla* 492). Inquiring "by what means he had obtained such authority," the man "brutally" answers: "By the true old way, Miss; I licks him" (*Camilla* 492). What other way can "one larns them dumb cretures?" he asks, and *Camilla* is aghast at such cruelty (493). *Camilla*'s sympathy for the bullfinch, Doody observes, is "a womanly sympathy, arising from similarities between her own position and that of the bird" (Doody *Life in the Works* 236). "Learned animals," as Hannah Velten explains, were celebrated for possessing "human qualities of intelligence" through their training and display of various feats or skills (126), and in a similar way, young women are also part of a system grounded in training and obedience. This connection is made clear when *Camilla* asks how the showman could harm such a "poor delicate creature": "'O, easy enough, Miss,' replied the man, grinning; 'everything's the better for a little beating, as I tells my wife'" (*Camilla* 492). These remarks, said with a grin, reveal what Seeber identifies as "the violence of marriage and domesticity" in the novel, and Eugenia in particular is the victim of such violence and control through her marriage to Bellamy (Seeber 103). Bellamy even threatens to treat Eugenia like a caged animal,

claiming he will lock her up “upon bread and water” for the rest of her life if she does not do as he commands (858). In a more playful manner, Sir Sedley applies this same rhetoric, comparing Camilla to a caged bird and begging that she “fly only thus, where you may be pursued!” (525). Women in the novel are frequently aligned with the plight of animals, and their “caged” position is explored throughout. Yet the comic way in which these oppressive experiences are framed says as much about the sordid systems themselves as the light-hearted way in which eighteenth-century readers viewed them.

When Burney’s showman states, “everything’s the better for a little beating, as I tells my wife,” he applies the same rustic humour as the popular wife-beating jokes found in various jestbooks and broadsides, such as *The Merry Medley* (1745) where:

A Country-Fellow that had married an idle Housewife, upon a Time coming from his Labour, and finding her lazily sitting by the Fire, as her Custom was, he took a Holly-wand, and began to cudgel her soundly: The Woman cry’d out aloud, and said, Alas, Husband, what do you mean? You see I do nothing. Ah marry Wife, saith he, I know it very well, and *for that Reason I beat thee.*³ (36)

This “Country-Fellow” shares the same sentiment as Burney’s showman who pinches his bullfinches “to a mummy” when they “do nothing at all by an hour or two” (Camilla 493). Another jest, taken from *The Nut-Cracker* (1751), also mimics the showman’s feelings about ill-temper when his birds become “so plaguy sulky, they tempt me to give ‘em a knock a little matter too hard, and then they’ll fall you into a fit, like, and go off in a twinkle” (Camilla 493):

A young Man married a very ill-temper’d Woman, to whom, notwithstanding her Perverseness, he behav’d well, and was very kind; she, however, not contented, made continual Complaints to her Father, to the great Grief of both Families. The Husband, no longer able to endure this seurvy Humour, bang’d her heartily; hereupon she renews her Compaints to the old Man, who being now better

³ This joke is also found with minimal variants in *Oxford Jest*s (London, 1720) and *Ornatissimus Joculator; or, The Compleat Jester* (London, 1703).

acquainted with her ill Humours took her to Talk and laced her Sides soundly too; saying, *Go, ...to your Husband, and tell him, I am now even with him; for I have cudgell'd his Wife, as he has beaten my Daughter.* (51-2)⁴

Like the wives in these jests, the bullfinch's "ill-temper" and "idleness" is what tempts the showman to "give 'em a knock" (*Camilla* 493). With his colloquial language and references to "a little beating," the showman evokes the same comic spirit as the "Country-Fellow" who cudgels his wife. However, like the bulldog frolic, these scenes move far beyond issues of class. Wife beating jokes were frequently reprinted and recycled in various forms, reaching both middle and upper class readers, showing insensitive interest in female suffering ("Hilarity and Pitilessness" 4). Burney's use of these classic jestbook tropes alludes to this insensitive tradition, and relates it to the suffering experienced by women within the novel itself in an ecofeminist critique. Ecofeminism, as Karen Warren observes, explores "the connections – historical, empirical, conceptual, theoretical, symbolic, and experiential – between the domination of women and the domination of nature," and Burney's bullfinch problematizes the systems of control placed upon the bird and her heroine by bringing these amusements into question (qtd in Seeber, 101). The showman may share the same comic spirit as the Country-Fellow and young Man who delight in positions of power, but Camilla's disgust serves to deflate these sentiments.

As with the bulldog scene, the bullfinch episode prompts a reassessment of crude amusements and also offers insight into systems of control. The bullfinch's caged position functions not only as a metaphor for Eugenia's marriage, but also Camilla's entrapment through courtship, and "caging" becomes a device used throughout the text to

⁴ This joke is also found with minimal variants in *Coffee-House Jest*s (London, 1733).

explore female docility due to rules governing propriety. Camilla's distress over the treatment of the learned bullfinch prompts Sir Sedley to purchase the bird as a gift, and in doing so he establishes a debt, though not a monetary one. Camilla thanks him "with a smile of open pleasure" but from "propriety" and "delicacy of spirit" initially refuses to accept the bird (*Camilla* 494). Sir Sedley suggests returning it to the showman, "brute as he was," and Camilla resolves to keep the "poor creature" rather than subject it to further torment (*Camilla* 494). This exchange, though well meaning on Camilla's part, makes Sir Sedley "unusually gay" with "an air and manner that seemed palpably to mark her as the cause of his satisfaction," leaving Camilla in "the deepest disturbance" over her implied approval of Sir Sedley's courtship (*Camilla* 495). By accepting the gift, Camilla finds herself in a "difficulty the most delicate," her initial refusal becoming a mere act of coquetry in the eyes of Sir Sedley (*Camilla* 495). Trapped by codes of conduct, Camilla innocently creates an illusion of love by accepting the gift that she is unable to shake, which later comes to embarrass her. Mrs. Arlbery refuses to intervene at the alleged risk of embarrassing Sir Sedley, and Camilla cannot clear up the situation herself "without announcing expectations from his partiality which he had never authorized by any declaration" (*Camilla* 495). The various avenues for offence and Camilla's helplessness illustrate not just the intricacies of propriety, but also the loss of female agency. Though Camilla is enslaved by social custom, the irony lies in the fact that she herself is the one considered the enslaver.

Alongside animal imagery, slavery becomes a recurring theme applied to courtship and marriage, in which people are "enslaved," "chained," or helplessly "tied." Mrs. Arlbery in particular uses this language, calling enamored lovers "willing slaves"

(466) and mocking Sir Sedley for his conceited foppery, which allows him to resist her “chains” because he only loves himself and “wears no chains but his own” (75).

Melmond is also hopelessly “chained” by Indiana’s charms since his “enchanted faculties were the mere slaves of her beauty,” which pulls a veil over his eyes and leads him to believe that “if she fretted, he thought her all sensibility; if she pouted, all dignity; if her laughter was unmeaning, she was made up of innocent gaiety” (769). While this rhetoric presents marriage and courtship as a helpless and hopeless experience, Mrs. Arlbery applies it in a rather empowering way. She warns Camilla that she must know her “power more truly, and use it better,” believing she must “amuse” and “defy” men because: “from the instant you permit them to think of being offended, they become your masters; and you will find it vastly more convenient to make them your slaves” (446-7). Mrs. Arlbery advises Camilla to use coquetry as a means to become a “master” in courtship rather than a slave herself, but Camilla’s refusal is useless, as she unknowingly becomes a coquette by accepting the bullfinch from Sir Sedley. Mrs. Arlbery happily concludes that “a Baronet, rich, young, and amiable, is upon the very point of becoming your slave for ever” (509), yet how can Camilla be an enslaver when she is merely caged in by codes of conduct? “Coquetry,” we learn, was “as foreign to the ingenuousness of her nature, as to the dignity of all her maternal precepts,” and when she unintentionally invites Sir Sedley’s advances she becomes the dupe of circumstance, a slave to social conduct.

Mrs. Arlbery, with her biting satire and widowhood, is the only truly liberated female in the text who resists such roles. She possesses great awareness of the social codes governing conduct, and is quite happy to displace them, telling Camilla, “you are

not used to my way, I perceive...yet, I can nevertheless assure you, you can do nothing so much for your happiness as to adopt it. You are made a slave in a moment by the world, if you don't begin life by defying it" (*Camilla* 246). Made a "slave" by strict self-governance, Camilla is told by Mrs. Arlbery to "take your own way, follow your own humour, and you and the world will both go on just as well, as if you ask its will and pleasure for everything you do, and want, and think" (*Camilla* 246). Camilla, as we know, remains confined by the wants and thoughts of her mentors, and references to animals and slavery are apt given the servility of her position. Markman Ellis notes that "campaigns against slavery and animal cruelty remained intertwined in the public imagination," and in tackling these themes Burney invites us to place Camilla, and the plight of women, in the same categories (Ellis 106-7).

