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Social Status in the Work of Frances Burney  
Master's Thesis

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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a její odbornou asistenci.

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## INTRODUCTION

When Frances Burney first entered the society, she assumed a role of a quiet observer instead of an active participant, which suited her naturally shy character. Due to her learning difficulties, Burney had learnt to notice the things around her and she often recorded her observations in her diary. Her position out of the centre of attention provided her with the opportunity to observe the society people, their manners and conduct, their behaviour toward their equals and toward people who were beneath them. Burney, using her excessive knowledge of society, applied the principles she noticed in people of various social standings in her novels, which are preoccupied with the notion of one's place in the world. Due to her family's background and her father's connections, Burney not only mixed with people of her own rank, but she was also able to observe the social elite in their own environment. Therefore, she was able to comment and give her opinion on a wide range of issues connected to social status via her literary work.

In Burney's time, social status was an important factor in the lives of many people, as their standing in society was determined by their position in the social hierarchy. In the time when people believed in their superiority based on birth, social status was not only the mark of their importance, but also the force that influenced the way they were generally perceived. Analysing *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782), I will attempt to identify the underlying issues connected to social status in these novels. Furthermore, it is my aim to point out Burney's critique of the social conventions which she considered outdated or irrational. While Burney is considered to be a feminist by many of her recent scholars, my analysis is based on her role as a social critic rather than a feminist.

Focusing on the issue of one's position in society, I will attempt to identify some common marks that distinguish one social class from another, as well as comment on the unique traits as pertaining to people of different ranks. By scrutinising the behaviour of Burney's wide range of characters, I will also discuss the possibility of upward social mobility and point out the reasoning behind their success or failure.

*Evelina* and *Cecilia* are full of instances which signal the deviation of socially accepted behaviour and my aim is to identify the foundation of this disparity between the social norms and individual conduct by analysing concrete

characters in these two novels. Furthermore, I will attempt to identify the tools which allow the manipulation of the perception of one's social status by analysing characters with aspirations to a greater social standing and the strategies they use in their pursuit of social promotion.

Burney's novels provide valuable information concerning the author's views on topics connected to social status. Being part of society means one has a public presence, and this is the aspect that Burney brilliantly projected in her novels. Focusing on the conduct of her characters, I will attempt to discover if there is a discrepancy between the public persona and private self, or whether they correspond to one another.

Burney's knowledge of the ways of high society, as well as her ability to move in the professional circles, allowed her to accurately depict the different manners and ways of living of various social classes, and therefore her characters afford a relatively realistic portrayal of the society of her time. Despite the fact that Burney dramatised some scenes so they would have bigger impact on her audience, her novels still provide a clear view of the eighteenth century social structure.

Burney's extensive knowledge of all social classes of her time is represented in the portrayal of characters of various social backgrounds in her novels and, moreover, it is apparent that she frequently used her literary work to comment on the issues pertaining to various social positions and offer her opinions on the subjects. Identifying the particular instances of her social commentary, I will attempt to show that social status is a major concern in both *Evelina* and *Cecilia* and furthermore prove the importance of good social standing in these novels.

# 1. CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOCIETY

This chapter serves as a brief overview of the society in the eighteenth century and its division. It is by no means a complete analysis of the social strata in Burney's time; however, it is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, which focuses on the novels and the portrayal of different social ranks. It introduces the tripartite division of society and the duties and values connected with each social order. The main point of this chapter is to introduce concepts that are related to the social structure in the eighteenth century Britain and connect them to specific virtues associated with particular social positions in the overall structure. Johnson's dictionary provides valuable information with regards to the vocabulary connected to the social sphere and it further serves to explain the differences between the "language of rank" and the later, nineteenth century "language of class." Nonetheless, referencing the dictionary's different senses of words, as perceived by various authors, for the purposes of this thesis, the terms "ranks," "orders," "station," and other similar expressions are taken as synonymous to "class," which came into use in the second half of the eighteenth century. It became part of the common language during the nineteenth century, however, with a very different meaning than the one used in this analysis, with its distinction between "an 'estate society,' in which status determines wealth and power, and a 'class society,' in which wealth and power determine status."<sup>1</sup>

The society of Burney's time is still "the old society," to use Perkin's terminology.<sup>2</sup> Before the Industrial Revolution changed the social atmosphere in Britain and before the emergence of the middle class as the body of people opposing the nobility and gentry, bringing forth social conflict between the upper and middle classes, the British social system was tripartite: the top of the social pyramid was occupied by the nobility and gentry, the bottom was occupied by the lower orders—the labouring people. In between those two extremes, there was a large body of people of middling ranks; separated from the labouring people by

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberly Shuffe, *Women, Rank, and Marriage in the British Aristocracy, 1485-2000: An Open Elite?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

<sup>2</sup> See Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (UK: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 14-51.

having capital, and from their social superiors by their need to earn income, they constituted the social middle—the somewhere-in-between people.

Each of the three main orders has been further divided; each of them had their own hierarchy. There is a deferential order with regards to titles and there is a hierarchy between the domestic servants. The hierarchy is visible even in Johnson's dictionary, in his definition of rank, which proves that even within one social order, there has been a hierarchy for individual people and that the principle of deference was, indeed, in operation there.

Authors use various labels for the distinctive social divisions: they range from Perkin's simple "landed ruling class, middle ranks, and . . . the labouring poor,"<sup>3</sup> Wahrman's "the Merchant, the Manufacturer, the Peasant, and the Peer,"<sup>4</sup> Hall's "the quality, the gentry, the middling sort, the lower orders and the poor,"<sup>5</sup> to Earle's more specific categories of "the aristocracy and gentry, upper middle class, middle class proper, lower middle class, independent artisans, wage-earning artisans, the poor that fare hard and the miserable."<sup>6</sup> However, what they all have in common is the main tripartite division of society.

The principle upon which the division of society works is the inequality principle and the presumption that the upper classes are better than the lower classes. While there is a double-sided working system of dependency between the labouring and the ruling people, as they mutually rely on one another to perform specific tasks—the lower orders rely on their betters for their work and wages and the higher classes, both the upper and middle class, depend on the lower class for the labour and service they provide—the accepted form of inequality permeates the society as a whole.

The lower orders—or, in other words, the working class—is not of much interest in literature. There are not many opportunities for social elevation, as the social mobility for labourers and the poor is extremely limited. The lower ranks lack education, their formal instruction is minimal; the labouring parents are indeed encouraged not to teach their children to read or write, because possessing

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (UK: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 105.

<sup>5</sup> K. G. Hall, *The Exalted Heroine and the Triumph of Order: Class, Women and Religion in the English Novel, 1740-1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 11

<sup>6</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 331.



this knowledge might embolden them to try to rise above their lot, which is only in few cases successful. The lack of property or capital makes it extremely difficult to rise up the social ladder, and therefore the poor and the labouring people are urged to give up hopes of social promotion. The lack of opportunity for upward social mobility makes them uninteresting subjects for the writers, who tend to concentrate on the middle and upper ranks in their literary works.

Furthermore, the issue of rank disregards the lower class as well. Johnson's interpretations of the word "rank" is as follows:

1. Line of men place a-breast.
2. A row.
3. Range of subordination.
4. Class; order.
5. Degree of dignity.
6. Dignity; high place; as, *he is a man of rank*.<sup>7</sup>

Johnson's third possible interpretation points out to the hierarchy within one social sphere, while the fourth example shows the possible inter-changeability of words "rank" and "class," which is supported by his entry for "class" as well. However, much more important are examples five and six, which both deal with dignity. Dignity is important for the upper classes, because it distinguishes them from the rest of society; however, it is relevant for middle classes with aspirations to improve their social standing as well. Nonetheless, the definition given by Johnson excludes working class people, who have no hopes to occupy "a high place." They are "not distinguished by any excellence; of no rank, mean, without birth or descent."<sup>8</sup>

Social mobility is, however, accessible to the middling sorts. It is possible for people to reach a higher social position than the one assigned to them by birth. The society that valued birth and descent over personal virtues and worth nonetheless allowed people to distinguish and elevate themselves socially based on their own merit and accomplishments or based on their wealth. The social status is, after all, based on land and property, and this manifested in the

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language, Vol. 2* (London: J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes, A. Millars; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1756). Accessed 24 April 2020. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i-1636>

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language Vol. 1* (London: J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes, A. Millars; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1756). Accessed 24 April 2020. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i-420>

“appearance of a new sort of gentleman.”<sup>9</sup> Originally, the term “gentleman” had a much narrower scope, as it referred only to people of gentle birth, people belonging to gentry. However, in time, it had come to refer to any “man raised above the vulgar by his character or post,”<sup>10</sup> which caused the penetration of the old order by the newly emerging body of social climbers—those who strove to improve their social status and standing. While the original meaning of gentleman was perceived as superior to the new kind of gentlemen who emerged in that era—after all, “true gentlemen were begotten, not made”<sup>11</sup>—the upper station came to accept the newly minted gentlemen as well.

It is a matter of speculation how long the process of becoming a gentleman would take. It is proven by extensive researches that sons of prosperous merchants had higher chances of bettering their status than their fathers, who have been too closely connected to their businesses; in other words, they could not live idly, in the ways of gentlemen, but had to work for their living. However, being supported by a successful father, a son of a tradesman could, in time, move upward on the social ladder, providing his education and possible occupation were sufficient to reach that status. Earle notes that it could possibly take two generations to reach the status of gentleman; Doyle, on the other hand, alludes to an adage that states it takes three generations.<sup>12</sup> It is not crucial to know the precise timing here; the important fact is that social mobility was possible and it was, in fact, happening in the eighteenth century society.

Society is a living, breathing thing, constantly changing and developing. The tripartite division of society brings with it its own problems; among the most major ones is the question *how* to decide where people belong. One of the problematic groups is professionals and their categorisation. Earle, and marginally even Williams, discuss with the tricky position the professionals occupy in society.<sup>13</sup> Do they belong to the upper class, or should they be relegated to the

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language Vol. 1* (London: J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes, A. Millars; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1756). Accessed 24 April 2020. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i-893>

<sup>11</sup> William Doyle, *Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>12</sup> See Earle, *The Makings of the English Middle Class*, 9; and Doyle, *Aristocracy*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> See Earle, *The Makings of the English Middle Class*, 5; and Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31.

middle class? The fact that they do, in fact, need to work for their living speaks for the latter option. However, the origins of many of these professionals firmly place them into the former, as they can claim gentle background. The cost of education of these professionals was very high; many of the younger sons of gentility were expected to become professionals as a way of providing for themselves; however, prosperous middle class people could afford the cost of education as well and used the profession as a way of elevating their children's social status. Professionals are, therefore, a questionable group to place, as their placement differs from author to author. What is certain is that they are a marginal group that stand on the border of upper class and middle class and their social position may differ based on their profession.

The nobility and gentry enjoyed many privileges connected to their high social status, although they were balanced by their responsibilities. Great families had many dependents—people directly reliant on their monetary help or their goodwill—and they were expected to practice benevolence and charity. Noble and genteel people also provided patronage to artists, musicians, writers, and other similar professions. Moreover, the upper classes were supposed to serve as models for their inferiors, who were likely to emulate their betters. Their conduct was constrained by the social rules and by a range of societal expectations, namely “deeds of valour, virtue, outstanding service to king and/or community.”<sup>14</sup>

Nobles—“of an ancient and splendid family [and] exalted to a rank among commonalty”<sup>15</sup>—are seen as the social superiors to the other classes of people. Their superiority is hereditary, passed from father to son—mostly just the eldest son, as the younger sons did not enjoy the same privileges as the heirs. Birth is of the utmost importance; and the need to keep their line alive is central to the family's existence. However, it is very rare to have “an unbroken line of male descent.”<sup>16</sup> This brings forth the importance of good alliance; and while it was common to take a wife from the same social sphere, it was not uncommon for a nobleman to take a wife from a lower class. Marriage provided a good example of

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<sup>14</sup> William Doyle, *Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language Vol. 2* (London: J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes, A. Millars; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1756). Accessed 24 April 2020. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i-1366>

<sup>16</sup> Doyle, *Aristocracy*, 26.

possible social mobility, especially for the middle class girls with good dowries, good comportment, and abundance of social graces.

The middle class people's position was, literally, in the middle. While they lacked the high standing of the nobility and gentry, their wealth at times exceeded that of their social betters, which accounts for their desire for social promotion. On the other hand, they owned capital and property and they did not need to work manually—with their own hands—to support themselves and their families. However, it was necessary for them to have some sort of income; therefore, they could not be “men of leisure,” a description nicely summarising the upper class. Still, the ideal of the men of leisure remained and it was something to aspire to.

The concept of accumulation—of wealth, property, and various goods—is closely connected to the middle class. Their need to display their wealth projected into their houses, decorations, and even the way they dressed. Even though they could not reach the highest social position, they could afford high quality clothes that rivalled that of nobles and gentility. The preoccupation with dress as a symbol of one's station is a trope frequently utilised by writers. However, clothes are not the only material possessions which the middle ranks used to showcase their financial affluence. They used rich and expensive furnishing in their houses for that purpose as well. What they lacked in social status, they more than made up for in their spending habits and tendency to advertise their wealth.

Despite the fact that the society constantly developed and new values were starting to be appreciated, it was still birth and money that held the furthestmost attention when the division of society was concerned. Those who were born low were likely to stay in the same position all their life, and the possibility of their children raising themselves socially were slim, especially with regards to the lower orders. However, the possible social mobility of middle classes gave hope to those who aspired to elevate themselves socially. In spite of the elitism of the nobility, and marginally even of the gentry, even their upper class was penetrated by the “newcomers,” the up-and-coming middle class people with high ambitions and social pretensions. These changes manifest themselves in literature and the way the social structure was perceived and portrayed by Frances Burney is the topic of this thesis.

## 2. FRANCES BURNEY

Frances Burney was an eighteenth-century English novelist and dramatist, who was very good at “attack[ing] her society’s principles . . . [and writing] about money and work, and extremely well about social class.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that her more well-known, nineteenth-century successors’ fame overshadows her work, it was Burney and her novels that started to establish the standard which the later writers, most notably Jane Austen, followed and improved.

### 2.1 BIOGRAPHY

Frances Burney was born on 13 June 1752 in King’s Lynn, to Charles Burney and his first wife, Esther Burney (née Sleepe). She was the third of their six children (two other boys died in infancy) and seemingly unremarkable in the family full of talented people.

Her mother died in September 1762, following the birth of Frances’ youngest sister, Charlotte. Frances was only ten years old and her mother’s death, as well as her inability to say goodbye to her, affected her greatly, which projects in her writing. On her death bed, Esther consoled her eldest daughter Esther, known as Hetty, and told her to write her letters to heaven.<sup>18</sup> Charles Burney married Mrs. Allen, their mother’s friend from King’s Lynn, in 1767. The relationship between his daughters and their stepmother was strained. The second Mrs. Burney did not approve of the girls’ activities, especially Frances’ writing, as it kept them from pursuing advantageous marriages. On the contrary, Dr. Burney “refused to have his daughters brought up as notable housewives,”<sup>19</sup> which led to the girls’ lack of respect for their stepmother.

Frances was short-sighted, which accounts for her reading difficulties; she has not learnt to read until she was eight years old, which only made her more observant to her surroundings. Frances never received any formal education, a point often emphasised by her biographers and scholars. She was self-educated; she taught herself French and Italian and she read many books on different topics

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Relating these events with the author’s literary work, this can partially account for the epistolary form of Frances’ first novel; the story about a motherless girl could be perceived as the motherless author’s tribute to her dead mother.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Sabor, *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137.

from her father's library. Despite her lack of formal instruction, Frances grew into an accomplished woman and a successful writer.

Frances started scribbling at an early age, mostly in private, and while she was young, she had plenty of time to pursue her writing obsession. She used her observations from society or amusing stories from her family's life and recorded them in detail. Only her confidante, her sister Susan, knew about her writing. However, in 1767, the fifteen-year old Frances burnt all her compositions, including the manuscript of her first attempt at writing a novel, "The History of Caroline Evelyn." Her sister Susan was present at the bonfire. Many of Burney's scholars attribute the destruction of her writing to the insistence of her stepmother; however, Harman presents a different account in her biography.<sup>20</sup> She believes that the stepmother's influence over Frances at the time of the bonfire would be very limited, if she had any at all, and attributes the fiery eradication of her juvenilia to "a resolve to write *differently*, rather than not write at all."<sup>21</sup>

Despite Frances' antagonism toward her stepmother, she contributed to the creation of Frances' diaries. Burney started to write her first diary six months after her father remarried; it is probable that she had little to complain about prior to their marriage, which changed with the inclusion of the former Mrs. Allen into their family. Frances used her diaries—her "letters"—for therapeutic purposes. Notably, she was not the only diarist in her family; her Burney sisters Susan and Charlotte also kept diaries, and her half-sister Sarah Harriet later became a novelist as well, albeit she never achieved as much success as Frances.

The social status of the Burney family was based solely on their accomplishments, as they possessed no great wealth or family connections; they had nothing to recommend them but their talent and their determination to improve their social standing. Despite this disadvantage, the family's social prominence rose considerably. Her father was a professional, part of the group that stood on the borderline between the upper class and the middle class. He was successful in his career and was therefore able to support his family and their genteel lifestyle; however, he was unable to provide for his children's future, especially with regards to his daughters. He could not afford to bestow dowries on his daughter and it was expected that they will marry advantageously, especially

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<sup>20</sup> See Claire Harman, *Fanny Burney: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 53-54.