The Theatre of Accomplish'd Monkies

Just as "learned bullfinches" are expected to deliver a performance, characters in the novel, particularly women, are expected to play a role and deliver certain socially prescribed "domestic" performances. As such, "theatre" becomes another recurring theme in the novel, with characters giving "bad performances" or suffering from bad management. Doody notes that theatrical play in the novel "permits irresponsibility," and "nothing is properly acted by anyone – it is all bad acting" (Doody *Life in the Works* 236). Bellamy in particular is a bad actor, with his talk of "love and rapture" fooling only "the unsuspecting Eugenia...for so little from the heart seemed either his looks or his expressions, that it was palpable he was acting a part" (807). Sir Sedley, though more convincing than Bellamy, is also an actor, able to "set his foppery and conceit apart" at

will, affecting his “vanity” and “frivolity” to play the role of a man of *the ton* (406). Yet unlike Bellamy and Sir Sedley, some “actors” in the novel are not able to choose their roles freely. When Lionel transforms Mrs. Arlbery’s attic into a makeshift theatre and forces absurd roles onto others, he embarks on what Doody calls “perverse theatre” (Doody *Life in the Works* 236). Miss Dannel, “pale with fright,” is found sporting Macdersey’s cocked hat and feather, and Macdersey is “in a rage utterly incomprehensible” when he discovers himself wearing the coachman’s large bob-wig “hanging loose upon his head” while Lionel watches on in a “convulsion of laughter” (*Camilla* 264). *Camilla*, as Doody makes clear, is all about poor performances, and as the novel progresses “human theatre degenerates into animal theatre, with exploited, abused creatures made to act parts they do not understand” (Doody *Life in the Works* 236). Yet in Lionel’s theatre, people, like such “abused creatures,” are also made to play parts they do not understand. Lionel’s bewildering swiftness frightens Miss Dannel when the hat is “suddenly deposited” on her head, and Macdersey is both furious and “irresistibly ludicrous” because of his wig – both have no say or control over the parts that have been forced upon them (*Camilla* 264). Like *Camilla*, who is constantly required to play different roles at the behest of mentors (such as “coquette” at the request of Mrs. Arlbery, and passionless daughter at the command of her father), Lionel’s actors are expected to play roles they do not want nor fully understand. Frolics themselves are nothing more than staged pranks that rely exclusively on spectacle and performance, forming a kind of everyday theatre. As such, the concert of “the accomplish’d Monkies” reveals how theatre – both animal and human – can degenerate into perverse systems of abuse for the amusement of others.

While attending the Mount Pleasant theatre, the group sees a bill that boasts of “a superb exhibition of wild beasts...consisting chiefly of monkies who could perform various feats, and a famous ourang outang, just landed from Africa” (*Camilla* 421). Mrs. Albery believes it would be “an amusing sight to see so many representations of the dear human race,” and indeed such exhibitions were popular, indicating a fascination with both the exotic and the scientific. As Londa Schiebinger notes, monkeys were important scientifically because they were the animals “most resembling humankind,” yet at the same time they “seemed to confirm the notion of hierarchy and continuity in nature” (qtd in Seeber 104). In John Adams’ *Curious thoughts on the history of man* (1789), it’s believed that “the Orang Outang, though an animal much resembling man, is not (according to Lord Monboddo’s hypothesis) possessed of reason, or human intelligence, any more than a horse, a dog, or a parrot,” and this implied inferiority reinforced man’s superiority at the top of the chain of being (Adams 85). Literature, like Edward Tyson’s *Anatomy of a Pygmie* (1699), Pope and Arbuthnot’s *An Essay of the Learned Martinus Scriblerus Concerning the Origine of Sciences* (1731), and the work of Lord Monboddo, were all concerned with the anatomical proximity between apes and humans, exploring similarity and “otherness” in a way which either validated oppressive methods of control or contested such brutality as unfeeling. Debates about sympathy aside, scientific interest in apes continued to grow in popularity and led to opportunities for spectacle and confinement in places like John Hunter’s Museum, the Exeter Change Menagerie and the Royal Menagerie in the Tower of London.

Thomas Rowland’s “The Monkey Room in the Tower,” depicting the Royal Menagerie, is particularly interesting for its use of spectacle and the suggestion of

violence (see Figure 9). The etching depicts a crowd gaping in pleasure and awe at a group of chained and loose monkeys, a trainer poised at the ready with a club as a woman looks on. The etching, which presents the “School for Monkeys” exhibition at the Tower, shows monkeys in a domestic space with no separating barriers, and Hannah Velten notes that “visitors would often be pinched and bitten by the animals, and many wigs were stealthily removed” (Velten 152). Interested in seeing the humanlike behavior of monkeys in a distinctly human setting, the “The Monkey Room in the Tower” illustrates just how thrilled curiosity seekers were to come dangerously close to the exotic. Yet while the image shows how amusing it can be to be within reach of “so many representations of the human race,” the image also suggests uneasiness about the violent methods used to keep such animals in line (*Camilla* 421). Trainers, as Velten argues, would “treat their animals as though they were without emotions or intelligence,” reminiscent of the “object status” applied by Smith’s theory, and “this resulted in some brutal treatment being meted out to the animals” (Velten 123). With his club rising in midair, Rowlandson’s trainer is a subtle reminder of the type of cruelties experienced by animals put on display.

The theatre of “accomplish’d Monkies” addresses such concerns about violent displays of control, and Burney orchestrates another uncomfortable scene triggered by cruelty and laughter. As the monkeys assemble on stage and play their instruments “every body stopt their ears,” however “no one could forbear laughing at their various contortions, and horrible grimaces” (*Camilla* 429). Yet the audience’s derisive laughter is more unsettling when the master of the booth “dealt about such fierce blows with a stick” to “keep them, he said, in tune” and the monkeys send up a “general howling” which the



Figure 9. Thomas Rowlandson, *The Monkey Room in the Tower* (1799). Hand-colored etching and aquatint. The Metropolitan Museum of Art #59.533.602

master of the booth refers to as “the *Wocal* part of his *Consort*” (429). The audience, we are reminded, “applauded by loud shouts” and laughter, while Mrs. Arlbery is “disgusted” by the display, rising to leave the booth as Camilla “started up to second the motion” (*Camilla* 430). Like a Bakhtinian carnival, the theatre of accomplish’d Monkeys becomes a liminal space characteristic of an “inside out” world that presents an “ambivalent laughter” (Bakhtin 12). Carnival, as Bakhtin explains, “is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (7). Burney’s spectators are notably a mix of “high” and “low,” representing a cross section of Camilla’s world that adequately represents “all the people” (421). Mrs. Mittin and Mr. Dubster, notorious for their “lowness” because of their “forward, vulgar and encroaching” manners (606), attend the concert alongside “the Quality” who the booth keeper is particularly keen to “oblige” given that “he could not endure to see the departure of the most brilliant part of his spectators” (430). “The people laughed and clapped, and Mrs. Arlbery sat [back] down” while the monkeys are dressed up as soldiers for the second part of their performance. Notably, Mrs. Arlbery laughs at this new scene, telling the General that “as he was upon duty, he should himself take the command,” and the scene essentially becomes a public decrowning of the army (430). Here, the monkeys are part of a carnivalistic world complete with “numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings” through their anthropomorphic framing (11). The monkeys are also made to imitate humans during their “*Consort of Music*: in which not less than twenty monkeys contributed their part; one dreadfully scraping a bow across the strings of a vile kit, another beating a drum, another with a fife, a fourth with a bagpipe, and the sixteen remainder striking

together tongs, shovels, and pokers by way of marrowbones and cleavers” (429). Camilla’s disgust effectively carves out a space for the reader to sympathize with the plight of the “accomplish’d Monkies,” and the reader is inclined to compare the forceful domestication of animals with the forceful domestication of young women. Miss Dannel, who is particularly interested in viewing the monkey performance, “ready to cry at the thought of losing the sight,” is a particularly good example (*Camilla* 428). Miss Dannel’s naïve interest in the show is particularly comic, given her ironic position. She is described as being “as childish in intellect as in experience; though self-persuaded she was a woman in both” (*Camilla* 259), and she dreams of one day marrying so that she may be liberated from her father (391). She is the caricature of a simple-minded young woman born for marriage, repeatedly exclaiming: “I wish I was married!” (422), “as soon as I am married” (263), and “I’m resolved when I’m married myself, I won’t be unhappy” (417). The irony, of course, lies in that through marriage she is “the most disappointed and distressed of human beings” and does not have half as much liberty or happiness as when she lived with her father. “Heartily repenting marriage” she “wished she had never thought of it” (*Camilla* 910). Miss Dannel, who is arguably the most thrilled by the “accomplish’d Monkies,” is also one of the most obvious victims of control; unwittingly and enthusiastically leaving one “system of domestic oppression” for another.