<sup>21</sup> Harman, *Fanny Burney*, 54.

by his second wife. That did not happen. Rizzo comments on “the seeming inability of the girls to marry well,”<sup>22</sup> and considering Frances’ preference to pursue her literary career over settling for one of her suitors, as well as her sisters’ problematic marriages, it seems like a fair comment.

Despite their lowly origins, the Burneys had numerous connections in different states of life. Her father’s acquaintance was rich and often present in the Burney household. This provided valuable lessons to his children, especially Frances, who used her observations in her writing—which she did in private, mostly at night, because she took her work as her father’s secretary very seriously. Frances was able to meet rich and fashionable people, as well as other people of her father’s station. Moreover, after the success of her first novel, published in January 1778, Frances started to mix with influential people in the literary circles. She became acquainted with Hester Thrale and was invited to the Thrale’s house, Streatham, where she spent time in 1778-1779. It was there she met Dr. Johnson, who praised her for her first novel. They struck a friendship; Frances admired Dr. Johnson and valued his opinions very much. Furthermore, after her entrance into the literary world, she met the members of the Blue Stockings society and other authors and influential people.

Frances published her first novel, *Evelina, Or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778) anonymously, and this allowed her the freedom to create her characters as she wanted them. She only allowed Susan to read the manuscript, and her brother Charles, who was her agent, helped with its publication. It was in Frances’ nature to be very self-critical and she possibly still felt the shame that overwhelmed her and led to the destruction of her previous work. However, following the unveiling of the author’s identity and her father’s discovery of her authorship in June 1778, she revelled in the praise, especially that of her father and other family members and friends. *Evelina* was published by Thomas Lowndes, who offered Frances twenty guineas for the copyright.<sup>23</sup> Due to Charles’ inexperience as a literary agent, the author made barely any profit on a book that became the talk of the literary circles.

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<sup>22</sup> Betty Rizzo, “Burney and society,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 138.

<sup>23</sup> For the profits of *Evelina* and other Burney’s novels, see Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 194.

Frances sought to follow the success of her first published novel with a dramatic comedy, because “in private . . . Fanny continued to dream of writing for the stage.”<sup>24</sup> She has always loved the theatre and her admiration of David Garrick, one of her father’s acquaintances and a frequent visitor in the Burney household, is reflected even in her novels. However, her play *The Witlings* (1779) was ultimately suppressed by her father and Samuel Crisp, a close family friend, Frances’ advisor and her “Daddy.” While they supported her literary pursuits, they were against the play because of its focus on female wits. Unwillingly, Frances took their advice and started writing her second novel instead, but she had never forgotten their interference with her dream. When both her “fathers” tried to make her change the ending of *Cecilia, Or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), she refused to follow their guidance, partially due to some residual resentment over her first play. In Burney’s second novel, the epistolary form was abandoned in favour of third person narration, which gave the author more freedom to influence her readers. *Cecilia* was published by Thomas Cadell and Thomas Payne, and while the author received more money for the copyright, specifically £250, it was incomparable to the sum of money the publishers gained by selling her work.

In 1786, Frances was offered a position at Court of George III based on the recommendation of Mrs. Delany, one of her family’s acquaintances. Reluctantly, she accepted the position of the Second Keeper of the Robes to Charlotte of Mencklenburg-Strelitz, the Queen, mainly due to the pressure from her family and the lack of stability her future offered. It was at Windsor where she came back to writing plays, this time tragedies, which helped her cope with the difficult life at court and her unhappiness. Burney’s tragedies: *Edgy and Elgiva* (1788-1795), the only one of her plays to see the stage during her lifetime, even though for only one performance on 21 March 1795; *Hubert de Vere* (1790-1791); *The Siege of Pevensey* (1790-1791), and the incomplete *Elberta* (1791), were all composed in quick succession during her stay at Court. It was also at Windsor where she met Colonel Digby. However, as with her previous suitors, Thomas Barlow and George Owen Cambridge nothing came out of her attachment to the widower, who chose a more appropriate wife who had both money and family connections, jilting Fanny in the process.

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Chisholm, “The Burney family,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.



Frances Burney spent five stressful years at Court, during which her health deteriorated. Once again consulting her father, who was involved in all major decisions in her life, save for those involving the publication of *Evelina*, she decided to leave her position. The Queen bestowed on her a pension of £100 a year, which constituted the author's primary source of income for a while. In 1792, following her departure from the Court after five years of service, Frances and her sister Susan met a group of French émigrés at Juniper Hall. One of them was Comte d'Arblay, whom Frances fell in love with and whom, despite her father's disapproval, she married in July 1793. Shortly afterward, she published a pamphlet called *Brief Reflections Relative to the French Emigrant Clergy* (1793). Burney was forty one at the time of her marriage, which further confirms her views on marriage in general: she was reconciled to being a spinster, given the alternative of "a risk with potentially catastrophic results that was probably better avoided than taken,"<sup>25</sup> but once she met the right man, she did not hesitate to marry him, despite his lack of wealth and his precarious position in England.

Given her husband's situation, Frances started to work on her third novel, *Camilla, Or, The Picture of Youth* (1796), as her pension from the Queen was not enough to sustain their growing family; their son Alexander was born in 1794. Aware of her previous mistakes, Burney published her third novel by subscription; she used her established reputation as an author to entice people to commit to buying her work before its publication. Her strategy worked, and overall, she received £2,000 pounds for her novel, and the d'Arblays used the profits to build their house, which they appropriately named Camilla Cottage.

Despite her seeming focus on writing novels, Frances never stopped working on her plays; she even got an offer for her comedy *Love and Fashion* (1799), which she accepted. However, she withdrew her approval in 1800, following the death of her beloved sister and confidante, Susan. This play was followed by two satirical comedies, *The Woman-Hater* (1800), and *A Busy Day* (1800), both of which had to wait a long time to be discovered and staged.

For a long time, the d'Arblay family was stranded in France by the war. While they were there, Frances started working on her last novel, *The Wanderer, Or, Female Difficulties* (1814), which she finished after her return to Britain. The

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<sup>25</sup> Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 53.

longest, but the most poorly received of Burney's novels, however, earned her the most money, around £3,000. Very soon after its publication, her father died; and moreover, the reviews of her last novel were very mixed at best. Burney did not attempt to write another novel; instead, she turned to writing her father's biography, *The Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832), her last published literary work.

After her husband's death in 1818, Frances moved to London, close to her son, who was ordained in the Church of England in 1837, but died of influenza the same year. After his death, Frances removed to Bath, where she spent the rest of her life in seclusion. Having outlived both her husband and son, Frances Burney died in 1840, at the age of eighty seven, leaving behind a considerable literary legacy.

Reading the author's private diary, as well as her correspondence with other people, offers various insights into Burney's life and by studying the material, it is possible to uncover her intentions regarding her literary work or understand the situations in which she found herself. It provides more insight into her thought processes and helps us understand her motivations, her relationships and friendships. By rigorously recording what was happening in her life, Burney largely contributed to her own scholarship.

## 2.2 INSPIRATION

"Burney took up the material that her life, her observation, and the literary conventions supplied her with, and worked on them in her own way."<sup>26</sup> Burney, like many other authors, took inspiration in real life. She used many of the things happening in her family as a foil for her fictional stories. Burney has often been accused of being too dramatic, of exaggerating; however, based on the study of her journals and letters, it becomes apparent that some of the seemingly overdone material of her novels can find real basis in the author's life. Despite that, the claim that her novels are directly autobiographical would not be accurate.

Burney's mother died when she was very young, therefore it is not surprising that her heroines are motherless, and, in some cases, wholly parentless. *Evelina's* Madame Duval's presence as unwanted substitute for mother figure

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33.

seems to echo Frances' attitude toward her father's second wife; it was no secret that Esther's children openly disliked their stepmother. The undesirability of Madame Duval's appearance in the heroine's life is frequently reinforced by various instances in the novel, such as Captain's Mirvan cruel behaviour toward Evelina's grandmother. His brutality and practical jokes are one of the instances of violence in the novel—the other instances being the infamous old women's race, or the novel's concluding monkey scene.

Burney has often been criticised for the presence of unnecessary violence in her novels, and critics, such as Austin Dobson, often concentrate especially on Burney's treatment of Evelina's grandmother, who represents an unexpected and unwanted mother-figure in the novel; unwanted because by the time she appears, Evelina has already found a mother-figure in her "mamma Mirvan" and she does not need another one. Doody makes a connection between the fictional Madame Duval and the real Mrs. Burney (née Allen).<sup>27</sup> The relationship between her and Esther's children was strained and the Burney girls often mocked their stepmother for her behaviour, while she disliked their lack of interest in domestic matters and marriage. Evelina's dislike and disgust of Madame Duval reflects Burney's hatred toward the second Mrs. Burney and Captain Mirvan's behaviour toward the old lady might reflect Samuel Crisp's attitude toward his friend's second wife. Like Frances and her sisters, Crisp was known to dislike the former Mrs. Allen, often joining the girls in mocking her and openly encouraging their antagonism toward their stepmother. The scenes in which Captain Mirvan makes fun of Madame Duval and behaves cruelly toward her echo some of the episodes recorded by Frances in her diaries and letters.

Burney has often modelled her characters on her real life acquaintance. *Evelina's* genteel hero, Lord Orville, echoes Burney's description of Fulke Greville, her father's patron and the husband of her godmother Frances, after whom she was named; and her latter Delvile family also resembles the Grevilles. Furthermore, Evelina's satirical Mrs. Selwyn, to some extent, resembles her godmother. Even their surname finds its way into her novels; *Evelina's* Lord Orville or *Cecilia's* Mr. Delvile are very similar to that of Greville. However, it goes even further. For the inspiration for the vulgar family of Evelina's London

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<sup>27</sup> See Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55.

relatives, the Branghtons, Burney did not even have to go that far; she has used her mother's brother, James Sleepe, and his daughters. The brash behaviour and unsophisticated manners of the Branghtons reflect how the Burney family saw their relatives.<sup>28</sup>

Due to her father's successful profession, Burneys were often mixing with the polite society, and Burney utilised her observations of the elegant ladies and the ways of the *ton*—the polite society, consisting of people of high social status and inherited wealth—in her novels. Some characters, like Lady Louisa Larpent in *Evelina*, or *Cecilia*'s Miss Larolles, embody the fashionable, yet silly young ladies so common in the *ton*. Burney's attitude toward the society penetrates her fiction; and while she excuses some characters, she is openly critical to others. Her dislike of aristocracy and its members is apparent in her novels; perhaps with the exception of Lord Orville, Burney seems openly disapproving of the rest of the social elite, especially the fops and the rakes.

However, Burney not only modelled her characters on real people, but she often utilised their names. The most glaring example is Monsieur Du Bois in *Evelina*. Burney's beloved maternal grandmother, whose influence over his daughter Dr. Burney feared, was half-French and her maiden name was Du Bois. Moreover, Frances' godmother's maiden name, Macartney, gave name to *Evelina*'s unfortunate stepbrother, and *Cecilia*'s Mr. Monckton bears the name of one of the Bluestockings, Miss Monckton.

Names in general are very important in all Burney's novels, and several major plots are connected to this issue. They are directly connected to identity, which is one of the themes Burney frequently explores in her work. Burney's own conflict regarding her identity is visible in her diaries, the first of which she addresses to "Nobody," an allusion that she also uses in her first novel; she is, in fact, the "Nobody." Burney was extremely self-conscious about her work and occupied the position of her harshest critic. Moreover, there is the infamous issue of the author's own name. How to classify her in archives and libraries? There is probably no right answer to this dilemma; and the lack of uniformity makes research into Burney rather problematic at times.

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<sup>28</sup> See Betty Rizzo, "Burney and society," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 93-110.

### 2.3 THEMES

Burney incorporates much of the standard plots and themes in her literary work. The marriage plot is developed by a young girl's search for love and the obstacles she has to overcome to find happiness in the marital state. However, behind the basic scheme of the novels, Burney explores in details other themes and topics, many of which overlap into the author's personal life. The theme of family is dissected in her novels, and the relationships between children and their parents are under the author's proverbial microscope. The search of one's identity permeates the novels as well and is relevant not only to the heroines, but also to many other characters. Marginally, the novels also deal with the issue of gender, which has been the point of study of many recent feminist scholars. Furthermore, Burney emphasises many social conventions and beliefs in order to show her disapproval of them, creating a lively satire for the readers.

Burney's novels frequently deal with the theme of family—especially parents in relation to their children—and the background for this can be found in her personal life. Doody's assertion that “the good mothers tended to desert their Frances”<sup>29</sup> not only runs true in the context of the author's life, but furthermore creates an interesting point with regards to analysis of Burney's literary work. The desertion of good mothers, or substitute mother figures, and the feeling of abandonment clearly manifests in her novels. *Evelina*, her first fictional heroine, is left motherless; her mother died in childbirth, and even her guardian's wife, Mrs. Villars, died while *Evelina* was growing up. She does, however, acquire other mother figures during the course of her novels, like Mrs. Mirvan and marginally even Mrs. Selwyn; nonetheless, even Mrs. Mirvan is forced to abandon *Evelina* and let her leave with Madame Duval, her grandmother.

The orphaned Cecilia, Burney's second heroine, is in a similar situation; she lacks the maternal presence in her life. After her parents' deaths, she was left in the care of her unmarried uncle; and while she has found comfort in her friend, Mrs. Charlton, she feels the absence of a mother figure. When she befriends Mrs. Delvile, she finds another mother figure in her life; this is, however, only short lived. After their affair and plans are made known to Mortimer's mother, she not only seeks to separate the lovers, but in the process creates a distance between

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<sup>29</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 30.

herself and Cecilia as well. On the contrary, the heroine of *Camilla* has a mother, but the novel shows what happens when the daughter is separated from the positive maternal influence and what dangers it might lead to. *The Wanderer*, Burney's last novel, almost completely lacks the presence of mothers or mother figures and Juliet's late mother only serves to further the heroine's issues regarding her legitimacy.

Despite the lack of mothers' presence in Burney's novels, their importance is recognized and unquestioned. Mothers play important roles in her novels, much in the same way as Burney's mother played in her life. Moreover, Burney also deals with the theme of fatherhood. Her own devotion to Dr. Burney is a well-known fact. All her life, Burney has sought her father's approval, and even tried to stifle her literary inclinations because she feared his disapproval. The anonymous publication of *Evelina* reveals not only her self-consciousness, but also the fear of paternal censure. Doody likens the secrecy of the publication to a sort of elopement,<sup>30</sup> as Burney, who was strongly opposed to clandestine alliances, which projects clearly in her novels, made her entrance into the literary world without her father's approval.

In Burney's novels, fathers are mostly absent, and the presence of substitute fathers is very frequent; as were the substitute father figures in Burney's own life. Furthermore, this theme is connected to the idea of mentors and guardians. The concept of a young girl in need of masculine guidance permeates Burney's fiction; all her heroines have, at one point or another, someone who helps guide them in some way. By emphasising the necessity of masculine supervision over young impressionable women, Burney in fact criticises this view of feminine helplessness. Her novels are social satires and this issue of dependency is one of the themes she explores.

Nonetheless, it is necessary for the heroines to "leave the paternal protection"<sup>31</sup> in order to assert their personal identity. Burney's heroines are all in search of their true selves and their places in the world; that is the basic premise of her novels. To establish their social identity, they must overcome many

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<sup>30</sup> See Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Doody, *The Life in the Works*, 64.

difficulties thrown in their ways, from the issues of illegitimacy, the infamous name clause in the will, to the lack of experience in the merciless social world.

In addition to the traditional themes, Burney touches the issue of gender as well. Her heroines' social standing reveals the disadvantaged position of women and the author repeatedly emphasises the young woman's need for good reputation in polite society. Through her characters, such as *Evelina's* Lord Merton, Sir Clement, and even Captain Mirvan, Burney also exposes "the masculine contempt for women."<sup>32</sup> The contempt is manifested in Lord Merton's opinion on old women—they are, as he states, "only in other folk's way"<sup>33</sup>—and even more in the infamous old women's race.

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<sup>32</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55.

<sup>33</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 275.

### 3. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In Shakespeare's sixteenth century tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, the heroine delivers her famous speech in which she asks the famous question: "what's in a name?"<sup>34</sup> As it is, in fact, the name of her lover that keeps them apart due to the feud between their families, Juliet contemplates the importance of the name. Two centuries later, Burney investigates the same issue in her novels, which gives rise to other questions: how important really is one's name? How else are people defined if not by their name? What does one's name signify, and is it more important than other things in life? And ultimately, is one's name worth sacrificing one's happiness for? What is, then, really in a name?

All of Burney's novels deal with the issue of name, but in significantly different ways. While in *Evelina* (1778) it is connected to the heroine's uncertain position linked to her "illegitimacy" and her inability to move on with her life before her "namelessness" is resolved and she is no longer the "Nobody" from the novel's beginning, Burney's second novel, *Cecilia* (1782) is still deeper involved in the question of one's name's importance, as the issue constitutes the novel's central plot and defines some of its characters as well. Examination of these two novels also reveals that the name is undeniably associated with one's social status.