As with previous examples of animal cruelty in the novel, our heroine’s disapproval of the insensitive treatment of the monkeys forms a critique of such behavior and also invites us to draw links between the position of women and the victimization of animals. As Seeber notes, “accomplished monkeys” are not much different from “accomplished ladies” who are also expected to perform in one way or another. Edgar

also makes a comparison between human and nonhuman, or rather, spectator and spectacle, which says as much about the treatment of animals as the treatment of women. Before attending the concert, he warns that the show is: “a species of curiosity not likely to attract the most elegant spectators; and rather, perhaps, adapted to give pleasure to naturalists, than to young ladies” (*Camilla* 421). Edgar’s distinction between “naturalists” and “young ladies” as Seeber notes, “reinforces the structural similarity between monkeys and ladies: Camilla in a sense is also subjected to the scientific gaze of the naturalist” (Seeber 105). And indeed, Camilla is constantly under surveillance when Dr. Marchmont explicitly tells Edgar that he must “study her” (*Camilla* 159). Subjected to Edgar’s “experiments” and gaze (671), Camilla’s relationship with her lover-mentor suggests that attempts at mastering nature and animals is not limited to the showman and monkey keeper alone (Seeber 105).

Seeber concludes that the “concern for animals is not mere convention in Burney; rather it is part of her feminist critique and exploration of the parallel caging of women and animals” (106). Burney certainly offers a feminist critique through her representation of animals, and it’s framed in a manner Burney knows best – through laughter. Uncomfortable scenes depicting cruel amusements and derisive laughter unsettle the reader, forcing them to rethink the perverse systems of control operating in both the human and animal world. Comic conventions are exposed as callus and in a similar way, laughter around deformity signals a shift in sentiment that criticizes cruel jests about the physically deformed. Insensitive jokes and pranks that aim to unite animals and women under the same category as “sufferers” also brings the “ugly” under the same category as “the beautiful,” with shame and disfigurement becoming a mark of virtue and moral

dignity achieved through suffering. Indeed, Eugenia certainly possesses an “inner beauty” that surpasses every other character in the novel; however, disability still becomes a mark of “otherness” that provides great insight into the spectacle and stigma around deformity in the eighteenth century.

Chapter 4

“The Little Hump-Back Gentlewoman”: Deformity, Ridicule and the Dynamics of Shame

Eugenia is undoubtedly a paragon of virtue, “her abilities and her sentiments” being “each of the highest class, uniting the best adorned intellects with the best principled virtues” (51). And yet like the animals and curiosities on display at menageries and exhibitions across London, Eugenia is made into an object of spectacle, as well as ridicule, because of her pockmarked face, visible limp and small frame. When Dubster discovers that Eugenia’s limp was caused by a fall, he asks her if “that was what stunted your growth so, Miss? For, I take it, you’re not much above a dwarf as they shew at Exeter Change...It would be a good sight enough to see you together. He’d think himself a man in a minute” (280). Dubster’s inquiry says as much about eighteenth-century attitudes towards deformity as the ethics of laughter – he aligns Eugenia with the “dwarf” at the Exeter Change who is made a public display, a “good sight enough” to thrill and amuse curiosity seekers, and indeed, Eugenia is considered an “amusing” sight throughout the novel (280). Attracting judging eyes and ridicule through a series of jests and pranks, she is publicly humiliated and laughed at, which causes her chronic shame. Through Eugenia, Burney offers great insight into the stigma around deformity, problematizing the ideological basis behind deformity humour and calling for reader sympathy by detailing Eugenia’s traumatic experiences under the public gaze.

Aesthetics and the Body

In his study on laughter and the representation of cripples, Roger Lund notes that “as with other ideologies from racism to misogyny which have been anatomized by modern scholars, critical confrontation of eighteenth-century attitudes towards deformity creates an epistemic dislocation that tempts us to reject laughter at cripples as a form of cruelty,” and he calls instead for an examination of “what other sorts of critical or moral expectations might have contributed to such peculiar and deeply-held prejudices against the physically deformed” (93). After reading jests and pranks delighting in the confusion of the blind, the tripping of cripples, and the comic misunderstanding of the deaf, it certainly becomes tempting to reject this laughter as a form of cruelty. And yet such a simplistic conclusion is as problematic in its own right – cruelty for cruelty’s sake ignores the cultural and ideological basis behind this laughter, as well as shifts in moral sentiment that began to consider this brand of comedy cruel. Many mid-eighteenth-century jests even begin to acknowledge the harshness of their material, signifying a push and pull between politeness and inappropriate humour that attempts to pass these jokes off as “light-hearted,” impulsive and innocent, such as the following from “The Jest of Beau Nash” in which:

Nash, like most other wits, was too apt to say cruel things, and to sacrifice decency and good-nature to a jest. One day in the grove, he joined some ladies, and asking *one* of them who was crooked, whence she came? She replied, *Strait from London. Indeed Madam*, said he, *then you must have been confoundedly warpt along the way.* (65-66)

Such jokes about the deformed offer a disclaimer similar to the one offered by Burney on behalf of Lionel, in which he would lop off his arms to protect his family “yet, when some frolic or gambol comes into my way, I forget you all!” (*Camilla* 739). The joker who is “too apt to say cruel things” and is quick to “sacrifice decency and good-nature to

a jest” is depicted as a victim of caprice, an attempt to vindicate such “wits” like Beau Nash who find the sight of a “crooked” woman too good to pass up (65). Yet accounting for *why* this brand of humour was so persistent and impulsive is far more difficult to comprehend. Like the philosophical justification for the cruelty of animals, the “peculiar and deeply-held prejudices against the physically deformed” were part of a deep-seated culture in transition, where derisive laughter and cruel amusements were becoming more and more difficult to defend (Lund 93).

The idea that deformity could be a legitimate source of amusement is no doubt a disturbing thought to any modern or sensitive reader, and yet as Simon Dickie observes, the “sheer callousness” of such jokes, and their “frank delight in human suffering... suggest almost unquestioned pleasure at the sight of deformity or misery” (“Hilarity and Pitilessness” 1). Theorists of humour have suggested that laughter becomes a “therapeutic or compensatory” response to this “weakness,” and Dickie notes that eighteenth-century Britain was a place where “deformity and disability were not only everywhere to be seen, but in which everyone faced the decrepitude and pain of old age, in which a chance accident could maim one for life” (“Hilarity and Pitilessness” 16). Death and disease lurked around every corner, and under such circumstances, laughter can be understood as a “powerful mask for anxiety and fear” which Dickie observes may have been able to “discharge for a moment one’s own fears of physical degeneration, one’s own sense of the precariousness of the body, of the proximity and near inevitability of disease and disability” (16). In the same vein, there’s a sense that those who mock are indulging in the “sudden glory” which Hobbes puts forward in his analysis of laughter, where the mocker experiences an instant “rush of glee” caused “by the apprehension of

some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves” (qtd. in “Hilarity and Pitilessness” 1). Each concept is no doubt relevant to any discussion about deformity humour, yet what seems to be of particular interest with respect to *Camilla* is Burney’s treatment of divine design.