However, Burney did not abandon the issue of name after publishing her first two novels. In *Camilla* (1796), it is connected to Eugenia Tyrold, Camilla's youngest sister, and in her case, the matter of name is more specifically connected to her title: "the heiress" of Sir Hugh. Due to her deformity caused by an unfortunate childhood accident as well as the smallpox marks on her face, Eugenia's future marital prospects hinge on her being an heiress. While she is very intelligent in her own right and has received a very good, albeit unusual, education for a young lady, it is the title of an heiress that comes to define her in the eyes of other people; the title takes over her person. Without it, she does not appear to exist for the members of society which values appearance and not intellect in young, marriageable ladies.

The importance of name is also clearly visible in Burney's last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814). The heroine, Juliet, experiences firsthand the difficulties—female difficulties, as it were—connected to being nameless, therefore without

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<sup>34</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 85.



protection. For a long time, she is “Incognita”: no one knows who she is or her real name, and thus no one knows her connections, her status. Moreover, very much like Evelina, Juliet deals with her possible illegitimacy; although she is, in fact, an acknowledged child of her father, she is unknown to her half-siblings, and for her own protection, she cannot claim her father’s name, Granville.

Although all of Burney’s novels are very dissimilar in terms of subject matters, the issue of name features significantly in all of them, as Burney ties the women’s identity to their names. It is, therefore, worth mentioning that the name of the author herself has generated many discussions among her scholars, who are not only divided in their use of her first name, but also debate over her surname.

### 3.1 *EVELINA*

Name is inevitably connected to social status, a fact that Frances Burney was more than aware of and used it to create tension in her fiction. Names play an important role in all her novels, but perhaps the most visible instance is connected to the heroine of her first novel, the “nameless” Evelina.

One of Burney’s destroyed manuscripts, “The History of Caroline Evelyn,” which was burnt in 1767 by the author, focused on the history of Evelina’s mother and presented the source of Evelina’s “namelessness.” Even though the manuscript is lost to the readers, there are pieces of this history included in Burney’s first published novel, as she alludes to some facts in the letter exchange between Villars and Lady Howard.

The namelessness of Evelina is connected to her precarious position in the world. Although her mother was married at the point of Evelina’s birth, her child bears no legal surname; the lack of official documents regarding the marriage, which were destroyed by Sir John Belmont, relegates Evelina to the status of an illegitimate child, which could only be changed if Sir John acknowledged his marriage to her mother. In the meantime, Evelina is forced to use another name to hide her unenviable situation; and the name itself is a big issue. What *should* she be called? This also echoes the issue connected to the author. What should *she* be called, how should her books be categorised in the archives and libraries?

Evelina's frustration rises from the fact that her father will not "*properly* own her,"<sup>35</sup> leaving her without any legal surname. Moreover, she does not know what surname she should go by in the meantime. Her anxiety is evident in her first letter, which she ends with an exclamation: "I cannot to *you* sign *Anville*, and what other may I claim?"<sup>36</sup> As her guardian and surrogate parent, Reverend Mr. Villars, is aware of the history, since he was part of it, and therefore to *him*, she cannot pretend to be someone she is not, an Anville. However, until she is acknowledged by her father, Evelina has no legal right to claim her father's name, which effectively renders her nameless.

Due to the complicated history of her parents, Evelina's social status is unresolved. As Doyle states, "noble children have a right to their father's status, provided that they are born in wedlock."<sup>37</sup> While this undeniably applies to the heroine of Burney's first novel, the problem arises from the destroyed marriage licence. Without Sir John's acknowledgement, Evelina is, at least from the legal point of view, born *out* of wedlock. Therefore, even though she is the "only child of a wealthy Baronet . . . [and] legally heiress to two large fortunes,"<sup>38</sup> she is still perceived by society as the "Nobody" Mr. Lovel accuses her of being. Unable to claim her real connection, she is, indeed, "unblessed with one natural friend"<sup>39</sup> in the eyes of the fashionable society.

Evelina is, for all intents and purposes, stuck between a rock and a hard place. In order to start living her life and fulfilling her role in society, she needs to be legitimised by her father; a quest which she strives to complete for the better part of the novel. Despite being in society, she cannot really take her part in it properly. Her obscure origin limits her opportunities, and moreover, she is being relegated into the position of 'a toad-eater', a paid companion position, by Mr. Lovel, who, having been unsuccessful in his search of her origins, turned to conjecture. Hence, her lack of social identity injures her character, however, as a woman, there is not much Evelina can do.

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<sup>35</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>36</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> William Doyle, *Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>38</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 22.

“To nobody belonging, by nobody . . . noticed.”<sup>40</sup> Oakleaf aptly concludes that Evelina’s lack of social identity keeps “blinding the socially distinguished to her merit”<sup>41</sup> and his claim is easily confirmed by analysing Sir Clement’s, and later Lord Merton’s, behaviour toward the heroine. While they are both taken by Evelina’s beauty and conduct, neither of them is serious in their regard. They pursue her in private, in the case of Merton, or blatantly ignore the rules of proper conduct, as is the case of Sir Clement. A woman with known connections would not be treated in the way Evelina is treated: she has been forced to ride alone with Sir Clement, she has been cornered by Lord Merton, she has been mistaken for an actress in a public place, and the behaviour of her relatives forced her to find protection with two prostitutes. If she was able to claim the protection of her father’s name, none of these occasions would come to pass. However, before she is acknowledged as his daughter, Evelina has “no named place in the patriarchy,”<sup>42</sup> which often places her in danger.

Evelina suffers from what Cutting-Gray calls “the condition of an improper identity . . . [and consequent] lack of inheritance, lack of name, lack of significance to cultural memory.”<sup>43</sup> She has no legal claim to any inheritance; her father does not acknowledge her existence, and as such, she is not entitled to inherit anything from him. With regards to her mother’s side of family, Madame Duval has sole discretion over the estate of late Mr. Evelyn, a fact that contributed greatly to the elopement of Caroline. Finally, the only inheritance she is likely to be able to claim is one left by her guardian, Villars, after he passes away, based on their bond of mutual affection.

Due to her lack of social persona, Evelina’s position in society is problematic. She comes to town in the company of the high standing Mrs. Mirvan, who introduces her to the *ton*. It is apparent that Evelina has some connections, but her natural ties cannot be identified and she is generally regarded as a poor country girl. Therefore, in her current situation, Evelina has “neither rank, not the

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<sup>40</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 340.

<sup>41</sup> David Oakleaf, “The Name of the Father: Social Identity and the Ambition of *Evelina*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3(4) (1991): 345.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40.

<sup>43</sup> Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as “Nobody” and the novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, c1992), 44.

fortune that would justify ignoring rank,”<sup>44</sup> which allows Sir Clement, and even Lord Merton, to pursue her with dishonourable intentions. Their behaviour only emphasises the superiority of Lord Orville’s character; he is able to see Evelina’s private merit regardless of her social standing. Orville’s regard for the young girl of obscure origin and no name—despite the fact that “wives were . . . selected . . . for birth, money and physical beauty”<sup>45</sup> and Evelina’s lack of the first two—makes him, in Koehler’s terminology<sup>46</sup>, a “paragon”, in contrast to the “parasites” Sir Clement and Merton.

Name is, therefore, very important for Evelina, because she is aware of the dangers of having no one to claim her. The protection provided by her guardian is not sufficient once she starts to mix with the polite society. However, despite her lack of proper social identity, Evelina is able to acquire some social prominence, which allows the Branghtons to “usurp [the] social meaning of her name,”<sup>47</sup> first when they use her name to secure Orville’s carriage for themselves, and later to try to solicit his patronage of their business. While these instances show Evelina’s social presence, they also lead to the acute embarrassment of the heroine due to the vulgar behaviour of her relatives. Furthermore, the lack of scruples of Tom Branghton forces her to break social decorum when she writes a letter of apology to Orville, which triggers the infamous swap of letters and leads to Evelina’s diminished opinion of Lord Orville.

However, Evelina is not the only character who is touched by the issue of name or identity. Mr. Macartney, the poor Scottish intellectual, who is later revealed to be Evelina’s half brother, is her male counterpart. His difficulties and misery partially mirror the problems Evelina has to overcome. Nonetheless, while he is, indeed, Evelina’s counterpart, the search for name and identity does not apply to him in the same way. As an illegitimate child, he has no legal rights to his father’s fortune or name. Unlike Evelina, whose mother was, in fact, married to Sir John Belmont and who suffers only because of the lack of official documents confirming her legal rights, Macartney cannot claim their father’s

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<sup>44</sup> David Oakleaf, “The Name of the Father: Social Identity and the Ambition of *Evelina*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3(4) (1991): 346.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of “Female Difficulties”* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 44.

<sup>46</sup> See Martha J. Koehler, *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laclos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as “Nobody” and the novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, c1992), 19.

rank. Because he is a bastard, he is automatically a commoner. However, his misery, which stems from the belief he has fallen in love with his half sister whom he can never claim as his own, as well as the knowledge that he has grievously injured his father, is undoubtedly connected to the issues of name, as the whole situation is caused by Sir John Belmont's destruction of the marriage licence.

Macartney's struggles bring forth the matter of the supposed Miss Belmont. Polly Green, "the bantling of Dame Green<sup>48</sup>, wash-woman and wet nurse,"<sup>49</sup> as Mrs. Selwyn calls her, was as a child presented to Sir John Belmont as his daughter. Dame Green used Caroline's death-bed entreaties to Villars for her daughter's advantage, in order to secure her a better future than she would have as her own child. As was the case with Macartney, Polly Green's story partially mirrors the story of Evelina. They both had a strict and mostly isolated upbringing; while Evelina was brought up by her beloved guardian, Polly grew up in a French convent, where she was sent by her supposed father; and conveniently, where she was out of the way and the chances of discovery of her mother's scheme were severely limited. However, unlike Evelina, Polly enjoyed the perks of being the baronet's daughter, including the claim to his social rank.

Dame Green's wish that the real origins of her daughter—her real name and identity—would never come to light directly contributed to the duel between father and son. Hopeful that once her daughter was married, the scheme would be concluded, Dame Green fervently promoted Macartney's suit to Polly. While the match between a daughter of a wealthy baronet and an impoverished poet would be to the heiress's disadvantage, "[Dame Green] well knew it was far superior to those *her daughter* could form after the discovery of her birth."<sup>50</sup> By securing her a suitor, the wash-woman wanted to secure her daughter's social promotion that could not be taken away from her, even if the truth about her fraud was revealed. However, the duel between Macartney and Sir John Belmont put an end to the prospective match and, ultimately, the scheme was exposed.

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<sup>48</sup> The name of the character, Dame Green, might in itself imply the imposition. The title "Dame" was used by baronetess *suo jure*. The connection between Sir John Belmont, a baronet, and daughter of "Dame" Green, who is supposedly a baronet's daughter, might be therefore implied by the name of the mother.

<sup>49</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 378.

<sup>50</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 375.

Burney used the revelation of the scheme and imposter to explain Sir John's cruel behaviour toward Evelina. Believing he was bringing up Caroline's daughter, his response to Lady Howard's claim concerning Evelina was harsh and unforgiving. In consequence to his reply, Evelina concluded it was unlikely she would ever be acknowledged as his daughter, taking his letter as the final denial of her innate social status. However, once the whole scheme was revealed thanks to the clever approach of Mrs. Selwyn, Caroline's story came to the conclusion with the acknowledgment of her child as the legitimate daughter and legal heir of Sir John Belmont.

Nonetheless, the issue of Evelina's name is not concluded with her legitimisation. The match between her and Lord Orville was imminent even before Evelina was afforded her birthright and proper social rank, despite her insistence on resolving the issue connected to her name first. Upon his acknowledgment, Evelina Anville, a nobody, became Miss Evelina Belmont, daughter of a baronet. The settlements upon their marriage, Lord Orville tells Evelina and the readers, will address Evelina by her newly-acquired legal surname, Belmont. However, Evelina was not to bear that name for long, as it was decided the marriage would take place with the utmost expedience, changing Evelina's name to Lady Orville.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, as Pawl points out, the novel does not have any instance of Evelina signing her letters as Lady Orville.<sup>52</sup> Her second-to-last letter is signed, "for the first, and probably the last time I shall ever own the name,"<sup>53</sup> by the name of Belmont and Evelina's concluding letter, written after the marriage ceremony, leaves the issue of "whom I most belong [to]"<sup>54</sup> unresolved. Does she now belong exclusively to her husband? Does she belong to her newly-found father, or the surrogate father who took care of her all her life? Or, as her simple signature "Evelina" might suggest, does she belong to herself, now that she has found her place in the world?

The issue of inheritance, so closely connected to name, is also settled in favour of Evelina. Now legally her father's heiress, she is to be the "sole heiress

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<sup>51</sup> Evelina's made up surname, Anville, carries a marked similarity to her final surname, Orville. As with Dame Green, this similarity might provide a clue as to the conclusion of the story.

<sup>52</sup> See Amy J. Pawl, "'And What Other Name May I Claim?': Names and Their Owners in Frances Burney's *Evelina*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3(4) (1991): 296.

<sup>53</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 404.

<sup>54</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 353.

of all [Madame Duval] is worth, when Lady Orville.”<sup>55</sup> While this provides a happy conclusion of the story full of difficulties connected to the heroine’s namelessness, it also points out the hypocrisy of society. Evelina started as nobody: without a name, without a claim to anything. Once she is named and finds her place in the patriarchal society, she is rewarded by receiving not only her due as her father’s heiress, but also a promise of her grandmother’s fortune upon her pending marriage. Burney’s clear emphasis of this disproportion shows the pretensions of the society of her time, which valued deference to social conventions over the assessment of personal worth.

### 3.2 CECILIA

The issue of name is even more prominent in Burney’s second novel. The problem is identified in the very beginning: the name clause. It is but this one condition in the will of Cecilia’s uncle that creates complications for the heroine, her lover, and various other characters. While the importance of the name for aristocracy is a topic that Burney already touched in *Evelina*, it becomes the central issue to the romance plot in *Cecilia*.

As Jordan states, “the novel figures power and class through naming.”<sup>56</sup> One’s name— more importantly, one’s origins, which are undeniable connected to one’s name—reveals the social standing of a person in society and the power he has over his life and that of others. In *Cecilia*, Burney challenges the power of the traditional ruling class by introducing characters of lower social status who pose a threat to the old order and she uses the name clause to highlight this issue.

Cecilia, an heiress of £10,000 from her deceased parents, becomes, upon the death of her uncle, the Dean, an “heiress to an estate of 3000 pounds per annum; with no other restrictions than that of annexing her name, if she married, to the disposal of her hand and riches.”<sup>57</sup> Johnson defines annexation as “Union; coalition; conjunction,”<sup>58</sup> and this is what the Dean wishes for: to unite Cecilia

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<sup>55</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 398.

<sup>56</sup> Meghan Jordan, “Madness and Matrimony in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55(3) (2015): 568.

<sup>57</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language Vol. 1* (London: J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes, A. Millars; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1756). Accessed 24 April 2020. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i-420>

and her husband under *his* family name. She is supposed to extend her name to her husband and she is to receive the inheritance upon the fulfilment of this condition.

Name, therefore, becomes central to the novel's plot from the very beginning. The pride that the Dean places on his name, even though the family does not have the illustrious ancestry of some of the other characters in the novel, is evident from the condition of his will. However, the condition in itself presents the uncertainty of the future of the family's name: the addendum "if she married" leaves Cecilia with the option of not marrying at all, in which case the inheritance would be rightfully hers, but the family name would be gone upon her death, as she was the only Beverley survivor. The Dean's dislike of this prospect is revealed much later; but the possibility of remaining unmarried exists. However, by including the possibility of staying single, Burney brings up the issue concerning many families of her time: if there is no one to carry the name, no heirs to continue the legacy of their family, the family's cultural heritage, unquestionably tied to the family's name, dies out.

Rogers statement that "the contrivance of [the] name clause draws attention to the customary expectation that women give up their names at marriage"<sup>59</sup> undoubtedly proves that Burney was an acute observer of society and used her novels to comment on the traditional ways she found antiquated or irrational. The name clause included in the novel was, in fact, nothing unique in Burney's time; many families demanded that the husband take his wife's name upon their marriage in order to further their family's legacy. This practice was frequently used by the upper classes, where the lack of a male heir would cause their extinction. In Johnson's terms, the "union" under the wife's name allowed the legacy of many noble families to continue with the next generation.

Cecilia's family, despite the impact of the Dean's clause on the development of the novel, is not, however, the family most prominently connected to the importance of name. The name-proud Delvilles, who consider their name a symbol of their social superiority, embody the tradition and ways of the old times, where the importance of high birth was the main priority. The inability of Mr. Delvile to appreciate the distinction afforded to Cecilia by her exemplary

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<sup>59</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of "Female Difficulties"* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 42.



character, despite her less than ideal origins, represents the nobility's unwillingness to dispose of their belief of their superiority based on their cultural inheritance, and their unwillingness to let people's personal merit influence their social status, as allowing them to do so would mean their loss of power. This reinforces Jordan's claim regarding the connection between power and names, as the power of the people of the highest rank is undeniably connected to the supposed superiority of their names.

From the introduction of his character in the novel, Mr. Delvile is identified as "the Man of Family." This is a nice wordplay by Burney, as it also points out the importance of long and distinguished ancestry to Mr. Delvile. The head of his family, Delvile is quick to emphasise the superiority of his family's origins in comparison to other people; he is a bigot, prejudiced against anyone below his rank. When he met Cecilia, he "received her with an air of haughty affability, which . . . could not fail being extremely offensive, but [he] was too much occupied with the care of his own importance [and] attributed the uneasiness which his reception occasioned to the overawing predominance of superior rank and consequence."<sup>60</sup> His belief in his own superiority and self-importance is immediately apparent.

Furthermore, Delvile's refusal to see his ward, in case the Harrels would see it fit to return his visit, and his initial rejection of the post of her guardian speak of his excessive feelings of social excellence based on his illustrious ancestry. His anger after Cecilia asks for his assistance after Mr. Harrel's suicide, stemming from the fact that "Mr. Arnott . . . with whom I have no sort of connection or commerce, and whose very name is almost unknown to me . . . can have no possible claim upon [the] time and attention . . . [of] a person in my style of life,"<sup>61</sup> and his constant insistence on predominance of his social prestige reflect his anxiety over his precarious position in the society that is in the process of change, which threatens the very foundation upon which he bases his social standing: his bloodline.

Delvile's concern over his social status is apparent in his need to assert his importance in society, but in doing so, he, in fact, undermines his claim to social

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<sup>60</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>61</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 428.

excellence even further. He feels the need to inform Cecilia that “people of large connections have not much leisure in London, especially if they see a little after their own affairs, and if their estates, like mine, are dispersed in various parts of the kingdom.”<sup>62</sup> However, being men of leisure is what distinguishes the social elite from the middling ranks. While it is commendable that Delvile oversees his affairs and makes sure they are in order, which differentiates him from people like Harrel, his need to look after his own affairs either points out his lack of trust in hired people—reasonable assumption if one takes into account his opinion of his social inferiors— or his inability to afford someone to look after his own affairs.

Moreover, Delvile’s pride in having no time for leisure creates contradiction with regards to his social identity. Leisure is a mark of high social status; and since Delvile constantly makes it a point to emphasise that he does not, indeed, have time to deal with Cecilia and her business, because he is “overpowered with affairs of [his] own, and people who can do nothing without [his] order,”<sup>63</sup> it would seem that he undermines his own social position. However, as it turns out, his claims are empty; despite his many protestations to the contrary, his “affairs” consist of ordering “people,” his servants, what they should do. This is the only business in which the readers see him engage. In the city, he has no real importance; which, consequently, is the reason why he values his country estate, Delvile Castle, so much. There, he is “secure in his own castle . . . [where] his security [is] undisputed, his will . . . without controul [sic].”<sup>64</sup>

The description of Delvile Castle, which is a symbol of the family’s social prominence, and as such directly connected to the issue of name, is exceptionally important, as it provides the metaphorical link between the place, upon which Mr. Delvile places his family’s importance, and the family itself:

Delvile Castle was situated in a large and woody park, and *surrounded by a moat*. A *drawbridge* which fronted the entrance was every night, by order of Mr. Delvile, with the same care as if still necessary for *the preservation of the family*, regularly drawn up. Some fortifications still remained entire, and vestiges were every where to be traced of more; no taste was shows in the disposition of the grounds, no openings were contrived through the wood for distant views or

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<sup>62</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>63</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 429.

<sup>64</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 458.

beautiful objects; the mansion-house was *ancient*, large and *magnificent*, but constructed with as little attention to convenience and comfort, as to airiness and elegance; it was dark, heavy and monastic, *equally in want of repair and of improvement*. The grandeur of its *former inhabitants* was every where visible, but *the decay* into which it was falling rendered such remains mere objects for meditation and melancholy; while the *evident struggle* to support some *appearance of its ancient dignity*, made the dwelling and all in its vicinity wear an aspect of constraint and austerity. Festivity, joy and pleasure, seemed foreign to the purposes of its construction; silence solemnity and contemplation were adapted to it only.<sup>65</sup>

The presence of a moat, as well as the drawbridge, represents the relative distance of the castle's inhabitants from the other people in the country, their superiority. By having a moat and drawing the drawbridge, Delvile tries to separate himself from the mere commoners and highlight his family's importance. The phrase "for the preservation of the family" no longer applies in the original sense; no one is putting the lives of the Delviles in danger, no one is attacking them but the slowly changing society that starts to disregard the importance of rank as it was perceived in the previous times. These people, who challenge the importance and merit of aristocracy and gentility and believe in the "internal middle class virtues like intelligence, industry and character"<sup>66</sup> instead of the old values, pose a danger to the family that bases their existence upon ancestry and their supposed birthright.

While the Delviles pride themselves on having ancient lineage, they are, indeed, in want of repair and improvement, which the addition of Cecilia, with her virtuous conduct, would bring to the family. The Delviles, despite having a great social standing due to their high rank, do not have the money to sufficiently support their lifestyle, or the funds to repair their country estate, and Cecilia's fortune would remedy the situation. However, despite her being gentleman's daughter, it is not enough for the prideful patriarch of the Delvile family, who needs to support the family's "ancient dignity." Doyle suggests that the two most important things for noble families are age and alliance<sup>67</sup> and this is proven by

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<sup>65</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 457. My emphasis.

<sup>66</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>67</sup> See William Doyle, *Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24.

Burney's description of Mrs. Delvile: "a lady . . . both by *birth* and *alliance*."<sup>68</sup> Age—being able to trace one's lineage as far as possible—is essential for Mr. Delvile; however, it must be supported by the *right* ancestry. By making a good alliance, the family's legacy can be enriched and can continue to future generations, who are supposed to revere in their prominence. No matter how wealthy Cecilia is, being an heiress is not good enough for the heir of the distinguished family of Delvile.

While Cecilia's character is admirable and the superiority of her mind cannot be disputed, her social distinction is found lacking by the elder Delviles. Mrs. Delvile's exclamation "You are indeed a noble creature!"<sup>69</sup> only extends to her character; and her inadequate ancestry makes her unsuitable to be Mortimer's bride in the eyes of his parents, for whom the name—their family and its tradition—is more important than the happiness of their son, and while they claim it is the Dean's condition that would make him a "Nobody," it is, in fact, them, who relegate him to the position of the heir, stealing his individuality and making him "Nobody" but the carrier of their name, as Jordan appropriately concludes.<sup>70</sup>

Rogers claims that "[Mr. Briggs] easily exposes the hollowness of a superiority based solely upon external advantages."<sup>71</sup> He is an excellent character to point out the folly of ignoring personal merit in favour of inherited birthright. Having no aspirations to social elevation, and being content with making more and more money, the miser is unafraid to stand up to the pompous Mr. Delvile and criticise his value system, even when he is in Delvile's home territory. Burney uses the character of Mr. Briggs to point out the issue of the nobility's old ways and rigidity, their dislike of change, and most importantly, the need for change.

It is Burgess' belief that "Burney's characters rigorously exclude questions of birth from marriage . . . replacing them with financial credit."<sup>72</sup> That is not necessarily true. While *Evelina*'s Orville is shown to ignore Evelina's obscure origins, he nonetheless declares that it was his intention to look into her

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<sup>68</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 260. My emphasis.

<sup>69</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 425.

<sup>70</sup> See Meghan Jordan, "Madness and Matrimony in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55(3) (2015): 569.

<sup>71</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of "Female Difficulties"* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 34.

<sup>72</sup> Miranda J. Burgess, "Courting Ruin: The Economic Romances of Frances Burney," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (1995): 133.

background. Furthermore, the whole premise of *Cecilia* is based on the question of birth in connection to marriage. Even though Cecilia ultimately marries Mortimer, the circumstances surrounding their match disprove Burgess' claim. Upon their marriage, Cecilia has lost the inheritance from her uncle; and since she was no longer in possession of her personal fortune, which her parents left her, their marriage cannot be considered to be financially motivated. Moreover, even when the name clause, and consequently the issue of name, is disregarded, the question of birth is still very much relevant. While Cecilia's social status is inferior to that of the Delviles, it is still high enough to satisfy the family. Mrs. Delvile herself claims that if it were not for the unfortunate name clause, Cecilia would be a welcome addition to their family—preferably with her fortune intact. However, the family's preoccupation with their family name prevents them, for a long time, to even entertain the idea of Cecilia and Mortimer's match.

Despite the fact that *Cecilia* is firmly connected with the issue of name, names do not carry the same importance for everyone. While Mr. Delvile would never entertain the idea of giving up his noble name and the family tradition that goes with it, Mr. Monckton, who is his complete opposite in this regard, has no such scruples. In order to further his affluence, as well as secure his position, Monckton is willing to give up his name, which does not mean more to him than the potential fortune he would get by giving up his patronym. His willingness to sacrifice his name for financial profit reflects the capitalistic ruthlessness of the middle class merchants, who are prepared to do anything for advancement.

Monckton, after all, is no stranger to relentless pursuit of self-promotion. As "the younger son of a noble family . . . in the bloom of his youth, impatient for wealth and ambitious for power, he had tied himself to a rich dowager of quality, whose age, though sixty-seven, was but the smaller species of her evil properties, her disposition being far more repulsive than her wrinkles,"<sup>73</sup> in order to promote himself. By sacrificing himself and his youth, he did, indeed, become "the richest and most powerful man in that neighbourhood."<sup>74</sup> Sacrificing his name for further promotion rather pales in comparison.

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<sup>73</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>74</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 7.

Even though Mr. Delvile's pride in his family and ancestry permeates the whole story, even his sense of self-importance fades when one considers that of the deceased Dean, who "began it all, by his arbitrary will, as if an ordinance of his own could arrest the course of nature! and as is *he* had power to keep alive, by the loan of the name, a family in the male branch already extinct."<sup>75</sup> While it is understandable why the aristocratic Delvile would fight for the continuance of his family's legacy, the fact that Cecilia's family lacks the distinguished ancestry of the Delviles and has risen to their current social standing just a generation ago shows the immense pride of the Dean. Name, therefore, is clearly of the utmost importance not only to the noble Delviles, but also to the genteel Beverleys.

However, the difficulties connected to the issue of name do not end with their marriage and the resolution to give up the fortune along with Cecilia's patronym. After the duel between the newly married Mortimer and Monckton, Cecilia, left alone in the country and waiting for Mortimer, is visited by a lawyer who asks to be told her name. Cecilia, acting according to the plan they concocted with Mortimer, which is to keep off telling everyone about their marriage until he is able to properly claim her as his wife, is hesitant to do so, which culminates in the critical question regarding her marital status. The as yet-unspoken enquiry—did your husband take your name?—is apparent in the comment. Even after thinking all the difficulties connected to the issue of name are resolved, Cecilia is still plagued by the consequences of the Dean's unfortunate name clause.

Following the story of Cecilia's family, it becomes apparent that even though the aristocratic bloodlines are the discerning element for the identity of people with claims to nobility, the sense of pride in one's origins—blood—is not limited strictly to those of the highest rank. The rising middle class, which was becoming more and more prominent and prosperous, appropriates the principles of their betters, and their emulation of the traditions and principles of the higher classes leads to the creation of the new kind of gentleman, like Cecilia's father or her uncle. The situation of their family shows that it is possible to better one's social standing and rise above the rank one was born into and some of the people who would belong to the middle class by birth could aspire to become, in time, part of the gentility.

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<sup>75</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 930.

#### 4. CHANGES IN SOCIAL STATUS

Social mobility is undeniably related to social status. In every society, there are those who want to rise above their position and who use their industriousness to achieve their goals. Burney, whose family had an acute understanding of the importance of social connections, especially those in the right circles who could support their advancement, incorporated her knowledge into the novels. Subtle reminders about the character's origins penetrate her literary works, and while some of those characters rise because of their own merit, others depend only on their supposed "birthright" and are willing to do whatever is necessary to maintain their social status, no matter the cost.

The most typical way of social mobility is marriage; a woman who marries a man of higher social standing automatically assumes his status after marriage, and so do their children. However, it works both ways; if a woman marries a man who is socially inferior, she loses the station she was born into and acquires that of her husband. The downward social mobility does not appear very frequently in literature, and it is almost exclusively the upward mobility that Burney represents in her novels. The heroine of *Evelina*, for instance, rises twice in the social hierarchy; firstly, by finally being afforded her real social status, as inherited from her father; and secondly, by rising from the rank of a baronet's daughter to that of a Countess upon her marriage.

However, according to Hall's study, Burney "took a fairly severe view of those whom she portrayed as actively seeking social advancement."<sup>76</sup> While this is definitely true in *Evelina*—an issue that is going to be discussed in more detail later—it is a rather extreme statement when one considers the instances of social mobility in *Cecilia*. It is true that Burney is wary of social climbers and her preference for people to stay in their innate class undeniably shows in her work, her position toward social elevation is not strictly negative, as witnessed by the novel's preoccupation with Mr. Belfield and his affairs, not to mention the promotion of the heroine into the highest caste by way of marriage. Be it as it may, social mobility nevertheless features significantly in Burney's work.

Hall's point can be attested when one considers Burney's first published novel. *Evelina* is full of instances of social mobility, attempts to climb the social

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<sup>76</sup> K. G. Hall, *The Exalted Heroine and the Triumph of Order: Class, Women and Religion in the English Novel, 1740-1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 25.

ladder or better one's situation by association with people of higher standing. However, it is my belief that the metaphorical "punishment" of those seeking to advance themselves serves as a foil to show her heroine in better light and showcase her purity and inner worth. Evelina, despite her precarious situation, only seeks to prove her innate social status, not to advance herself socially. The marriage to the aristocratic Lord Orville is her award for staying true to the moral education and purity of character instilled in her by her guardian.

Evelina is very conscientious of the social structure. However, the impression of social status and its importance is not limited to the heroine. Madame Duval, Evelina's vulgar grandmother, is possibly even more aware of the significance of good position in society, and she is the character whose upward social mobility is the most noticeable in the novel, as her status is decidedly the one being most elevated. Her humble origins are acknowledged in Villars' letters to Lady Howard, in which he describes the history of Evelina's family:

[Mr. Evelyn's] unhappy marriage . . . with Madame Duval, then *a waiting-girl at a tavern*, contrary to the advice and entreaties of all his friends, among whom I was the most urgent, induced him to abandon his native land, and fix his abode in France. Thither he was followed by *shame* and *repentance*; feelings which his heart was not framed to support; for, notwithstanding he had been too weak to resist the allurements of *beauty*, which nature, though *a niggard to her in every other boon*, had with a lavish hand bestowed on his wife; yet he was a young man of excellent character, and, till thus *unaccountably* infatuated, of unblemished conduct. He survived this *ill-judged* marriage but two years.<sup>77</sup>

Madame Duval has risen from the poverty of working class situation to the ranks of genteel society. However, her elevation was achieved by her beauty, not by any personal merit or excellence of character, which is apparent from Villars' letter. Nevertheless, this significant rise in her social standing had severe consequences for her husband, as he violated the unwritten rules of society to marry those who are close to one's own status; the subsequent, albeit self-imposed exile, followed by feelings of "shame and repentance" resulted from their union, and the fact that Burney felt appropriate to punish Mr. Evelyn for it shows her dislike of such social elevation.

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<sup>77</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15. My emphasis.



Once Madame Duval acquired the social status of her husband, her social standing improved, and even his death could not relegate her back to the class she was born into. However, despite her relatively high station, “Madame Duval’s access to society rests entirely upon her patrilineal name and money, for which she is more tolerated than accepted.”<sup>78</sup> Cutting-Gray makes an excellent point stressing the difference between intrinsic and acquired status. Because she was born outside the gentility, Madame Duval will always be an outsider and tolerated rather than accepted.

The descriptions provided by Burney sums up Madame Duval’s deficiencies that make it apparent that Madame Duval’s current social standing does not correspond to the one she was born into. She is “a woman low-bred and illiberal . . . by no means a proper companion or guardian for a young lady [because] she is at once uneducated and unprincipled; ungentle in her temper, and unamiable in her manners.”<sup>79</sup> The shortness of her temper is evident several times in the novel, most notably when she slaps Evelina after the infamous highway robbery scene which ends up with Madame Duval tied up to a tree in a ditch, covered in filth and dirt. This scene also points out one of the instruments that social climbing characters often use to demonstrate their elevation: dress. (The correlation between dress and social status is further discussed in Chapter 5.)

Madame Duval is acutely aware of her raised social position and revels in it. Even to a group of complete strangers, she is quick to point out that she “shall only just visit a *person of quality* or two of [her] *particular* acquaintance,”<sup>80</sup> even though that is not necessarily true; she barely knows Lady Howard, but behaves very familiarly toward her, erasing the social distance that stands between them, regardless of Madame Duval’s assumed social standing. Moreover, Madame Duval assumes the haughty airs typical for the aristocracy, evident for instance in Lord Merton, and she shows clear preference of French, which is revealed by her judging English people as vulgar and lacking manners and furthermore by her insistence to take Evelina to Paris to receive some much-needed social polish. Her presumption is that her preference of everything French—despite the fact that she

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<sup>78</sup> Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as “Nobody” and the novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, c1992), 27.

<sup>79</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15-16.

<sup>80</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 52. My emphasis.

is *not*, in fact, French—makes her seem more cultivated and fashionable. However, despite her social elevation, “it is evident, from her writing, that she is still as vulgar and illiterate as when her first husband, Mr. Evelyn, had the weakness to marry her,”<sup>81</sup> as Lady Howard states.