Camilla places great emphasis on the concept of beauty and deformity, offering a direct challenge to popular aesthetic theories that considered the deformed to be “lesser than” or a complete violation of a divinely designed “norm.” As with the treatment of animals, philosophical debates about deformity identified the deformed as characteristically “other,” and in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke goes as far as to suggest that deformity is a mark of the “inhuman.” Locke argues that it is the physical body, rather than the conventional belief in rationality, that defines a human:

It is the shape, as the leading quality, that seems more to determine that species, than a faculty of reasoning, which appears not at first, and in some never. And if this be not allowed to be so, I do not know how they can be excused from murder who kill monstrous births, (as we call them), because of an unordinary shape, without knowing whether they have a rational soul or no; which can be no more discerned in a well-formed than ill-shaped infant, as soon as born. (387)

Locke’s suggestion that the deformed are “less than human” implies a justification for the insensitive, or rather, *inhuman* treatment of the deformed; the very notion of infanticide – the killing of “monstrous births” – is a rather horrific example of the powerful stigma around deformity and disfigurement. Locke’s emphasis on the “ordinary” and “unordinary” human shape then leads naturally to a discussion about aesthetics and the human body, where “ordinary” and “unordinary” gives way to “beauty” and “ugliness.”

Beauty in the eighteenth century was largely about the perfection of the human shape – the very appearance of deformity was a violation of this perfection, and seemed to legitimize laughter as a negation of difference. Ideas about what constituted beauty and

perfection varied considerably, from the Palladian adaptation of geometric principles and harmony, to Hogarth's belief in the "serpentine line" as the model for natural beauty (Lund 96). Yet what remains consistent, as Helen Deutsch makes clear, is the belief that "beauty and normalcy derive from symmetry and regularity," creating fixed ideas about the human body as a model of "perfection" whereby anything deviating from this model was by default imperfect, unnatural, and ugly (12). For example, Martin Weinrich, in his treatise on "monsters" (1596), puts forward the claim that "all that is imperfect is ugly, and monsters are full of imperfections," making laughter and ridicule an almost automatic response – part of an ideology reaching as far back as antiquity (qtd. in Lund 94). Aristotle defined the ridiculous as "a species of the ugly," while Cicero maintained that laughter "proceeded from the castigation of deformity and disgrace" (qtd. in Turner 62). As a result, laughter around deformity seems to be as much about the observer as the observed, revealing socially embedded hostilities against "otherness" that took issue with physical and aesthetic difference rather than disability or impairment itself.

The idea that deformity was largely a "visual" concern is seconded by William Hay – Member of Parliament, author of one of the first extended treatises on deformity, and sufferer from a distinct curvature of the spine. In *Deformity: An Essay*, Hay observes that "bodily deformity is visible to every eye," and indeed it is the visibility of deformity that essentially defines it (2). Lennard Davis points out that in *The Life of Johnson* Boswell simultaneously mentions then downplays Samuel Johnson's disabilities, noting that one blind eye "was little different from that of the other," while Hester Thrale similarly concludes that "this defect however was never visible, both eyes looked exactly alike" (qtd. in Davis 61). Here, what seems to matter to the observer is not Johnson's

actual blindness, but the fact that he does not *look* blind (95). Hay attempts to account for why “one species of deformity should be more ridiculous than another,” and why the laughing mob “should be more merry with a crooked man, than one that is deaf, lame, squinting, or purblind” (35). Yet in a world where deformity is defined by “ugliness,” it seems clear that responses to deformity are purely aesthetic, its “visibility to every eye” inspiring the degree of “merriment.”

Unlike Johnson, William Hay offers a description of his own deformities that are far more “visible to every eye” (Hay 2). Describing himself as “scarce five feet high” with a back “bent in my mother’s womb,” Hay concludes that he resembles “Esop, the prince of Orange, Marshal Luxemburg, Lord Treasurer Salisbury, Scarron, and Mr. Pope: not to mention Thersites and Richard the Third” (4). Yet Hay is quick to note that he does not consider Thersites and Richard the Third “as members of our society: the first being a child of the poet’s fancy; the last misrepresented by historians, who thought they must draw a Devil in a bad shape” (5). Hay’s rejection of Richard the Third as a “member of his society” is particularly insightful, touching on a recurrent theme in eighteenth-century literature that presented deformity and disfigurement as a mark of evil, “Devils in bad shapes” which, by the author’s “fancy,” offered a physical indication of an immoral soul. This formed a popular convention that related the physical body to the human spirit.

The belief that “inner beauty” could exist within a “deformed frame” was, according to aesthetic principles, a virtual impossibility in both nature and literature. If the deformed were “botched” attempts at a perfect, divinely designed model, then it could only follow that a deformed exterior offered an “imperfect,” or rather, deformed interior. Depicting the “Devil in a bad shape” was certainly a popular literary trend, and disease in

the novel was rarely morally neutral (Hay 5). Simon Dickie notes that eighteenth-century fictions “have their share of evil dwarfs and one-eyed moneylenders,” with deformity used as a device to identify and stigmatize characters as villains and outcasts (*Cruelty and Laughter* 89). Pope’s *Dunciad* is an interesting example, with Cibber’s “monster-breeding breast” suggesting that the dunces are spawning literary creations as “deformed” as their own bodies (Pope 213). Pope’s use of the body to ridicule his dunces’ highlight just how prominent the link between deformity and mockery is – ridicule, as Lund observes, is a “primary rhetorical instrument for reinforcing cultural norms,” and for the satirist, deformity becomes an effective means of exclusion (104). The dunces create “monstrous” works, and so they themselves are “monstrous” figures, possessing an “otherness” that excludes them from the realms of high art and taste. And yet, having visible deformities himself, Pope’s attack is reciprocated and deformity once again becomes the main “rhetorical instrument” for his exclusion.

In *A True Character of Mr. Pope*, one of Pope’s dunces, John Dennis, calls him “one, whom God and Nature have mark’d for want of Common Honesty” (4), and warns that “if any one appears to be concern’d at our Upbraiding him with his Natural Deformity... we desire that Person to consider, that this little monster has upbraided People with their Calamities and their Diseases” (9). Claiming that Pope has been “marked by God,” Dennis attempts to justify his insensitivity by stressing that this “little monster” has judged others for their defects as well, giving him the authority to reciprocate and, above all, identify his deformity as a “warning we should hold no society with him, as a creature not of our original, nor our species” (10). Pope and Dennis’ exchange reveal how deformity is treated as a tool for ridicule, “bad character,” and

“otherness,” yet at the same time Dennis’ acknowledgment of his audiences “concern” over his attack on Pope’s “natural deformity” is a legitimate one. “A man can no more help his calamities and his diseases, than a monster can his deformity,” Dennis affirms, however “the deformity of this libeller, is visible, present, lasting, unalterable, and peculiar to himself” (10). Dennis’ rejection, then affirmation of old prejudices against the deformed highlight a struggle to reconcile old ideologies with a growing consciousness that pushed against such unsympathetic ideals. Mrs. Arlbery begs Camilla to “never judge the heart of a wit,” claiming that “we have often as good hearts, ay, and as much good nature too, as the careful prozers...but we have a pleasure in our own rattle that cruelly runs away with our discretion” (*Camilla* 780). Pope’s popularity as a renowned wit and satirist attests to his audiences’ forgiveness of his cruel “indiscretions” much like the forgiveness given to Beau Nash for his tendency to “sacrifice decency and good-nature to a jest.” Yet Dennis’ less “innocent” attack, a diatribe lacking wit and humour, somehow makes it less forgivable – the tension between politeness and cruelty, sensibility and ridicule are here more visible, and the anticipated “concern” of his audience is a very real one.

The eighteenth-century was a transitional period in our understanding of disability, just as it was a transitional period in our understanding of animal cruelty. Conduct literature called for the censoring of laughter at the expense of others, because, as poet and moralist James Beattie argued “no man, who has any pretensions to good manners, to common understanding, or even to common humanity, will ever think of making a butt of that person who has neither sense nor spirit to defend himself” (qtd. in Turner 64). Laughter at the disabled had no place in “the age of sensibility,” and yet

deformity humour continued to creep into jestbooks and comic literature under the guise of light-hearted and innocent amusements. “A good person is a letter of recommendation,” Hay notes, while deformity becomes “an obstruction in the way of favour...deformed persons set out in the world to a disadvantage, and they must first surmount the prejudices of mankind, before they can be upon a par with others” (30). Authors attempting to bring the disabled into more sympathetic realms and, in effect, “set them upon a par with others,” did so by experimenting with deformity by making it a mark of virtue rather than evil. Works like Sarah Scott’s *Millennium Hall* depict virtuous and honourable women living with some form of disfigurement or deformity, and similarly, in *Camilla*, Burney sets up foils that complicate ideas about “divine design,” beauty and virtue. By applying conventional jests around deformity and depicting traumatizing pranks that crush Eugenia, *Camilla* suggests that not all wit and humour is forgivable.