Still, in accordance to Hall’s previously mentioned statement, there is a price that Madame Duval, along with every other character who has been elevated socially, has to pay to satisfy Burney’s tendency regarding social climbing. Madame Duval is punished for the presumption to aspire to a class which was unattainable to her based on her lowly origins; her punishment is utter humiliation by the socially superior, yet overly cruel Captain Mirvan and his helper, the callous Sir Clement Willoughby.

Following the complicated history of Evelina and her family, Greenfield comes to the conclusion that “thanks to their mothers, all three children improve their social position.”<sup>82</sup> Her claim is certainly true; Miss Green’s status is undeniably raised by the scheme conceived and executed by her mother. Evelina, due to her resemblance to her deceased mother, is able to claim her true inheritance and social standing. While Macartney is unable to obtain the rank of his father due to his illegitimacy, he is acknowledged by Sir John as his son thanks to his mother’s letter and he will inherit part of Sir John’s fortune through his marriage to Polly Green, which will improve his social position.

However, Miss Green is punished for her social elevation, much like Madame Duval. Because her social promotion was achieved by imposition, and she has no real claim to the social standing achieved by posing as Sir John’s daughter, she is, in theory, “returned” to the lower class into which she truly belongs. Yet, by the fortuitous marriage to Mr. Macartney, she does not stay thus “degraded” for long, and even though the match was planned when Miss Green’s social standing was more prominent than that of her birth, Macartney places no importance on her social status and marries her anyway. Hence, even though Macartney’s social standing is much less prominent than that of Sir John’s—the one into which she was raised thanks to her mother’s scheme—her social position

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<sup>81</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>82</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 5.

is ultimately much better than the one she was born into; she does, indeed, achieve at least some upward social mobility.

The issue of social mobility is undeniably connected to Evelina's vulgar London relatives, the Branghtons. While the elder Branghton is satisfied with his current situation, the same cannot be said about his children. The most visible instance of their desire for greater social prominence is Tom Branghton's appropriation of Evelina's name and connections in order to promote the family's silversmith's business in Snow Hill. He is aware that having such a prominent patron as Lord Orville would help their business and possibly even bring in other aristocratic patrons as well, which would help promote the family's social status.

Moreover, the Branghtons sisters show interest in social promotion. They try to "imitat[e] the tastes of those on a higher social level,"<sup>83</sup> but they are mostly unsuccessful. The distance between them and their social betters is insurmountable with regards to their conduct, lack of manners, and even their conversations. Their interest in *faux* genteel Mr. Smith, their lodger, on the one hand, and their disregard for Mr. Macartney unable to even pay for his room on the other hand show their ignorance and shallowness of their characters. While the intellectual Mr. Macartney is dismissed, the insincere Mr. Smith is celebrated and looked up to as someone who could potentially raise the social position of one of the sisters by marriage. Miss Branghton's refusal to "marry any person but a gentleman"<sup>84</sup> clearly shows her hope for social promotion.

Although Mr. Smith aspires to become part of gentility, his true social standing is revealed when he is in the same room as Sir Clement Willoughby. Even though Mr. Smith tries to compare himself to the baronet and even though he might imitate the conduct, dress, lifestyle, and even the language of his betters, it is apparent that there is a marked difference between them and Mr. Smith's desire to appear as a gentleman is unsuccessful. Smith may seem as such to the ignorant Branghtons, yet his real social standing and persona become visible and his social pretensions fail when contrasted with the real gentility.

While *Evelina* is full of aspiring—and sometimes successful—social climbers, *Cecilia* portrays different kinds of social promotion. Even though there

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<sup>83</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

<sup>84</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 171.

are instances of people punished for their social rise, it is this novel that emphasises the significance of personal merit, which can help achieve upward mobility. It is also this novel that shows that “the price of status . . . can be very high.”<sup>85</sup>

*Cecilia*'s Mr. Harrel is a perfect example of the lengths people go to in order to maintain their social standing—and then have to pay the price for. Although Doyle's comment that “distinction needs to show itself and impress onlookers”<sup>86</sup> is made with aristocracy in mind, it also nicely summarises the gentility's attempts to live up to the high standards of their titled superiors. Mr. Harrel uses the visual display of affluence to advertise his importance. His constant spending, be in on elaborate parties or masquerades, new additions and furnishings to their town house, or the reconstruction of his Violet Banks, far exceeds his income, but he only considers the effect it has on his peers, not the effect on his purse. The boundless extravagance and consummate ways of the Harrels, his ceaseless gambling, as well as the immoderation of his wife, they all lead to accumulation of debts; and while they contribute to his public image, they ultimately lead him to ruin.

However, it is also Cecilia Beverley who belongs to the “people but just rising from dust and obscurity.”<sup>87</sup> Even though she is “distinguished by fortune, caressed by the world, brought into the circle of high life, and surrounded with splendour,”<sup>88</sup> her origins leave much to be desired, especially to people like the Delviles, who place rank and noble birth above all other accomplishments. Her lineage is similar to that of Mrs. Harrel, as both of their ancestors were farmers. The critical difference, however, lies in the specification; while Cecilia's ancestors were “rich farmers in the county of Suffolk,”<sup>89</sup> Mrs. Harrel's came from a family of “mere Suffolk farmers.”<sup>90</sup> This accounts for the difference between the two female characters; while Cecilia can enjoy affluence separate from any male influence once she comes of age, Mrs. Harrel was forced to marry young.

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<sup>85</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 143.

<sup>86</sup> William Doyle, *Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46.

<sup>87</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 187.

<sup>88</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 54.

<sup>89</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 260.

Nevertheless, in Cecilia's father "a spirit of elegance had supplanted the rapacity of wealth, [and he] had spent his time as a private country gentleman, satisfied, without increasing his story, to live upon what he inherited from the labours of his predecessors."<sup>91</sup> By distancing himself from manual labour and living upon his inheritance, he has elevated his social status to that of "gentleman"—despite not being of gentle birth, he still qualified for that status by his manners, his way of living, and qualities that are commonly associated with gentlemen. Therefore, Cecilia inherited her father's elevated social status, not the lower one belonging to her ancestors.

Cecilia Beverley's family is the perfect example of people who has risen out of the class that was afforded to them by birth. Unlike Madame Duval or even the vulgar Branghtons in *Evelina*, Cecilia's family was not punished for the elevation, because their promotion was gradual, based on the steady change of lifestyle and personal merit. The Beverleys raised themselves from being farmers to belonging to the new kind of gentility, one that embraced the traditional ways of genteel people and combined them with the ideas of individual worth.

Thus far, only the most typical ways of social mobility were discussed. However, the character of Mr. Monckton in *Cecilia* provides another example how a man can raise his social status: by clever targeting of a future wife and advantageous marriage. In most cases, the fortune-hunters are merely interested in the money; in Monckton's case, he sought to promote himself socially as well. While his origins were noble, he was only a younger son and as such, he had to find a way to provide for himself. Instead of seeking an honourable occupation, like joining the army or becoming part of clergy, he chose to marry Lady Margaret instead, as it would guarantee him not only a considerable fortune, but also an elevated social position than he enjoyed so far. Doody appropriately sums his behaviour by saying "like Sir Clement Willoughby, Monckton uses social conventions . . . for private desire."<sup>92</sup>

Monckton's blatant disregard of his wife and his disrespect toward her make it obvious that his promotion was the only factor in his decision to marry her. Burney does not hide Monckton's mercenary ways; on the contrary, the form

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<sup>91</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>92</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113.

of the novel, so different from its epistolary predecessor, allows her to make sure that they are, in fact, known from the very beginning of the novel; the same goes for his wishes for the future, which include the heroine, upon whom “he had long looked . . . as his future *property*.”<sup>93</sup> Despite Monckton’s belief that he must certainly be widowed soon, he is proven wrong; and while his attempt of social promotion was, in fact, successful, he is paying the price of it by being tied to a woman he despises.

*Evelina*’s Lord Merton and *Cecilia*’s Sir Robert Floyer belong to the category of fortune hunters as well. Merton is “a nobleman who is but lately come to his title, though he has already dissipated more than half his fortune,”<sup>94</sup> which is precisely the reason why he seeks to marry Lord Orville’s sister, Lady Louisa Larpent. He needs a wife with a big dowry to fund his extravagant lifestyle, which includes unnecessary and foolish wagers on trivialities. The same applies to Sir Robert Floyer. While his initial interest in Cecilia is based on a false assumption that she is open to the match, which is championed by one of her guardians, Mr. Harrel, there is no attraction but her fortune for Sir Robert. An incorrigible gambler and rake, his marriage to Cecilia would definitely be to his advantage; and it would also solve Mr. Harrel’s problem of having to repay his debt of honour to Sir Robert. These characters, however, have no need for social promotion, as they already belong to the highest ranks, and it is their high position that allows their often cruel and reprehensible behaviour, a point that is emphasised by Koehler as well.<sup>95</sup>

Much like *Evelina*’s Braghtons, *Cecilia* also has a character that plans to use his connections to his advantage:

Mr. Morrice, a young lawyer, who, though rising in his profession, owed his success neither to distinguished abilities, nor to skill-supplying industry, but to *the art of uniting suppleness to others with confidence to himself*. To a reverence of rank, talents, and fortune the most profound, he joined an *assurance in his own merit*, which no superiority could depress; and with a *presumption* which encouraged him *to aim at all things*, he blended a good-humour that no

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<sup>93</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9. My emphasis.

<sup>94</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 276.

<sup>95</sup> See Martha J. Koehler, *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laelos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 156.

mortification could lessen. And while by the pliability of his disposition he *avoided making enemies*, by his readiness to oblige, he learned the surest way of making friends by *becoming useful to them*.<sup>96</sup>

Morrice's aim in life, it seems, is to be useful to someone and by doing so, to promote his own aspirations. While he has no pretensions to better his rank, he has no scruples to use his social superiors to promote his career. By being obliging, he works to integrate himself among the social elite. In very much the same way Tom Branghton used Evelina, Morrice uses his connections to meet people who could be useful to him. Having met Cecilia only once, he uses her to integrate himself with the Harrels, who, in turn, can introduce him to other prospective clients. He is quick to provide any assistance, needed or not, because "he might possibly have something to gain, but . . . nothing to lose."<sup>97</sup> Mr. Morrice is, without a doubt, one of the most accommodating characters in Burney's fiction.

However, the character most distinguished by social mobility is undoubtedly Mr. Belfield, who "aspires to a station in life above the one in which he was born,"<sup>98</sup> but finds that "none of [his various occupations] . . . bring true independence."<sup>99</sup> Burney's introduction of his character broadly hints at his fickleness and inconstancy of his mind:

Mr. Belfield, a tall, thin young man, whose face was all *animation*, and whose eyes sparkled with *intelligence*. He had been intended by his father for trade, but *his spirit, soaring above* the occupation for which he was *designed*, from repining led him to resist, and from resisting to rebel . . . [He was] fond of the polite arts, and eager for the acquirement of knowledge, [but also] too volatile for serious study, and too gay for laborious application, [and] unhappily associated with fickleness and caprice, [which] served only to impede his improvement, and obstruct his preferment . . . He lived an unsettle and unprofitable life . . . devoting his time to company, his income to dissipation, and his heart to the Muses.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11. My emphasis.

<sup>97</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 43.

<sup>98</sup> Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 144.

<sup>99</sup> Janice Farrar Thaddeus, *Frances Burney: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 75.

<sup>100</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 11-12.

As Doody claims, “the social and psychological costs of rising above one’s original class are high”<sup>101</sup> and Belfield’s situation embodies the difficulties connected to one’s social elevation. By being distinguished by his education and style of living, which his father helped him sustain while he was alive, he has risen above his station. In doing so, he has isolated himself from his family; he cannot claim them in front of his noble and genteel friends, as the association with the trade would damage his reputation. Similarly, he cannot introduce his friends to his family. He is constantly torn between the two worlds; in order to satisfy his demanding friends, he needs to spend money that his family supplies; and if he wishes to visit his family, he needs to do it in private, in order to save himself the humiliation of his lowly origins being recognised.

Belfield is “handicapped by his origin in the wrong class.”<sup>102</sup> His disposition is not suitable for trade or many other professions, as his search for his place in the world of occupation shows. He has joined the army, tried his hand at a lawyer, a man of letters, even at being a tradesman. Belfield’s attempt to be a tutor, which he found unbearable because it emphasised his inferiority in comparison to his masters, leads to his complete isolation from the society and his becoming a day labourer. While he claims that the daily labour fulfils him and emphasises his resolve to stay away from society, it does not take long for him to change his mind and try another occupation.

Belfield lacks the independence that Cecilia’s fortune should, in theory, afford her; but unlike Cecilia, he is, indeed, able to continue his search for independence and place in life, while her choices are severely limited due to her gender. Just as Macartney is Evelina’s foil, Belfield serves the same role for Cecilia. There are definitely similarities between these two characters, as they both are in search of their place in the world. However, they both appear to be similarly unsuccessful in trying to find the one thing that would satisfy them the most and unable to exercise their desires.

Going back to Hall’s statement about Burney’s severe views and opinions on social climbers, Belfield’s character provides an adequate reason to disagree with that statement. Given Burney’s preoccupation with his character, despite his

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<sup>101</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113.

<sup>102</sup> Doody, *The Life in the Works*, 113.



failure to achieve happiness and true independence, Belfield is a person whose social promotion is justifiable. His character and intellect, which helped him to attain many genteel accomplishments, made him wholly unsuitable to his lot as a tradesman, all the while creating the need for something greater. While his parents are to be blamed for their never-ending support of his various enterprises, their wish for their son to aspire to a greater social status than they could give him is understandable, as well as very common among people of middling ranks.

The association with people of lower rank or degrading manners and conduct can put the social standing of people into question. The most evident example is Evelina's precarious situation with regards to her London relatives. While she *is*, in fact, their social superior, the lack of acknowledgment by her father permits them to treat her as their inferior. By introducing her to the lowly Branghtons, "Madame Duval brings Evelina socially low"<sup>103</sup> and it leads to Evelina's many social embarrassments. Her shame in revealing her place of residence while she is in London with her grandmother points out her humiliation over confessing to such an abode. Living at the right address is extremely important to the fashionable people, and her association with Holborn can only signal her social degradation. Evelina is reluctant to be seen with the Branghtons in the Opera, in case any of her acquaintance sees them together. Some connections are very undesirable, especially when the people concerned are as unmannered and ill-bred as the Branghtons, who do not hesitate to use her name to their advantage, yet demean her for her situation.

Similarly to Evelina's connection to the Branghtons, Sir Clement Willoughby's recommendations suffer by his association with Captain Mirvan, the inappropriate seaman and husband of the extremely proper Mrs. Mirvan. While Sir Clement's opinion of the Captain is far from good, he uses their connection to get unrestricted access to Evelina, who resides under the Captain's roof. In order to satisfy the Captain, Sir Clement becomes his willing companion and collaborator in his practical jokes aimed at Evelina's grandmother. Even though the association with the brutal seaman has a potential to damage his reputation, he considers it worth the price, which is being close to the object of his affections. Despite his admiration of her character and beauty, however, Sir Clement is

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<sup>103</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

unwilling to entertain the idea of marrying Evelina, as he believes their social positions are incompatible; in other words, that Evelina's social status, uncertain as it is for most of the novel, is not good enough for a baronet of his standing.

Similarly, Belfield degrades himself, in his case by becoming a day labourer by choice. Even though he has risen from the middle class and has become a gentleman, his decision to isolate himself and de facto become part of the working class compromises his social status, which accounts for his shock when he is seen by Cecilia. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Belfield is aware how belittling his current situation is he chooses to abandon this simple way of living and returns back to town not long after their unfortunate meeting.

Burney's portrayal of social mobility, going either way, is realistic and thorough. Due to her access to the people of higher social status than hers, she was able to observe not only the most distinguished people in society, but also the people who aspired to become one of the *ton*. Furthermore, her close connection to the professional people and their need for social promotion made her the perfect commentator on the various ways by which people could distinguish themselves, with the view of potentially elevating themselves on the social ladder.

## 5. THE INSTRUMENTS OF SOCIAL STATUS

With the distinction of various social classes, the need arises for instruments which would help distinguish people from different social spheres. Some of these instruments can clearly signal one's class affiliation, while others can prove problematic, as they are often used by people who want to appear socially higher than they are in reality. According to Doody, "the aggressive search for power . . . is the true nature of social life."<sup>104</sup> The search for power is something that all classes have in common; and while the working class is mostly unsuccessful in asserting their claims to any sort of authority, and as such are left from this discussion, middle and upper classes use various instruments to profess their importance and distinction; among those are dress, language, and social conduct.

### 5.1 DRESS

The way people dress is an important identifying mark that shows one's social status; or rather, their financial situation, which is connected to social standing. Burney utilises this tool frequently in her novels, and the characters' dressing habits also help with determining their personalities or current situation—as there is, for instance, a strict dress-code for people in the mourning period.

*Evelina's* Madame Duval wears rich and gay clothes—despite the fact that she has been only recently widowed, she is already out of mourning—to display her elevated social status. Dress is a symbol of social prominence for her, but it also proves to be the tool that is used by other people to degrade her. Upon her first appearance in the novel, the clothes of Madame Duval speak of quality; moreover, the following scene with the newly-returned Captain Mirvan shows the importance Madame Duval takes in dressing lavishly:

C: *You* would much sooner be taken for [Lady Howard's] wash-woman.

D: Her wash-woman, indeed!—Ha, ha, ha!—why you han't no eyes; did you ever see a *wash-woman in such a gown as this?*—besides, I'm *no such mean person*, for I'm *as good as Lady Howard*, and as *rich* too.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>105</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51. My emphasis.

Furthermore, following the tripping “accident” after her introduction to Evelina, Madame Duval is more concerned with her damaged Lyons silk than catching a cold, clearly showing her preference for the fashionable attire than for her health.

“The people in general are well clothed . . . which is a certain proof of their living at ease,”<sup>106</sup> which is certainly true for Madame Duval, who associates good social standing with having money and good clothes. These are qualities most associated with the middling ranks, who, after acquiring money, do not hesitate to spend them on quality things to showcase their financial affluence, and by spending money on expensive clothes or furniture, they show their aspiration for social mobility. Burney emphasises the importance of clothes in the scene of Captain Mirvan’s infamous practical joke on Evelina’s grandmother, in which he stages a fake highway robbery:

Her dress was in such disorder, that I was quite sorry to have her figure exposed to the servants, who all of them, in imitation of her master, hold her in derision . . . 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.<sup>107</sup>

Madame Duval’s preoccupation with clothes is furthermore declared in the scenes following the robbery, in which she expresses her inability to see people without her “curls,” or her unwillingness to borrow a cap from Lady Howard, because it would be too unfashionable for her. Moreover, she complains about her clothes being destroyed: “Why, all my things are spoilt; and, what’s worse, my *sacque*<sup>108</sup> was as good as new. Here’s the second negligee I’ve used in this manner!”<sup>109</sup> Ultimately, Madame Duval’s efforts to indicate her elevated social status by her extravagant clothes are sabotaged, as she is consistently punished for her social presumptions.

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 281.

<sup>107</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150.

<sup>108</sup> A type of gown that was typical for French fashion.

<sup>109</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 155.

Burney furthermore utilises the instrument of dress to show the differences between Evelina and her cousins, the Miss Branghtons, and their perception of social rules. While Evelina, their “country cousin,” is aware of what is the proper dress code for opera, her London relations are ignorant and refuse to listen to Evelina: “. . . well, really, I must own, I should never have supposed that my gown was not good enough for the pit . . . if Miss does not think us *fine enough* for her, why to be sure she may chuse [not to be seen with us] . . . ”<sup>110</sup> When she is forced to accompany her relatives to opera, the remarkable difference between their attire and her own causes her embarrassment, as it attracts general notice and she wished to remain anonymous while in their company. Moreover, the Miss Branghtons tried to show Evelina her place based on her dress during their first meeting. They examined her clothes and made remarks about it being out of fashion and they rudely asked about the cost, which caused Evelina’s further embarrassment, as money is one of the topics not discussed among the high ranking people of the *ton*.

However, there are various other uses of dress; clothing is also utilised by people of genteel or noble birth to proclaim their social superiority. One of the identifying marks of the upper classes was the quality of their clothes. With the rise of the middling ranks, who could afford to spend the same—or in some case, higher—amount of money on clothes, the fashion grew more and more extravagant, especially in the highest circles, as can be observed by reading Burney’s novels.

When Mr. Lovel makes his grand entrance in *Evelina*, the heroine marks his extravagance by saying: “his dress was so foppish, that I really believe he even wished to be stared at; and yet he was very ugly.”<sup>111</sup> Fops, those men with fashion in the forefront of their minds, constituted one group in the polite society. Despite his many protestations to the contrary, dress is, indeed, very important to Lovel, as he uses it to display his social prominence. Captain Mirvan’s exclamation—“dress like a monkey?”<sup>112</sup>—immediately comes to mind in connection to Lovel because of the novel’s concluding scene. Indeed, the association between the fop and the monkey is a good way to show the tendency of upper classes to overdo it

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<sup>110</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 86.

<sup>111</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 30.

<sup>112</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 62.

with regards to their dress. Through the Captain's unguarded mouths and by dressing the animal in the style similar to the fop's and also through Mrs. Selwyn's later biting comments, Burney criticises the people of the *ton* who place so much importance on their clothes, and points out the folly of spending money on extravagant clothing.

The quality of clothing is also important to the libertines and rakes, such as Sir Clement Willoughby and Lord Merton, or to people who use their dress to distinguish themselves from others, like Captain Aresby in *Cecilia*. These characters use clothing to distinguish themselves from others because they lack other means to achieve the distinction. As Paulson appropriately notes, "Sir Clement . . . has nothing to offer but his gentility,"<sup>113</sup> and this comment can be easily transferred to the other listed characters as well. On the contrary, there are characters such as Lord Orville, who do not need to use their clothing to show their superiority, because they have other merits as well.

Clothing also provides welcome topic of conversations between young women in the polite society, as is apparent from the study of the *ton* misses in Burney's second novel. *Cecilia* is much more subtle in her way of addressing the issue of dressing habits; however, even there the luxurious and gay way of dressing signals social prominence and affluence. Clothing is also one of the tools which the Harrels use to mask their near-bankruptcy.

To further support the claim that dress is important with regards to social status, Burney offers a nice word play in one of *Evelina*'s scenes. After lying to Sir Clement about having a dancing partner, and her anxiety to identify him, he boldly asks: ". . . did he address you in a *coat* not worth looking at?"<sup>114</sup> A coat is ambiguous, even in this context; it can either mean a part of men's clothing, or it can refer to the coat of arms, which only the nobility and gentility—the true gentility—had a right to display. By making this comment, Sir Clement not only addresses the issue of dress, but also the issue of social identity. What he is asking, in other words, is: is the person who asked you to dance good enough for you? Moreover, is he better than me? The social implication is apparent in Sir Clement's comment.

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<sup>113</sup> Ronald Paulson, "Evelina: Cinderella and Society," in *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 290.

<sup>114</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42. My emphasis.

## 5.2 LANGUAGE

“Each of [Burney’s] novels relies heavily in the power of speech to reveal character and class”<sup>115</sup> and, therefore, by analysing the speeches of various characters, it is possible to identify some emerging patterns that can be, at least partially, attributed to class distinction. However, it is not only the way the characters speak, but also the topics of conversation they use. By comparing various characters and the way they communicate with other people, the differences between their social standing are revealed. Moreover, the issue concerning the treatment of women is closely connected to the language men use.

Doody comments on “the artificiality of the language with which men address women”<sup>116</sup> which can be found in Burney’s novels. There is no disputing of the fact that the flowery speeches with which women are awarded by their suitors, potential or actual, are very often just empty words, used by men to conform to social conventions. Most of the conversations of the *ton* are in reality meaningless, about nothing important. Furthermore, language is being manipulated by various characters in Burney’s work, who have different goals in mind. Lord Orville “is accustomed to dazzling others through correct use of language”<sup>117</sup> and his language represents the way he presents himself—the proper gentleman. On the contrary, “[Willoughby’s] hyperbolic speech,”<sup>118</sup> as Koehler calls it, is part of the persona he presents to the society. He is, in Koehler’s terms, a parasite; and his social position and high rank allows him to act any way he wants, as demonstrated by his callous and improper behaviour toward Evelina. Language is the instrument of Sir Clement’s power and he knows how to manipulate it to his own advantage.

The language used by both Orville and Willoughby is the language of gallantry. However, the goals they aim to achieve with their speech are very different; while Orville’s rhetoric exudes real gallantry and reflects his moral character and superiority, Sir Clement manipulates words to serve his purpose of seducing Evelina, or at least get as close to seducing her as he can. Nonetheless,

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<sup>115</sup> Claire Harman, *Fanny Burney: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 57.

<sup>116</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43.

<sup>117</sup> Doody, *The Life in the Works*, 44.

<sup>118</sup> Martha J. Koehler, “‘Faultless Monsters’ and Monstrous Egos: The Disruption of the Model Selves in *Evelina*,” in *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laoclos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 164.

language is undeniably an important part of courtship, and, as Rogers aptly concludes, “Orville and Willoughby effortlessly manipulate the social forms of courtship, while Lovel and Smith ludicrously fail.”<sup>119</sup> This is evident from analysing their language as well; while both Orville, the paragon, and Willoughby, the libertine, are skilled in the language of courtesy, Lovel and Smith lack the experience with manipulating language in their favour. While Smith can only hope to imitate the verbal expression of his betters, which explains why his attempts ultimately fail, Lovel, as part of the *ton*, should be able to manoeuvre his speech the same way as Orville or Willoughby.

However, “[Mr. Smith] is forming himself attentively, and has begun to learn the debased language of chivalry that marks the gentleman.”<sup>120</sup> This is true if his speech is analysed. The way he expresses himself, as well as his vocabulary, show his attempts to emulate the language of his betters. Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between his speech and that of Sir Clement Willoughby, which shows Smith’s inability to fully copy the manners, behaviour, and language of the gentility, to which he aspires.

Koehler’s assertions that “the discourse of Smith . . . also exemplified libertine values, albeit in a degraded, even parodic form . . . [and that] in Smith’s discourse, Burney supplies a middle-class parody of the libertine’s desire to separate women from one another”<sup>121</sup> help expose Smith as an impostor in gentility. His social climbing aspirations were acknowledged and explained in the previous chapter; here they are connected to his speech. While Smith can attempt to emulate the language and ways of his social superiors, his failure to do so properly presents him as unsuccessful in his pursuit of social promotion, in his quest to become a real gentleman.

Contrastingly, there is the character of Captain Mirvan, who already belongs to the gentility; however, his language speaks to the contrary. Doody states that “[Captain Mirvan] is a far remove from the debased language of

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<sup>119</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of “Female Difficulties”* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 27-8.

<sup>120</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

<sup>121</sup> Martha J. Koehler, “‘Faultless Monsters’ and Monstrous Egos: The Disruption of the Model Selves in *Evelina*,” in *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laoclos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 160-1.



chivalry employed in the ballroom”<sup>122</sup> and her comment rings true; Captain Mirvan’s speech is definitely unique. Unlike the other genteel and noble characters, the Captain does not mince words and speaks his mind, often even swearing in the company of women. He seeks to constantly argue with someone, despite the fact that arguments in polite company were something to avoid. The Captain’s speech is the same as his behaviour; unprincipled and untamed. His language does not correspond to his social standing, and his speech is something that distinguishes him from the other characters of his rank.

*Cecilia*’s Captain Aresby represents the typical member of the *ton*. Havens appropriately calls him “the jargonist,”<sup>123</sup> as he very frequently mixes his speeches with French. French was a fashionable language to know at Burney’s time; she herself learnt to speak it on her own; and by using so many French words in Aresby’s frankly ridiculous speeches, Burney criticises the society’s pretensions. By combining English and French, the *ton* members sought to distinguish themselves from the other classes, who had only a limited, if any, knowledge of the language. However, with the rise of the prosperous middling ranks and their ability to afford the best of tutors, even the differences in their language knowledge were slowly being erased.

Villars’ language is very distinct from the language of all the other characters in Burney’s novels; his words reflect his extreme moral integrity, and they echo Johnson’s moral principles. It is no mistake that one of the illustrations in *Evelina*’s early editions includes the portrait of Dr Johnson in Villars’ office, where he frequently wrote his correspondence. His verbal expression contrasts with the language of the other characters and serves as the distinguishing mark; furthermore, it reflects Burney’s admiration of Johnson.

The topics of conversations utilised by people from various classes are invariably markers of different social standings. While there were only certain topics that were afforded to people, and especially women, in polite circles, the middle classes do not share this trait, and this shows prominently in Burney’s epistolary debut novel. As Copeland states, “Branghtons . . . all talk about money

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<sup>122</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

<sup>123</sup> See Hilary Havens, “Revisions and Revelations in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* Manuscript,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55(3) (2015): 547.

unconscionably,”<sup>124</sup> and even though it is an appropriate topic for the Branghton men, who are, after all, in trade, the fact that the Branghton sisters also question Evelina about money, especially with regards to her dress, speaks to the differences between the upper ranks and people of middling sorts.

Similarly, there are characters openly discussing money in *Cecilia* as well. Mr. Hobson and Mr. Simkins, and even Mrs. Belfield, indiscriminately and frequently use money as a topic of their conversations, and it is not surprising that all of them belong to the middle class, or lower, as might be the case with Mrs. Belfield. Contrastingly, Mr. Belfield, despite his common origins shared by his mother, is skilled and knowledgeable enough of the genteel ways not to bring up money, especially in the company of high ranking ladies.

Moreover, there is a double standard with regards to speech and gender. While men can say whatever they want, such a trait is undesirable in young ladies, especially in the polite society. However, what is most interesting is specifically the language men use when talking about women. Not only do they often speak condescendingly when discussing young ladies of the *ton*, but the words they use can be classified as that of the language of ownership. In men’s private conversations, women are treated as commodities, as their property, or they are belittled by being called “creatures” or likened to famous characters from the past.

Furthermore, the issue that is worth noting is the women’s inability to be heard. Rogers states that “because women’s wishes were considered unimportant, it was not necessary to listen to them.”<sup>125</sup> Even if women are able to voice their desires, they are disregarded because of their gender. Considering Cecilia, “the heiress [who] possesses social status, independence, and intelligence of mind”<sup>126</sup> and her inability to make people listen to what she is saying speaks about the men’s general tendency to ignore women, regardless of their personal or financial worth, as “affluence gives freedom and power to men, but not to women.”<sup>127</sup>

Similarly to Cecilia, Evelina’s comments and protests are being ignored, especially by her grandmother and vulgar London relatives. Neither of them has

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<sup>124</sup> Edward Copeland, “Money in the Novels of Fanny Burney,” *Studies in the Novel* 8(1) (1976): 26.

<sup>125</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of “Female Difficulties”* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 50.

<sup>126</sup> Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as “Nobody” and the Novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, c1992), 32.

<sup>127</sup> Rogers, *The World of “Female Difficulties,”* 41.

“[the] authority to speak, unless she borrows the authority of her husband who authors her,”<sup>128</sup> or rather, they can speak, but they are not being listened to; and the resulting madness, in Cecilia’s case, is therefore “a symbol of her cultural silencing.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, the madness allows her to speak and, more importantly, to be heard. Only when she is delirious and not in control of her senses, in a way, she is being listened to. Her exclamation “I am married, and no one will listen to me!”<sup>130</sup> supports the claim that it was easy to disregard what women were saying, regardless of their marital status.

Language is definitely an important instrument and useful tool when it comes to distinguishing between classes. The differences between speeches made by the upper classes reflect their superiority, but also their rigid rules of proper social conduct and conversation, while the language of the middle class characters is more relaxed and not so controlled. Burney, who was not only an acute observer of society but also of language, to which she contributed greatly by her innovative usage of words, certainly projected in her novels the variations she noticed while mixing with people from different social spheres.

### 5.3 SOCIAL CONDUCT

The way people behave, whether among their equals or toward their social superiors or inferiors, shows the character of those people. The variety of different fictitious characters allows Burney to point out the various tendencies with respect to conduct that she observed all around her. The following passage deals with the distinct value systems, attitudes and accomplishments as pertaining not only to various social classes, but also to people of the same social sphere.

The values traditionally connected to the people of highest social ranks are honour, moral integrity, and benevolence toward those below them. While it was imperative that the social elite act as moral guide to the lower classes, who looked up to their social superiors, the rules were not always followed by all of nobility and gentry; the discrepancies between social status and behaviour are discussed in the next chapter. However, despite that fact that Burney was criticising the idea of

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<sup>128</sup> Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as “Nobody” and the Novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, c1992), 48.

<sup>129</sup> Meghan Jordan, “Madness and Matrimony in Frances Burney’s Cecilia,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55(3) (2015): 575.

<sup>130</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 933.

paragons as depicted by Richardson,<sup>131</sup> the moral superiority of some of her characters, like Lord Orville, is what distinguishes them from the rest of the *ton*.

Orville embodies the perfect gentleman, with all the values connected to one of his rank. Mrs. Selwyn's remark: "Certainly . . . there must have been some mistake in the birth of that young man; he was, undoubtedly, designed for the last age; for he is really polite!"<sup>132</sup> rings true, especially if Orville is compared to the other characters of his rank. Even though he is still young, his manners are comparable to those of Villars and reminiscent of the previous era. Moreover, his politeness extends not only to his equals, but also to his social inferiors:

In all ranks and all stations in life, how strangely do characters and manners differ! Lord Orville, with politeness which *knows no intermission*, and *makes no distinction*, as is unassuming and modest as if he had never mixed with the great, and was totally ignorant of every qualification he possesses; this other Lord, though *lavish of compliments and fine speeches*, seems to me an *entire stranger to real good-breeding*; whoever strikes his fancy, engrosses his whole attention. He is forward and bold; has an air of haughtiness towards men, and a look of libertinism towards women; and his conscious quality seems to have given him a freedom in his way of speaking to either sex, that is very little short of rudeness.<sup>133</sup>

The marked contrast between Lord Orville and Lord Merton provides evidence for the claim that not all nobles behaved according to the rules of conduct and decorum. While Orville's behaviour does not differ even when he interacts with lower classes, there is a significant difference in Lord Merton's behaviour when those he considers beneath him are concerned. His superior attitude allows no signs of deference, even to women, despite the rules of politeness. Merton's belief in his own self-importance, tied to his high rank, is evident in Coverley's remark that "[his] Lordship never bows at all."<sup>134</sup> Lord Merton's superior attitude undeniably confirms Doody's view that "what one social identity possesses is held at the expense of others,"<sup>135</sup> because in order to establish Merton's own

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<sup>131</sup> See Martha J. Koehler, *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laclos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 167.