Eugenia and Indiana, Mind and Body

The body is an important signifier in *Camilla*, with “fugitive roses” appearing on Camilla’s cheeks to expose her admiration for Edgar through a blush (220), and Eugenia’s “paleness” upon hearing Bellamy’s approaching footsteps suggesting domestic violence (844). As with most of Burney’s work, the body is a critical source of meaning, and *Camilla* in particular becomes a meditation on the relationship between mind and body. Burney plays with conventional ideas about inner virtue and outward beauty by strategically inverting them: Indiana possesses a “beauty so exquisite, it is scarce possible to look away from it a moment” (149), yet she has an ugliness of mind that equals, if not

exceeds, her physical beauty. In direct contrast, Eugenia is virtuous and honourable, possessing an inner beauty that is obscured by her disfigurement and lameness, called “the ugliest little fright, poor thing! I ever saw in the world, poor thing!” (568), by her cousin Indiana, with her disfigurement remaining “an obstruction in the way of favour” (Hay 30). Dr. Marchmont notes that Eugenia “joins so much innocence with information, that the mind must itself be deformed that could dwell upon her personal defects” (149), and indeed there are plenty of “deformed minds” in *Camilla* that dwell entirely on physical beauty. The social world of the novel is one that is obsessed with appearances, and *Camilla* reevaluates the belief that a woman’s “physical being” is the most “essential” part of her identity (McMaster 148).

Eugenia and Indiana both “come out” into society at the same time, occupying the same social circles, and set in opposition to one another under the public eye. Their first “public exhibition” is at the Northwick ball, led by Indiana who attracts the greatest attention (60). “Fluttering with all the secret triumph of conscious beauty,” she walks up the room “through a crowd of admiring spectators,” while Camilla and Eugenia “followed rather as if in her train, than of her party” (60). “Eugenia,” we are told, “could only have served as a foil, even to those who had no pretensions of beauty” (58), and there is a murmur of “impertinent witticism upon her face, person, and walk” (61). She produces “a disposition for sneering in the satirical, and for tittering in the giddy” which makes her “as valuable an acquisition to the company at large” as her “fair cousin,” suggesting that Eugenia and Indiana are both sources of amusement, but for two rather different reasons (61). Beauty and deformity are both “entertaining” for spectators, beauty for the “admiration” it inspires, and deformity for the pure sake of laughter.

Emphasis on “spectacle” is echoed throughout the ball scene, with “spectators” gazing upon young ladies who are “attracting all eyes” (62), and the young ladies themselves become “delightedly pre-occupied” with “new scenery and new objects” that charm their imagination (61). Public scenes are notably “exhibitions” that are as invasive and troubling as they are meant to be enjoyable, and much like the pranks detailed throughout the novel, the ball scene places great emphasis on both the discomfort and pleasure caused by spectacle. The Northwick ball marks the young ladies’ “entrance into the world” and the reader enters alongside them, uncovering how the body is not only subjected to the intrusive public gaze, a “good sight enough” for spectators (280), but also how the female body’s “determining force, its value in the market,” and “its status as a system of signs” is challenged by Burney’s critique (McMaster 148).

As Deirdre Lynch observes, assembly halls, balls and theatres are opportunities for fashionable display, which “render the woman conspicuous only to make the ‘real’ woman disappear. They entail an experience of excessive embodiment, of being misrepresented as someone who is all body” (qtd. in McMaster 148). Indiana and Eugenia are certainly “embodied” subjects, their physical selves being the only “selves” that matter, and Burney sets the tone for the rather shallow understanding of the female body early on in the novel. Sir Hugh’s ranking of his nieces in a kind of figurative beauty pageant places great emphasis on “prettiness” with respect to marriage, and unable, as always, to “keep a single thought to himself” he reminds Edgar that “you have a right to choose for yourself; for as to beauty, ‘tis mere fancy; not but what Indiana has one or other the prettiest face I ever saw, though I think Camilla’s so much prettier” (20). As Sir Hugh makes clear, the best quality for marriage is “prettiness,” and the “value” of his

nieces on the marriage market is a purely physical one. Conscious of her beauty at a young age, Indiana learns to use her body for her own benefit, never weeping “without advantage,” knowing that “not to spoil her pretty eyes by crying, was the current maxim of the whole house” (45), and when her eyes are not crying to get what she wants they are “licensed” with their most “melting powers” to weaken prospective suitors (145). Indiana is, in effect, “all body,” while Eugenia is bred at a young age to sharpen her intellect in an attempt to make her more “marketable.”

Fearing he is becoming a “sheer blockhead” himself, Sir Hugh attempts to be schooled in the Classics, but when he becomes the target of Lionel’s taunting, who “almost rolled upon the floor with convulsive merriment” at the sight of his uncle’s struggle, he soon gives up the venture and directs his attention to Indiana and Eugenia (43). Indiana proves to be a less than ideal student, and Miss. Margland, hoping to remove the “intolerable burden” of a classical education, warns Sir Hugh that “though beautiful and well brought up” Indiana could “never cope with so great a disadvantage as the knowledge of Latin” (45). “What gentleman will you ever find that will bear with a learned wife?” Miss. Margland asks, and she reminds him of the “danger of injuring her beauty by study” (45). Miss. Margland notably echoes standard conduct literature of the day, with writers like James Fordyce warning young ladies not to lead an intellectual life, since marriage to a “witty female” is sure to disrupt “domestic happiness” (qtd. in *Laughing Feminism* 22). With her reputation for absurdity and hyperbole, the reader is inclined to reject anything Miss. Margland says as satire, and Burney appears to reassert her stance on female education through the more sensible Mrs. Arlbery, who notes that men are “always enchanted with something that is both pretty and silly; because they can

so easily please and soon disconcert it” (254). When “the pretty flies off, and the silly remains” men are left with a “choice companion on their hands,” and indeed Macdersey is saved from too many “tête-à-têtes” in his marriage to Indiana, thanks to a profession “obliging him to sojourn frequently” (254). Intending to marry his heiress Eugenia to her cousin Clermont, Sir Hugh decides to have Eugenia educated instead, believing they can be “bookish” together (48), and it’s Eugenia’s “naturally thoughtful turn” and virtuous character that eventually leads to her marriage with the equally “bookish” Melmond. Their shared interests and her charitable nature transforms her “to a deity” in Melmond’s eyes, “benignly employed to rescue and bless him” (747), and Eugenia, “once loved, was loved forever” (912). A thoughtful mind then leads to their “domestic happiness” because “providence,” Eugenia states, “is too good to make the mind necessarily deformed with the body” (746). With Indiana being both “pretty and silly,” it’s suggested that “providence” has graced her with beauty to compensate for her intellectual deformities.

While it is implied that Eugenia’s education makes her more “marketable” in marriage, it equally, as Margaret Anne Doody notes, makes her an object of even further ridicule – making her a spectacle not just because of her body, but also because of her mind. As with the Northwick ball, where Eugenia’s appearance sparks “impertinent witticism upon her face, person, and walk” (61), her mind causes her to be “stared at still more than her peculiar appearance” by the fashionable ladies in Southampton, who “titter” and “ran away from the learned lady” believing “her studies had stunted her growth; and all were convinced her education had made her such a fright” (748). Yet it’s not only the ladies at Southampton who think Eugenia a “fright” because of her education – Clermont believes that “this learning is worse than her ugliness; ‘twould make me look

like a dunce in my own house” (579), while Sir Hugh considers her “so bookish” that “I might as well live with an old woman” (51). Eugenia’s classical learning is part of a much larger dialogue on the subject of female education. As Miss. Margland anticipates, women are deemed “unfeminine” or undesirable because they are educated “in the style of a boy” (592), and in the eyes of those around her, Eugenia suffers from what Doody calls a “double deformity,” both physical and intellectual (243). Yet by associating the vulgar ridicule of the educated female mind with the vulgar ridicule of the deformed female body, Burney invites the reader to reject both reactions as “crude, inhumane, and archaic” (Doody 243). Jason Farr has suggested that, like Alexander Pope, Dr. Johnson and even Esop, Eugenia becomes part of a “monster/genius trope” that is quite “pervasive in the eighteenth-century literary imagination” (2) – Eugenia’s naturally “thoughtful turn” and deprivation of “childish amusements” because of her infirmities demands a sharpening of her mind because, as Hay notes, “a man, that cannot shine in his person, will have recourse to his understanding: and attempt to adorn that part of him, which alone is capable of ornament” (68). Yet while Burney applies this “monster/genius trope” in an effort to highlight the strength of “inner beauty,” the torment meted out to Eugenia because of her “double deformity” illustrates the sheer callousness of the public gaze.