<sup>132</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 283.

<sup>133</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 114-115. My emphasis.

<sup>134</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 291.

<sup>135</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58-9.

prominence, someone who is lower on the social level is needed, so the hierarchy of precedence can be established. The passage also emphasises the link between social status and speech, which is, while still in accordance with the general rules of conduct, frequently artificial and empty; it furthermore points out the potential of misuse of language to suit one's purposes, and the possible between one's speech and his conduct. Language, despite being a great tool of social prominence, with its "fine speeches and lavish compliments," does not necessarily signal a good character.

Sir Clement's behaviour toward Evelina, originating from her uncertain social standing, was already remarked upon; however, he is not the only character who judges her for her obscure origins. Orville's sister, Lady Louisa, embodies the standard society lady; she is prone to affectation, she is not truly interested in anything, and her conversation is tiresome. In her behaviour toward her social inferiors, she mirrors Lord Merton; before Evelina's true social status is revealed, Lady Louisa completely overlooks her, even going as far as ignoring her presence in the room. However, after being informed of the impending marriage between her brother and the heroine, as well as being told of Evelina's real circumstances, her conduct dramatically changes.

Similarly, Mrs. Beaumont's attitude toward Evelina is reversed after her parentage becomes known. Despite her protestations to the contrary, Evelina's merit was not, in fact, enough for Mrs. Beaumont's regard. While she was polite to her guest, it was because she felt indebted to Mrs. Selwyn and because of her general politeness. Her preoccupation with bloodlines and social affluence was very much evident in her conduct, which is acknowledged in her speech as well:

My Lord . . . the young lady's rank in life,—your Lordship's recommendation,— or her own merit, would *any one of them* have been sufficient to have entitled her to my regard . . . though, had I been sooner made *acquainted with her family*, I should, doubtless, have better known how to have secured . . . [the] respect in my house which is *so much her due*.<sup>136</sup>

Lord Orville, who does not take one's rank as their only recommendation, is the only character of being able to look past it, which shows the superiority of his moral integrity. The other character's sudden change of behaviour toward Evelina

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<sup>136</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 381. My emphasis.

emphasises the hypocrisy of the upper classes, with their insistence of pedigree, as it favours disreputable characters like Merton, but disregards well-intentioned and deserving people like Evelina.

*Cecilia* is full of instances of supposed social superiority. Mr. Delvile's unwillingness to visit Cecilia in Harrel's house and his refusal to assist Arnott, even in a small way, after Harrel's suicide, they all speak to his sense of social prominence. Moreover, even the disbelief of Mrs. Harrel upon being placed in the company of men such as Hobson and Simpkins speaks to the attitude of higher ranking people toward those who are on a lower social level, regardless of their other circumstances.

Furthermore, Delvile's treatment of Cecilia, a young lady of excellent character and great wealth, who has many accomplishments to recommend her, exposes the presumed inequality based on their social positions. Like Evelina, Cecilia is treated as inferior on the sole bases of her birth. However, excluding Albany, who tries to repent for his past actions, Cecilia is the only character who is seen actively helping other people. Despite the expectation of benevolence among nobles, it is Cecilia, whose family only just reached genteel status, who is portrayed in liberal acts of charity. The other characters' treatment of the poor, such as Harrel's outright dismissal of Mrs. Hill and her claims, or Monckton's manipulation of Miss Bennet, his wife's poor companion, provide contrast for Cecilia's generosity and superiority of character.

Social decorum is often exploited by people like Sir Clement Willoughby, whose "clever manipulations of manners . . . and his unscrupulous exploitation of [Evelina's] inexperience,"<sup>137</sup> however deplorable, are still, for the most part, in line with the social rules. He is skilled at avoiding detection; if he violates a rule, he does in out of the public eye. Far more dangerous are the manipulations of Monckton, who uses his close connection to Cecilia, as well as his position as her unofficial guide and confidante, to promote his hidden agenda. Despite being a gentleman, Monckton clearly shows signs typically associated with unscrupulous and aggressive people of middle class: greed and exploitation. His behaviour, especially in his underhanded attempts to stop Cecilia's connection to the Delviles, is far from being socially acceptable. However, Monckton is prepared to

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<sup>137</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of "Female Difficulties"* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 30.

sacrifice his character in order to accommodate his wishes. Similarly, though, to the characters who have aspired to social promotion, he is punished for his abandonment of the gentleman values; not only does he lose Cecilia to his opponent, but he also loses her good opinion following the revelation of his manipulations.

There is a marked difference between the highest rank and people of middling orders with regards to their attitude toward life. While the nobles and genteel people understand the necessity to keep up appearances, which governs their everyday life, the middle class people, who are aware of their need to work in order to gain money, are in comparison much more reserved on the subject. Even though some successful traders and merchants advertise their financial affluence by spending money on external signs of prosperity, such as expensive clothing, furniture and houses of good address, it is certainly not the case for all middle class people, as witnessed by Branghton's unwillingness to spend so much money on entertainment.

The contrast between Branghton's shock over the ticket prices and Lovel's eager admission that he goes to the theatre "merely . . . to meet [his] friends, and shew [sic] that [he] is alive"<sup>138</sup> is startling, yet it shows the two distinct ways of living. The reluctance to part with money is typical of the middle class, while the readiness to unnecessarily spend one's funds nicely sums the attitude of the aristocracy and gentility, which is based on inherited property and wealth. Having to earn one's fortune makes one appreciate it, and having inherited money makes one more likely to squander it.

However, the difference between the social elite and the social middle is not only visible in their attitude toward financial matters, but also in their attitude toward education. While it is unnecessary for the middle class people to have a useful knowledge of some trade or profession, which could potentially lead to their social promotion, the education of the members of the ton is focused on the study of classics, history, and foreign languages. Moreover, because women were unlikely to receive any kind of formal education, they were more focused on obtaining what Straub calls "genteel female employments: needlework and the

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<sup>138</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 82.

accomplishments,”<sup>139</sup> which consisted of singing, playing musical instrument, the knowledge of polite conversation and proper conduct in society. These accomplishments stand in the stark contrast to the middle class Branghtons sisters, who do not possess any, and they spend their time looking out of the shop’s window, because “some very genteel people pass by [their] shop sometimes.”<sup>140</sup> This not only attests to the lack of accomplishments and acceptable pastime activities, but also to their unfitness for any useful occupation.

The way people behave is undoubtedly connected to the issue of how men treat women. This issue was touched in one of the previous chapters, but it is appropriate to mention it here as well. Shaffer comes to the conclusion that women are inevitably dependent on other people, simply because they are women.<sup>141</sup> Burney demonstrates this in Cecilia’s story; despite being financially settled, she lacks the means to be truly independent. Her choices are constantly being questioned, no matter how small they are. The fact that her uncle felt the need to assign her not one, but three guardians speaks to the general tendency to underestimate women in Burney’s time. As a woman, Cecilia and her opinions are not being taken seriously.

Similarly, Evelina is portrayed as a helpless woman, unable to protect herself; and as such, she needs someone to protect and guide her. The idea of having a male mentor is something taken from Burney’s own life; she was led not only by her father’s advice, but also that of her Daddy Crisp, and later even Dr Johnson’s. Mentors are important parts of Burney’s novels; however, as the author realised and projected into her work, they are not always right. Shaffer’s conclusion that “Evelina is able to determine for herself how to act . . . [and furthermore], is able to act morally *only* when departing from the advice of male mentors”<sup>142</sup> is certainly true. Due to the distance between her and Villars, and accounting for the time it took to them to receive and letter and send a reply, Evelina often had to act before she could be guided by her Villars’ advice, and she was forced to start thinking and acting for herself. In very much the same way,

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<sup>139</sup> See Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 87.

<sup>140</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 177.

<sup>141</sup> See Julia Shaffer, “Empowering Women in the Marriage Plot: The Novels of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen,” *Criticism* 34(1) (1992): 41.

<sup>142</sup> Shaffer, “Empowering Women in the Marriage Plot,” 59. My emphasis.



Cecilia is compelled to depend only on herself, as her guardians were unwilling and, frankly, incompetent, to help her on many occasions.

Social conduct is undoubtedly connected to social status, as it helps distinguish between characters who behave according to the rules from those who break the social conventions. Very frequently, one's social position does not correspond to one's behaviour, creating discrepancies between social status and conduct, which is discussed in more details in the last chapter of this thesis.

## 6. DISCREPANCY BETWEEN SOCIAL STATUS AND CONDUCT

There are plenty of instances in both *Evelina* and *Cecilia* in which the conduct of characters does not correspond to the expectations accorded to their social status. There are noble characters who behave dishonourably, gentlemen who treat people disrespectfully, or people from middle class who affect to act as upper class people. In some cases, the characters hide their misgivings and disagreeable nature from the society, but ultimately their true colours are revealed. While this is easier to do in *Cecilia*, in which the author has the narrative authority to inform us of the true nature of her fictional characters, she uses numerous strategies in her epistolary debut novel *Evelina*. The ways in which the characters deviate from the expectations are discussed separately with regards to various criteria.

### 6.1 SOCIAL MASKS

Social mask is a hypernym for various aspects connected to the social lives of *ton* people. The most obvious one refers to the way people behave in public, which reflects their public persona, or social persona, which can greatly differ from their true character. Social persona, therefore, does not necessarily correspond to the person's intentions and goals and this frequently contributes to the confusion of Burney's naive characters. Social mask reflects the cultivation and upbringing of people; therefore, there is a marked difference between the noble and genteel people of the town, and those who has spent most of their lives in the countryside.

“These people in high life have too much presence of mind . . . to *seem* disconcerted, or out of humour, however they may feel. . . ”<sup>143</sup> People hide behind their social masks, as it allows them to conceal their feelings, and at times, their true selves. Sir Clement Willoughby's public persona of a proper gentleman disguises his unscrupulous character and underhanded tendencies. Lord Orville's overwhelming correctness is also a social mask, the face he shows to the public; however, because of the form of the novel, it is impossible to confirm if his public persona corresponds to his private self. Furthermore, the way Mr. Delvile presents himself to other people—as a distinguished and reputable man of high rank—hides his insecurities regarding his place in the world.

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<sup>143</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33.

Many characters in Burney's novels feel the need to conceal their true natures behind a social mask; however, there are those who do not have—or are unable to have—a public persona just yet. The heroine of *Evelina* is one of those people, especially after she first comes to London. Evelina is the complete opposite of the people who have cultivated their social selves for years in order to perfect their public image; “[she] has no social mask, so her reactions are instantly visible,”<sup>144</sup> which her constant blushes attest to. Her sheltered background and inexperience in the sophisticated ways of the young ladies and misses of the ton are accountable for that. Evelina, still mostly ignorant of the ways of polite society, is a unique occurrence between the fashionable sophisticates; she is unable to hide her feelings, especially when she feels ashamed, and her flaming cheeks betray her current state of mind on numerous occasions.

However, Evelina's inability to display social distance from emotions does not mean she is incapable of deceit. The obvious example is the scene in which she lies to the unrelenting Sir Clement about being engaged in order to avoid dancing with him comes to mind. In her letter to her guardian, Mr. Villars, Evelina even acknowledges the wrongness of her conduct; nevertheless, she acts against her better judgment and conscience because she feels the need to discourage Sir Clement's unwelcome attentions with an invention of a dancing partner. Sir Clement, however, is able to swiftly turn the situation with his clever manipulations. Sir Clement is an ultimate rake, and he is well-versed not only with the ways of society, but also in the ambiguity of courtly language which he uses to serve his nefarious purposes. Evelina, embarrassed both by her deception and also by the attentions of a complete stranger, is still unable to put on a social face of supposed indifference: she does not have any; instead, when her deceit is discovered, she bursts into tears.

The lack of social polish, as well as the absence of social mask, can be attributed to two aspects of Evelina's life: firstly, to having lived in relative retirement before coming to London, and secondly, to not having a mother. As the letters at the beginning of the novel indicate, Evelina is a rustic, and, unlike the latter Cecilia, she is wholly unused to society and the high life of London. Her inexperience becomes glaringly apparent when Evelina attends her first ball; she

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<sup>144</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60.

unintentionally insults Mr. Lovel, her would-be dancing partner, because she does not know how to behave properly at such assemblies. While she refuses to dance with Mr. Lovel, she consents to dance with the yet unknown Lord Orville. Consequently, her ignorance of social etiquette leads to her embarrassment when she is confronted by the foppish Mr. Lovel. As with Sir Clement and her deception, Evelina is now “punished” for her inexperience as well.

The concept of growing up without a mother is nothing new; motherless daughters are a common occurrence in the eighteenth century fiction. Greenfield studies the relevance of mothers and comes to an important conclusion that “the family and social order collapse without the mother [and] the novels prove her fundamental importance.”<sup>145</sup> The significance of Evelina’s mother is slowly revealed in the novel. Without Caroline—without the letter she leaves for Sir John, and more importantly, without Evelina’s resemblance to her deceased mother—Evelina has no way to convince Sir John Belmont that she is his real daughter; and Evelina needs to be acknowledged by her father because her current situation—“a form of social silence,”<sup>146</sup> as Cutting-Gray calls it—“makes her vulnerable to sexual attacks,”<sup>147</sup> as witnessed by Sir Clement’s, and latter Lord Merton’s, attempts at taking liberties with Evelina.

Despite Caroline’s importance in the process of Evelina’s legitimisation, she also represents the reason for the father-daughter separation. Her last wish expressed to Villars—to keep Evelina away from Sir John until their marriage is acknowledged—along with Villars’ ready acceptance and submission to her conditions, enables Dame Green’s deception. Moreover, Caroline’s early demise is partially to blame for Evelina’s ignorance concerning social etiquette. It is a mother’s duty to educate her daughter in the society’s ways before she enters it, and while Caroline’s death prevents her in doing so, she leaves Evelina with a companion wholly unequipped to do it himself. Her lack of suitable choices—her mother being generally acknowledged as being an improper companion to a young lady, with good reasons to support this conclusion—excuses her selection, but the point that Evelina is, in consequence of her mother’s actions and

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<sup>145</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>146</sup> Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as “Nobody” and the Novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, c1992), 12.

<sup>147</sup> Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters*, 41.

decisions, left without any social polish and with hardly any knowledge of the social etiquette, however unnecessary it might have been in her life prior to her excursion to London, still stands.

Evelina's ignorance and naivety is, nonetheless, what distinguishes her from the other *ton* ladies and misses. While she is cast into several difficult situations because of her unfamiliarity with social decorum and protocols, she manages to charm Lord Orville, who, despite his high rank and her lack of it, creates an attachment which ultimately ends in marriage. His willingness to connect himself with a girl of still-obscure origins, despite "the preference of nobles . . . for wives from their own social level,"<sup>148</sup> stands in stark contrast to Sir Clement, who only seeks to seduce Evelina, as he is unsure of his interest in matrimony, especially to a girl "[whose] only dowry is her beauty."<sup>149</sup> Orville not only shows his superiority of conduct, but also the prominence of his intelligence, when he is able to overlook Evelina's supposed deficiencies of birth.

Cecilia, in contrast to the naive heroine of *Evelina*, does not completely lack the social polish. Like Evelina, Cecilia has "passed her time in retirement, but not in obscurity,"<sup>150</sup> but she has an undeniable advantage over Burney's earlier heroine. Cecilia has mixed with the society in the country, and although she is taken by surprise by the assembled company and its number shortly after her arrival to London in the Harrels' house, her "native dignity of mind . . . enabled her in a short time to conquer her surprise, and recover her composure."<sup>151</sup> Unlike Evelina, Cecilia is able to control her emotions in society most of the time, which works to her advantage while navigating the *ton*; however, both of them are still comparably 'green' with regards to the rules and ways of the polite society and at an disadvantage from the rest of the *ton*.

"Fashionable people . . . participate in life not as themselves, but . . . as signs and referents of something else,"<sup>152</sup> which is also a sort of a mask that the social elite must wear: a mask of their cultural inheritance and identity. By being

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<sup>148</sup> William Doyle, *Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>149</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 347

<sup>150</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22.

<sup>151</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 22.

<sup>152</sup> Julie Parks, "Pains and Pleasures of the Automaton: Frances Burney's Mechanics of Coming Out," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40(1) (2006): 37.

born into prominent families, they have a duty to maintain and continue their family's tradition, which puts further constraints on their behaviour. The expectations placed on Mortimer not only by his father, but also by his mother, who "had invested in her son her desire for some kind of power,"<sup>153</sup> greatly restrict his conduct, and despite his great social rank, he lacks the independence in very much the same way as Cecilia.

While the social masks are necessary instruments for the high ranking people, as they constitute their social identities and their adherence to the rules of decorum, there are times when "disguises . . . release [them] from the normal constraints of their social roles."<sup>154</sup> One of these instances is connected to the masquerade; and Burney, being a great observer of society, does not fail to include a masquerade in her second novel as a tool of social critique. As the *ton* people shed their social masks and put on their costumes, Burney provides valuable commentary on how high ranking people behave when they are not constricted by the strict social decorum.