Burney’s critique of conventional beauty and “divine design” can be found at every turn of the page. Eugenia’s “ready impulse” to reach for her purse at the sight of a poor widow is in direct contrast to Indiana, who “neither heard nor saw the petitioner” from vanity and pride at the thought of entering an assembly room where she is “sure of again being admired” (82-3). Even when Indiana performs an act of kindness, it’s revealed to be out of pure self-interest – she walks with Eugenia arm-in-arm at the

dancehall, not “in kindness, to save her from fatigue in the eternal sauntering of a public place,” but to create a “contrast” for spectators and generate “striking, and renewed attention to her own charms” (715). Yet while deformity no longer signifies a “deformed spirit,” it still plays a critical role in the novel beyond Burney’s meditation on inner beauty and female education. Rather than a “mark of evil,” disfigurement in *Camilla* is a “mark of calamity” that is used to emphasize Burney’s commentary on bad mentors (804). “Disfigurement and disability,” as Helen Deutsch notes and Burney makes clear, “become a positive virtue” in the sentimental novel that “signals spiritual and moral dignity achieved through suffering” (69). Eugenia, as well as Camilla, suffer from the whims and bad advice of bad mentors, and Eugenia in particular is one “marked by calamity: her ill health, even from infancy and her subsequent misfortunes” exciting “in her whole house the tenderest pity” (804). The “pity” over Eugenia’s “subsequent misfortunes” is no doubt a deliberation on the unfortunate circumstances of her upbringing and suffering under the public gaze, which grows progressively worse as the novel unfolds (804).

Believing he is the cause of her misfortune, Sir Hugh desperately tries to make it up to Eugenia – as discussed, he makes her his sole heiress which ultimately makes her the target of fortune hunters like Bellamy who plague her throughout the novel; he ensures Eugenia is educated in the classics, which makes her the target of further ridicule; and lastly, but most importantly, Sir Hugh orders the household never to mention Eugenia’s scars and limp, which makes her unaware of her deformities since childhood. This act exposes her to intense shame and humiliation when she is publicly laughed at for the first time. But why does Burney constantly make Eugenia the victim of physical and

psychological torment? Burney shows that even those who merit the highest degree of respect, like the good-hearted and virtuous Eugenia, fall victim to ridicule, and comedy illustrates the faults and cruelty of the characters that torment her. Satire might allow an author to use ridicule as a moral tool, but as Gabrielle Star makes clear, not “every moral question and every moral realm” are properly “subject to satire” (Star 99). Laughter around deformity, as well as Eugenia’s physical and psychological pain may serve a purpose in her work, but Burney’s moral intentions run the risk of being lost on an audience still clinging to a mirthful past.

Laughter and Shame

Burney makes it clear that people enjoy laughing at each other, with Mrs. Arlbery claiming there is nothing more enjoyable than “a little innocent diversion” (253). Eugenia is notably made the object of Mrs. Arlbery’s “innocent” wit when she learns Clermont has rejected her. Calling her a “poor little dear ugly thing!” she suggests that Eugenia “must certainly go off with her footman” not unless Dr. Orkborne “will take compassion upon her and her thousands, and put them both into his own pockets” (780). This “raillery” is “painful, nearly to disgust to Camilla,” and Mrs. Arlbery apologizes even though, as we are told, you should never “judge the heart of a wit” (780). Similarly, jokes about Eugenia’s deformity are acknowledged as being in bad taste, but like “The Jests of Beau Nash” they are sometimes disregarded and cast-off as light-hearted, playful or innocent. Lionel refers to his sister throughout the novel as his “little Greek and Latin,” while Dubster, the ill-mannered would-be gentlemen gets away with calling Eugenia a “little lame duck,” greeted only with a look of “chagrin” on Camilla’s face (91). Even the

poor little boy who refers to Eugenia as the “little hump-back gentlewoman” is disregarded as part of a “senseless little crew,” easily swayed by a little charity and greeting Eugenia with “admiration” only after he pockets a shilling (305-6). “Wretches who in such a light can view outward deficiencies cannot merit a thought,” says Mr. Tyrold, they are “below even contempt, and ought not to be disdained, but forgotten” (Camilla 302). And yet how much of the novel’s humour is meant to be forgotten, indulged, or upheld as an example of improper laughter is sometimes hard to discern. In *Camilla*, as well Burney’s other works, anyone is capable of being the object of ridicule, and reader sympathy is qualified by our awareness of the discomfort laughter causes. As with other frolics in the novel, like the seaside prank involving Dr. Orkbourne or Lionel’s “mad bull,” group laughter has the ability to lower a character or “bring them back down to earth.” And yet some frolics, like those centered on Eugenia, stand out as glaring examples of cruelty and prejudice.

When Lionel tells Camilla and Eugenia that he shall “treat” them “with a frolic,” it’s enough to signal uneasiness, especially since he has “great designs, and a most agreeable surprise in view for them” (274). Any “agreeable surprise” orchestrated by Lionel is no doubt one that will satisfy his own amusement, and we are not surprised to find Camilla and Eugenia in yet another uncomfortable situation with Mr. Dubster. Lionel arrives at Dubster’s home with his sisters and demands a tour, telling him he’s “brought two young ladies on purpose to see it; and who knows but one of them may take a fancy to it, and make you a happy man for life” (275). Again made the object of her brother’s amusement, Camilla is trapped and forced to politely endure Dubster’s attention as they make their way through his home, which in itself stands as a symbol of

confinement. Margaret Anne Doody has discussed the symbolic significance of Dubster's home, which provides "images for the novel and its actions in general – ups without downs, downs without ups, dead-end holes, zig-zags, elaborate promises, and reversals" (261). The chaotic layout and absurd features, such as the labyrinth with walls so low "no person above three foot height could be hid by it," a muddy pond which Dubster enthusiastically calls a lake (281), and his "animals" which are really wooden cutouts representing "emblems of the conjugal state," all point to a disorienting, and notably domestic world, full of thwarted expectations and dead ends (271). Dubster's summerhouse in particular is a confining space, a "dead end," under construction and accessible only by a ladder. At Lionel's request, the sisters mount the ladder, neither of them "in the habit of resisting him, nor of investigating with seriousness any thing he proposed" (282), and Lionel, noticing "a party of sportsmen," scampers down to join the hunt and takes the ladder with him as a practical joke. Lionel gallops off "laughing, in defiance of the serious entreaties of his sisters" and "looking in the utmost glee" (282). What follows is a scene that leaves both ladies, as well as Dubster, stranded and in distress, with Eugenia being publicly humiliated.

In truth, Eugenia's humiliation begins as soon as she enters Dubster's home, when she is compared to the dwarf at the Exeter Change. Eugenia is "struck and surprised" not only by his comments, but also by the thought that she could merit such a comparison, given that Sir Hugh has kept her maladies a secret, even to herself. Yet while Eugenia is spared the same fate as the dwarf at the Exeter Change, she figuratively takes his place in the summerhouse – Dubster believes that if his workers see him "hoisted up in this cage, like, they'd only make a joke of it" and indeed, the summerhouse becomes a cage of

sorts, where like the dwarf at Exeter Change Eugenia is subjected to the cruelty of those passing by (283). Calling out for help, they meet three women and a young boy returning from the market, and Dubster asks for their help. Spotting Eugenia, the boy asks “what were you put up there for, Miss? To frighten the crows?” (285), and there is an exchange of laughter as they continue to taunt her: “Miss may go to market with her beauty; she’ll not want for nothing if she’ll shew her pretty face!” and “take care, Miss, you don’t catch the small pox...for fear Miss should be marked” (286). Like the bullfinch trainer and booth keeper at the theatre of “accomplish’d Monkies” Burney makes her ridiculers low-class laborers, and they are even placed physically low, beneath the summerhouse where Eugenia is housed. “They can’t do no hurt; though they are rather rude...to say such things to your face,” says Dubster, “but one must not expect people to be over polite, so far from London” (287). Yet as the mocking whispers in the dancehalls and assembly rooms suggest, the upper class can be just as “rude” and unrefined, even if they are “polite” enough to avoid saying it to one’s face (304). While animals are subject to the physical violence of “rustics” and trainers, Eugenia is subject to the psychological torment of ridicule by the socially “low,” as well as the “high.” The laughter indulged by the market-goers and spectators in the dance halls is the lowest form of laughter, and the discomfort Eugenia feels, as well as her crippling shame, illustrates just how painful these “amusements” can be.

After Lionel’s summerhouse frolic Eugenia spirals into bouts of shame, which says as much about the stigmatization of deformity as her own internal struggle with humiliation. “Shame-humiliation,” Donald Nathanson explains, “is conceptualized as a mechanism that throws the organism into a painful experience of inner tension” reducing

the possibilities for “positive affect in situations when compelling reasons for that positive affect remain” (139). Before being openly mocked, Eugenia believes that she “had nothing peculiar” to herself, and so the laughing mob leaves her in “reproach” of her family for “deluding me into utter ignorance of my unhappy defects, and then casting me, all unconscious and unprepared, into the wide world to hear them!” (293). The “positive affect” which is disrupted is Eugenia’s sense of “normalcy,” and so laughter triggers discomfort and suffering in the belief that she is decidedly “less than” or “other” because of her defects. In an oft-quoted passage by Silvan Tomkins, it’s observed that:

Shame is the affect of indignity, of transgression and of alienation. . . shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking dignity or worth. (qtd. in Nathanson 146)

The laughter of the passing laborers certainly causes Eugenia great distress, but it’s the ramifications of that laughter, the long-term effects, that leave her feeling “naked, defeated, alienated” and “lacking dignity or worth” (146).

Eugenia is largely associated with shame-imagery after the summerhouse frolic, highlighting her internal struggle, her “sickness of the soul” as Tomkins suggests, as well as the social stigma around deformity in the eighteenth century. The feeling of “nakedness” or rather, complete “exposure” that Tomkins describes is particularly relevant to Eugenia’s experience, as Burney makes clear how invasive the social world of *Camilla* is – balls and assembly halls are “exhibitions,” women are “spectacles” and the summerhouse itself is a “hoisted cage,” placed high for all to see. Everywhere one looks there are “inquiring eyes” (521), “eyes eagerly wandering all around” (612), and “staring eyes” (681) that are virtually inescapable. “The eye is the organ of shame *par*

excellence,” Wurmser states, and Morrison has also noted that shame involves the eye turning inward “a shame as we face ourselves, as we see what we wish to hide from ourselves” (qtd. in Nathanson 325). In response, Eugenia attempts to obscure this “eye” – her gaze is always “fixed upon the ground” (288), hoping to hide from judgment, and in a fit of emotion she even asks Camilla to “hide me! Hide me! From every human eye, from everything that lives and breathes!” (295). Returning to Cleves, she “refuses to leave her room” which “she had darkened by nearly shutting all the shutters” and remains in the corner “with a look of despondence” (292). “Some people,” Nathanson observes, “find the experience of shame so toxic that they must prevent it at all costs,” prompting the need to avoid the public gaze and use withdrawal as a means to “reduce, minimize, shake off, or limit shame affect” (313). Eugenia resolves to “no more expose to the light a form and face so hideous: – I will retire for all mankind, and end my destined course in a solitude that no one shall discover,” and her personal “confinement” is indicative of attitudes towards deformity and disfigurement – the idea that she “cannot even be seen without being derided or offended” (294-5). “Whenever a person is disempowered,” Adamson and Clark explain, “whenever a person is devalued and internalizes the negative judgment of an other, shame flourishes” (3). And indeed, Eugenia’s shame flourishes because of socially prescribed attitudes about her defects.

“Otherness”

So far I have largely defended Burney and the use of cruel laughter – it serves to either jolt the reader into discomfort and generate sympathy by exposing cruelty towards animals, women, and the disfigured, or it functions as a kind of “social policing” that

lowers prideful or ridiculous characters and exposes the tyrannical power of pranksters and mentors. Yet while Burney is critical of attitudes toward deformity, there are instances of exclusion that seem to enforce ideas about “otherness.” After locking herself in her room from shame, Mr. Tyrold aims to console Eugenia by teaching her a few moral lessons. Able to coax her out of hiding for an “airing,” they order a carriage and Mr. Tyrold begins his own carefully orchestrated “experiment,” a frolic of sorts, which puts forward some questionable ideas about disability and deformity (310). Reaching a “small house, surrounded with a high wall,” Mr. Tyrold gazes through an “iron gate” and spots a young woman standing at one of the windows. Feigning ignorance he gleefully calls her such “a beautiful creature” (306), and the sisters peer through the bars alongside their father as this “fine picture” makes her way into the garden, plucking grass and sobbing “violently” (309). She then laughs manically, and “in two minutes, the laugh ceased all at once, and the young creature, hastily rising, began turning round with velocity that no machine could have exceeded” (309). They watch as the woman covers her face with a handkerchief, beats herself, strokes a cat “wholly unresisting the scratches which tore her fine flesh,” and concluding she is mad, the sisters become terribly frightened (310). The young woman then approaches the iron bars, which the sisters are relieved to find are locked, and she asks them for a shilling “while the slaver driveled unrestrained from her mouth, rendering utterly disgusting a chin that a statuary might have wished to model” (309). Mr. Tyrold explains his little “experiment,” telling Eugenia that the beautiful young woman “was born an idiot, and therefore, having never known brighter days, is insensible to her state,” living “in obscurity” (310). Arranging to have her caregiver let the young girl “loose” in the garden, this “melancholy sight” is arranged

by Mr. Tyrold to show Eugenia that she should consider her mind a blessing because “beauty, without mind, is more dreadful than any deformity” (311). Eugenia, thankful for the sight, promises her father that she will “think of her when I am discontented” and “will call to my mind this spectacle of human degradation – and submit, at least with calmness, to my lighter evils and milder fate” (311).

This lesson provides momentary relief for the distressed Eugenia, yet there is something deeply troubling with its message – the “iron bars” of the gate, “high walls,” and the fact that this “ill fated young creature” is let “loose” in the garden by her caregiver, makes her more animal than human (310). Indeed, she utters sounds that “resemble nothing human,” and we are reminded that her caregiver keeps her “in existence and in obscurity,” suggesting that to merely “exist” behind the iron bars is all that can be expected of this “creature” (310). This scene works as an ironic affirmation of the treatment given to Eugenia in the summerhouse, as well as the animals in the text. The Tyrold’s, as Margaret Anne Doody observes, “are forced to repeat the intrusive curious behavior with which vulgar gazers had pained Eugenia” and while this is a “melancholy sight,” it still suggests that certain people are proper objects of spectacle (Doody 228). Like the Exeter Change, where spectators pay a fee to see exhibits, the young woman even asks the Tyrold’s for a shilling after her display. Compared with Eugenia’s voluntary confinement out of shame, which her father tries to rectify, this young girl is forcibly restrained and made to live a life “in obscurity” (310). Guardians and mentors are notoriously bad at giving advice in *Camilla*, but Eugenia is not made uncomfortable by this lesson “her thoughts, her occupations, her happiness” being “centred in filial gratitude and contentment” because of this experiment (311). The scene

then suggests that there is no unified category of disability – a “hump-back gentlewoman” is not as bad as a girl “born an idiot,” who is confined by a caregiver and left “in obscurity.”

The suggestion of “otherness,” and the categorization of “better than” or “less than” lead us to question whether all the laughter around Eugenia’s disfigurement is meant to be a critique of low humour, or really just an indulgence in it. If the beautiful woman behind the iron bars is denied all social interaction because of her mind, then Eugenia’s physical deformity may also deny her some socially prescribed rights of passage, such as dancing and marriage. Conventional jests about how Eugenia “hobbles” a country-dance (77) mimic the idea of her “hobbling” to the altar (523), and its implied that her physical self will always be a social impediment to her happiness. Jane Austen makes a particularly apt connection between dancing and marriage in *Northanger Abbey*, a novel that notably pays homage to *Camilla* in her famous “defense of the novel.” “I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage,” says Mr. Tilney, and indeed Eugenia’s attempt at dancing is indicative of her attempt at a happy marriage (74). As Simon Dickie observes, Midcentury Londoners could recall the crutch dances at Martin Powell’s puppet theatre, and newspapers were “full of advertisements for novelty dances at the fairgrounds” such as one Bartholomew Fair handbill that advertised “A Cripples Dance by Six Persons with Wooden Legs and Crutches in Imitation of a *Jovial Crew*” (qtd. in *Cruelty and Laughter* 56). “It looked like a crutch dance, one said of any group of middle-aged or impaired people trying to dance” (65), and even folk rhymes delighted in the unsteadiness of a cripple where “the man on the hill, that couldn’t stand still / Went hobble, hobble, hobble” (qtd in *Cruelty and Laughter* 52). William Wycherley notes that

“we are pitted, while we go lame because we can’t help it, but laughed at for pretending to dance, when we are obliged to hobble,” and like Mme. Duval who is deemed ridiculous for dancing at her old age, the thought of “the lame” dancing, according to Fielding’s “affectation defense,” only “raises mirth” (qtd. in *Cruelty and Laughter* 58). In the same vein, comic marriage plots on stage and in literature delighted in arranged marriages, where a beautiful young woman or man is set to marry a deformed cripple – John Vanbrugh’s *Esop* (1697) enjoyed performances well into the 1750s, with Esop “coughing and hobbling about offstage,” sporting foppish attire and “doing his best to be handsome” (*Cruelty and Laughter* 59). With whispered witticisms about Eugenia’s “hobbling gait” at the dancehall (77), and her ability to attract fortune hunters or arranged suitors like Clermont who suffocates with “violent laughter” at the thought of marrying her, Burney runs the risk of losing her critique among a mirthful audience used to comic tropes about the physically deformed (568).

In a journal entry from August 1778, shortly after the release of *Evelina*, Burney offers a portrait of deformity that seems to capture her representation of Eugenia, based on her first encounter with the great “literary man,” Samuel Johnson:

Soon after we were seated, this great man entered. I have so true a veneration for him, that the very sight of him inspires me with delight and reverence, notwithstanding the cruel infirmities to which he is subject; for he has almost perpetual convulsive movements, either of his Hands, lips, Feet, knees, and sometimes all together. However, the sight of them can never excite ridicule, or, indeed, any other than melancholy reflections upon the imperfections of Human Nature; for this man, who is the acknowledged first Literary man in this kingdom, and who has the most extensive knowledge, the clearest understanding, and the greatest abilities of any Living Author, - has a Face the most ugly, a Person the most awkward, and manners the most singular, that ever were, or ever can be seen. (92)

As with Eugenia, Burney explains that “all that is unfortunate in his *exterior*, is so greatly compensated for in his *interior*,” and such admirable people “can never excite ridicule” (92). Yet by implication, the absence of such a “refined mind” suggests that ridicule is otherwise justifiable. When Melmond marries Eugenia, he discovers that “where her countenance was looked at, her complexion was forgotten; while her voice was heard, her figure was unobserved” and “where her virtues were known, they seemed but to be enhanced by her personal misfortunes” (912). Eugenia “once loved, was loved forever” (912), yet her disfigurement never goes away in Melmond’s eyes, it is only “forgotten” or “unobserved.” Though Burney offers a sympathetic portrait of deformity, undermines conventions around physical beauty, and exposes the cruelty of ridicule through derisive laughter, it’s important to note that Eugenia’s scars and limp always remain “an obstruction in the way of favour,” which like Samuel Johnson’s “cruel infirmities” marks her as distinctly “other” (Hay 30). Burney’s work alludes to the troubling fascination, even amusement, around physical deformity in the eighteenth century that, coupled with her treatment of animals and the representation of women, does violence to both her characters and her readers.

Conclusion

After reading *The Witlings* and discouraging Burney from publishing it due to its comic focus, Samuel Crisp, Burney's family friend and mentor, warns her about the difficulty of reconciling female delicacy with comic writing, explaining that:

A great deal of management and dexterity will certainly be requisite to preserve spirit and salt, and yet keep up delicacy; but it may be done, and you can do it if anybody. Do you remember, about a dozen years ago, how you used to dance Nancy Dawson⁵ on the grass-plot, with your cap on the ground, and your long hair streaming down your back, one shoe off, and throwing about your head like a mad thing? Now you are to dance Nancy Dawson with fetters on; there is a difference: yet there is certainly a nameless grace and charm in giving a loose to that wildness and friskiness sometime. (Burney, *Diary and Letters* 165)

Comic writers, both male and female, were essentially “dancing with fetters” – given the chance to dance like a “mad thing” but restricted and shackled by propriety. The sheer impulse to give way to that “wildness and friskiness” was made possible through fiction, with writers able to pen comically transgressive scenes with “nameless grace” as long as order was restored, and the shackles were put back on again. Perhaps that is why Burney's fiction is so focused on the ethics of laughter, with farce and derisive laughs able to exist alongside sentimental laughter and emotionally driven scenes because such cruel and insensitive material was subtly critiqued. Yet how much of Burney's violent comedy is an indulgence in that “wildness and friskiness,” and how much is meant to be a genuine criticism, is arguably up for debate. In either case, Burney's fiction notably responds to popular debates about laughter, and *Camilla* in particular emerges as a

⁵ This refers to the hornpipe dance made popular by Nancy Dawson in Covent Garden's revival of *The Beggars Opera* on October 15, 1759. As Jeremy Barlow explains, Nancy Dawson replaced the original male dancer, a Mr. Miles, who had fallen ill, and her performance became a regular feature that drew large crowds (225). Crisp conjures up a revealing image of Burney's position as a comic writer; like Nancy Dawson dancing the hornpipe, Burney is taking up a traditionally masculine form.

thoughtful meditation on comedy and the distinction between proper and improper forms of laughter and conduct.

Recent scholarship on sentimental literature has contributed to an idealized image of the eighteenth century – a picture of politeness and sensibility that pushed against older, cruder forms of amusement. *Camilla* explores the baffling coexistence of cruelty and sensibility in the eighteenth century, revealing the persistence of “low” forms of humour that was indulged across class lines, and never completely went away. *Camilla* draws from this “low” brand of comedy by applying jestbook humour and classic comic conventions, exposing them as cruel by highlighting both the physical and psychological violence they do to others. By pushing the boundaries of comic acceptability with violent humour and placing these troubling scenes before her readers, Burney forces her audience to negotiate between laughter and disgust, or rather, old habits and new standards of behaviour. The beating of monkeys as they perform in front of a laughing audience, the disfigured young woman who is trapped upon a platform and insulted by passersby, and the sickly old man terrorized by threats and extorted for money – all are episodes that are comically framed and disturbingly cruel, meant to confront and jar her readership. Violent comedy successfully challenges the legitimacy behind laughter at the weak and the infirm – the Hobbesian “sudden glory” and the lowering of the “truly ridiculous” are all brought into question as pranksters and wits overstep the bounds of politeness and compassion for their own amusement.

Also open for criticism in *Camilla* are the systems of power operating in the text that allow for this type of violent comedy to flourish. The reader is inclined to connect the prankster and their ability to seize complete control over others through a prank with the

other systems of control – patriarchal, social, animal – that exist in *Camilla*'s world. Burney purposefully aligns pranksters with the guardian and mentor figure, whose self-interest and need to satisfy their own whims similarly results in a crescendo of pain. After practicing “self-command” at the behest of her mentors, Camilla experiences gradual torment; she makes a series of bad decisions based on bad advice and suffers from comic misunderstandings that cause her great emotional, even physical trauma. The same can be said for the systems at work within the animal realm, with animal cruelty and its comic framing standing out as a sheer abuse of power and a glaring example of the insensitivity and pain caused by master's indulging in cruel delights. The frolic in *Camilla* represents much more than a prank – it is a system of control under the guise of innocent amusement that gives free license to torment and abuse others. Whether intentionally, like Lionel, or unintentionally, like Sir Hugh, the prankster emerges as a sinister pain-bringer, and Eugenia becomes the novel's greatest victim. Physically marked and psychologically tormented, Eugenia is made to feel chronic shame for circumstances that she did not create nor control. She brings together Burney's critique of cruel laughter and bad mentors, her body acting as a physical reminder, a legacy of sorts, of the power and cruelty operating in an unsympathetic world where pranksters take many forms.

Audrey Bilger has stated that “although almost never mentioned in studies of eighteenth-century comic writing, Burney's fiction takes part in debates about the proper function of comedy, and she deserves greater recognition than she is typically accorded as an innovative comic writer” (“Burney's Comic Genius” 127). Burney's work certainly responds to debates about laughter and goes further by experimenting with comic form, revealing the various dimensions and possibilities of laughter – it can be a subversive

satiric tool, a social enforcer, and a coercive way to break through the bounds of propriety. Her fiction can easily be seen as transitional, marking a shift from cruel forms of amusement towards the more acceptable, sentimental comedies closely tied to an age of self-conscious politeness. *Camilla; a Picture of Youth* offers a glimpse into the history of English comedy, a period in which comic writers and polite women were giving way to that “wildness and friskiness” with fetters on.

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