The excuse to don costumes that the masquerade provides allows the social elite the freedom of action which their everyday lives lacks. In order to maintain their good reputations, which could greatly influence their social standing, they have to obey the rules of society, which means they are not free to act however they wish. The masquerade changes that; while in costumes, they are able to act as they please, regardless of the rules and correctness of their behaviour. Thaddeus brings attention to the recklessness of Harrel in organising their masquerade.<sup>155</sup> There are simply no rules, no way for people to be identified, which has a potential to end up in a disaster.

The freedom of behaviour afforded by masquerades is evident from the moment Cecilia becomes part of it. While other people are wearing costumes, she has none to hide behind; she is wearing a common dress, which makes her stand out. The masqueraders, concealed behind their masks, surprise Cecilia with "the abruptness with which [they] approached her, and the freedom with which they

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<sup>153</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, "'Deadly Snares': Female Rivalry, Gender Ideology, and Eighteenth-Century Women Writers," *Studies in Literary Imagination* 47(2) (2014): 10.

<sup>154</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of "Female Difficulties"* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 53.

<sup>155</sup> See Janice Farrar Thaddeus, *Frances Burney: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 85.

looked at or addressed her,”<sup>156</sup> which confirms the claim that the behaviour of people changes when they are not “themselves,” when they are free from their public personas. In their costumes, they are not hindered by the social conventions or by the rules of proper conduct.

“The masquerading men can express their inner natures and feelings as they like without being held to account, because they are not recognized,”<sup>157</sup> which nicely describes the Devil. Later identified as Monckton, the Devil’s aim is to keep all Cecilia’s potential suitors away from her. While this is his general intention and not limited only to the masquerade, his inability to act directly because of the social conventions is highlighted by the freedom of action afforded to him by his disguise. While in his costume, he does not have to hide his ruthlessness, which he takes advantage of at the masquerade. However, his interference with Cecilia’s entertainment is opposed by her three rescuers<sup>158</sup>, who unsuccessfully try to rid Cecilia of her passionate admirer from hell. As it turns out, the only person capable of rescuing Cecilia is Mr. Briggs, as he is the only one unconcerned with conventions.

Mr. Briggs’ costume reflects not only his inferior social position, but also his stinginess. His choice of costume was, for the most part, motivated by economy; and while he complains he was exploited, his mask came very cheap, especially in comparison to some of the elaborate costumes of the *ton* people. Briggs’ behaviour at the masquerade, as well as his costume, does not conceal his lowly origins, because he has no wish to hide them; he does not attempt to imitate the social elite, because he has no aspiration to join their ranks. Briggs acts as he normally does; he has no need for a social mask, and he is possibly the only character in both *Evelina* and *Cecilia* who does not possess, nor does he acquire, a social persona. He is satisfied with his position in the world, and has no wish to change it. Despite his obnoxiousness and insensitive behaviour toward Cecilia at

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<sup>156</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106.

<sup>157</sup> Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of “Female Difficulties”* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 53.

<sup>158</sup> The number of Cecilia’s rescuers at the masquerade corresponds to the number of guardians assigned to her by her uncle. This leads to the question whether the number is simply accidental, or significant. Is Burney saying that young ladies need *three* people to look after them, to mentor them? Considering the number of *Evelina*’s “guides” and mentors—Rev. Mr. Villars, Mrs. Mirvan, and eventually Lord Orville—the answer to that question appears to be positive.

times, he is to be admired as one of the most straightforward characters in Burney's fiction.

The costumes people choose can be very telling as to the people's social status. The well-known idiom stating that "the devil is in the details" certainly proves to be true in the masquerade scene, especially with respect to Belfield and Morrice. While the young lawyer does not aspire to a higher social rank than he already occupies, and he only means to promote his professional aspirations by mixing with his social superiors, Belfield's social position has changed dramatically; and this difference projects also in their costumes, or rather, their accessories. While a lance, consisting of "an old *sword* fastened to a slim cane,"<sup>159</sup> is part of Belfield's Don Quixote costume, Morrice opted to accompany his Harlequin costume with a *wooden* sword. The difference in the material of the swords is crucial; the ability to wear swords in public was notoriously exclusive only for the nobility in the past times. While Belfield's origins leave much to be desired, his social promotion to the ranks of gentility allows him to have an actual sword as part of his disguise. On the contrary, the middle-ranking Morrice has to be satisfied with a wooden replica, as he does not belong, nor does he aspire, to the social elite.

"Do you know me? – Not . . . by your *appearance*, I own!"<sup>160</sup> The masquerade is the perfect place to reveal people's true selves. It provides people with the opportunities to arrange for an assignation, as witnessed by Cecilia and Mortimer, the yet-unidentified white domino, or the author with an excuse to point out what she dislikes in the *ton*: the lack of common sense, the ignorance of young ladies, and the hypocrisy of the high ranks. The masquerade is the place where entertainment mixes with freedom of action. As Cecilia notes, wearing the masks do not make people behave in accordance to their costume. Masks are, therefore, only a way to liberate people from the oppressive rules of decorum they normally have to adhere to.

The behaviour of the characters at the masquerade, as well as their choice of costume, exposes their true characters, which they normally hide under their social personas. The most glaring example of that is when a young man, in a mask

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<sup>159</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108. My emphasis.

<sup>160</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 110.



of an old woman, appears, and his costume and antics are the cause of great entertainment for the other masqueraders. This seemingly inconsequential scene brings to attention one important element which Burney often emphasises in her fiction: aging. The amusement and pleasure the young man's costume brings shows the general tendency to look at aging, and consequently old people, with disdain and ridicule. Burney's treatment of Madame Duval, who refuses to conform to the rules of how people of certain age should act, along with the prominence of the old women's race, and additionally, this later masquerade scene, they all point out to the society's attitude toward old age. Mortimer Delvile's comment that "while we all desire to live long, we have all a horror of being old"<sup>161</sup> nicely sums up the general stance regarding the aging process. Because people are afraid of becoming old, and hence inconsequential, they treat old people with derision and contempt.

## 6.2 DISSIPATION

Dissipated characters of high rank are strewn all throughout Burney's novels. Despite the expectations of respectability and highly moral conduct, which upper classes are supposed to possess, it is often quite the opposite. Burney does not shy from portraying characters that deviate from the social expectations imposed upon them by their social status, be it merited by birth or other accomplishments. The variability and wide scale of her characters show Burney's awareness of different types of people in the society she lived in, and her familiarity with the 'good' as well as the "bad."

One of the ways characters defy the society notions of their conduct is dissipation. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines dissipation as "wasteful expenditure . . . [and] intemperate living, especially excessive drinking"<sup>162</sup> and being "extravagant or dissolute in the pursuit of pleasure."<sup>163</sup> These definitions undeniably capture the predispositions of some of Burney's fictional characters and imply the corruption of the high ranks as portrayed by the author.

*Evelina*'s Lord Merton and his extravagant friend Jack Coverley are both dissipated characters who strive to amuse themselves at all costs. Their favourite

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<sup>161</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114.

<sup>162</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dissipation> Accessed 15 March 2020.

<sup>163</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dissipate> Accessed 15 March 2020.

activity is wagering, and one of their wagers results in one of the most violent episodes on the novel, the old women's race. In a way, this could also be considered gambling, because there is money involved in the result. Among other things, this episode also shows Orville as a character who does not condone gambling – in fact, he is “no friend to gaming”<sup>164</sup> – but it also shows him as their moral superior. Unlike the suggestions of others, his proposition that “the money should be his due, who . . . should bring the worthiest object with whom to share it,”<sup>165</sup> which he makes even though he knows it will not be accepted, runs deep and reflects his moral integrity. Nonetheless, when the time for the actual race comes, Orville does not try to stop it, which also shows that he will not involve himself in the matters of others, no matter how outrageous or violent, because while he does not condone gambling and wagering, he still respects the rights of others to do so.

However, as Straub comments, “Orville focuses only on the question of gambling, and gambling is the only issue on which he can influence the players.”<sup>166</sup> Unable to influence the players to stop their ridiculous wager, Orville, and even Evelina, become implicated in the objectionable race, as if they were active participant in the wager. Their inability to act and stop the deplorable actions of the dissipated rakes goes back to the strict rules of conduct connected to wagering, as well as the general rules of society, which their interference in the matter would break.

Dissipation and gambling go hand in hand, as “gambling was in fact second only to drinking as a London amusement,”<sup>167</sup> and they also align in Mr. Harrel and Sir Robert Floyer in *Cecilia*. From the beginning of Cecilia's stay in the Harrel household, she is aware of Mr. Harrel frequent late absences from home, and of his association with the disagreeable Baronet. Cecilia later discovers just how bad things are, especially after Mr. Harrel asks her for a loan and involves her in dealing with a Jew. Mr. Harrel is the perfect example of a dissipated character: he lives beyond his means, gambles with money he does not

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<sup>164</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 295.

<sup>165</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 292.

<sup>166</sup> Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 50.

<sup>167</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 56.

have, and instead of incorporating some economy in his spending, he does the opposite. Despite not having money to pay his workers, he makes plans for future improvement of his house or Violet Bank, their villa outside of London, creating “a chain of escalating claims,”<sup>168</sup> which leads to his exploitation of lower classes. Cecilia, not blind to Harrel’s vices and misgivings, does not approve of this, and her dislike of Sir Robert grows when she realises he does nothing to stop his supposed friend’s decline into bankruptcy.

The long-anticipated scheme between Harrel and Floyer is at last revealed to the readers in Harrel’s letter in Book V, in which Cecilia finds out she has been “sold out” as if she were an object and not a human being. Harrel, in a desperate need for money, borrowed some from Sir Robert, to whom he promised unrestricted access to the heiress who was coming to reside under his roof. Neither of them counted on Cecilia’s dislike of the Baronet, and her refusal to be connected to him in any way, much less marriage. This shows both men’s condescension and their presumed superiority over women, because they believed the deal sealed by their mutual agreement upon the match.

Burgess’s statement that “as Burney’s novels recognize and lament, credit depended largely on the fashionable appearance of the debtor”<sup>169</sup> certainly rings true when one considers Harrel’s behaviour. His extravagant lifestyle and his need to maintain it to preserve his social status and to appear prosperous was mentioned before; and Burgess’ claim concerning credit further develops the analysis of Harrel’s conduct. This claim is supported by Harrel’s ability to find people who would extend his credit based on the appearance of his solvency is acknowledged by the frank Mr. Hobson and overly deferential Mr. Simpkins.

Dissipation and high-ranking men go hand in hand. They are men of leisure, with nothing to occupy their time but pursuing their own pleasure. Men of business, such as Mr. Briggs or even Mr. Hobson, are in contrast to these leisured men; their need for occupation assigns them to a lower social position, the middle class, even though they might affect to have the habits of upper class people. However, it also keeps them from risking their money in gambling and similar pursuits; they are much more careful with their possessions than the upper class.

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<sup>168</sup> Miranda J. Burgess, “Courting Ruin: The Economic Romances of Frances Burney,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (1995): 139.

<sup>169</sup> Burgess, “Courting Ruin,” 139.

Harrel's social position proves to be the source of his dissipation. In his last letter for his wife, Mr. Arnott and Cecilia, he states: "Idleness has been my destruction; the want of something to do led me into all evil!"<sup>170</sup> Being a gentleman, he has lacked a useful occupation, and he has fallen into the bad ways of aristocracy and gentry. Supported by his so-called friends, he has gambled almost every night, with a view of replacing his losses by doubling his stakes. Ultimately, his intemperate living has led to his loss of independence, as he became reliant on other people, such as Floyer, Arnott, or Cecilia. The idleness he refers to has literally become his destruction, along with his acquisition of debts of honour—the only debts that upper classes and aristocracy never failed to settle promptly—which he had no way of repaying, because while "with tolerable ease, he could forget accounts innumerable with his tradesmen, one neglected *debt of honour* rendered his existence insupportable!"<sup>171</sup> For a gentleman, it is preferable to commit suicide than sully their honour – or be considered dishonourable.

"A bad character taints even illustrious rank,"<sup>172</sup> as witnessed in the character of Lord Merton, whose shortcomings are announced in Evelina's letter to Villars: this "confirmed libertine . . . was . . . a nobleman who is but lately come to his title, though he has already dissipated more than half his fortune; a man of most licentious character [whose] companions consisted chiefly of gamblers and jockeys, and [who] among women . . . was rarely admitted."<sup>173</sup> Men with bad reputation were not admitted to some places in polite society; in a way, they were excluded from it. In order to assert back his independence—or ability to move freely in polite society—Lord Merton needs to restore his good name, and he plans to do that by marrying Lady Louisa Larpen, Lord Orville's sister.

Doody comments on Lord Merton being able to "barely sustain the affectation of gallantry through the courtship, [while] *forcing* himself to wed . . . Lady Louisa."<sup>174</sup> This assertion shows not only Lord Merton's indifference toward his chosen bride, but also his dislike of the institution of matrimony. He

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<sup>170</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 431.

<sup>171</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 433.

<sup>172</sup> David Oakleaf, "The Name of the Father: Social Identity and the Ambition of *Evelina*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3(4) (1991): 348.

<sup>173</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 276.

<sup>174</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55. My emphasis.

has to *force* himself into marriage, and he is only doing it to restore, at least partially, his reputation. His scheme is most likely going to work, which is confirmed by Mr. Ridgeway: “he may now be admitted any where, for he is going to *reform*.”<sup>175</sup> After their marriage, Lord Merton will be accepted by polite society once again, despite his bad habits and bad reputation. This connection is, however, opposed by Lord Orville, who does not want his sister to be tied to a libertine. Despite his desire to “reform,” Lord Merton has not changed his way; even though his marriage is imminent, he is still in pursuit of Evelina. Even though they have not been formally introduced, he addressed himself freely to her, talked to her in a very familiar manner, and while he ignores her while in company of other people, he takes liberties with her when they are alone.

Both Mr. Harrel and Lord Merton are dissipated gamblers, and they place “little value . . . upon domestic happiness,”<sup>176</sup> which shows in Harrel’s attitude to his wife and Lord Merton’s behaviour toward Evelina and even Lady Louisa. However, they differ in other ways, their social status being one of them. Lord Merton is a titled man and belongs to the nobility, while Mr. Harrel is a mere gentleman, belonging to the gentry. Nevertheless, the overindulgent pursuit of pleasure is more easily forgivable in aristocratic men, despite the fact that they often have many people dependent on them for their livelihood. The way the “reformation” of Lord Merton after his marriage is seen as inevitable and the way Harrel’s actions are condemned after his death show this disparity. Some men of leisure are, indeed, men of more leisure than others.

Mr. Harrel and Lord Merton are the most visible examples of dissipation in these two novels, but there are also other characters that fit the description in some ways or other. *Cecilia*’s Mr. Lovel, the fop who is, in a way, involved in Merton and Coverley’s wager, is also a dissipated character, although in a different way. He is very extravagant, something that is apparent from the way he dresses, as discussed in the previous chapter. He does so in order to fit in with the high society. However, his extravagance runs deeper than his clothing. His manners and demeanour is extraordinary as well, which shows in the episode in the opera, where he does only with the intention of being seen. Such a waste of

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<sup>175</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 276.

<sup>176</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33.

money, with the aim to keep up social appearances, can only be condemned as extravagant and reckless, and this is pointed out by the inappropriate Captain.

However, dissipation is not only connected to the people of highest ranks. Following the rumours about Cecilia's marriage, she is contacted by a lawyer of Mr. Eggleston, a cousin of the Dean's wife, and as such, "the next heir to [the late Dean's] estate . . . if [Cecilia] dies without children, or changes [her] name when [she] marries."<sup>177</sup> He fears imposition from Cecilia—that she keeps using the estate's profits, despite the fact that her husband did not take her name upon their marriage. His worry is understandable, as it becomes apparent that he is experiencing some financial difficulties, brought about by the dissipation of his sons. While Cecilia fears the forcible seizure of the estate, which would leave her without a home and means to provide for herself until Mortimer comes back, Mr. Eggleston's uncertainty about his ability to claim the much needed income from the estate is more acute. As a "man of large family, the sons of which, who were *extravagant* and *dissipated*, had much impaired fortune by prevailing with him to pay their debts, and much distressed him in his affairs by successfully teasing him for money,"<sup>178</sup> the prospect of regular, not insignificant income much appeals to him, and it is not surprising that he is eager to seize the estate in case Cecilia does not adhere to the condition in the Dean's will.

*Cecilia's* Monckton is also a dissipated character who is prepared to use whatever means necessary to accommodate his goals. Tied by the marital bonds to an old woman, for whose early demise he prays, he needs to use underhanded tactics to prevent any Cecilia's potential match, so she is free for the taking after his wife's death. He does not shy from spreading incorrect information, sharing secrets revealed in confidence, or persuading other people to do his dirty work for him, as was the case with his wife's companion, Miss Bennet. He would do anything "to have saved [Cecilia] from a connection [he] never thought equal to [her] merit"<sup>179</sup> and to preserve Cecilia's fortune for his future disposal. Monckton is one of the characters who treat women abominably; while he is cruel and unfeeling to his wife, he treats Cecilia as a property to be appropriated by him.

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<sup>177</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 854.

<sup>178</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 861. My emphasis.

<sup>179</sup> Burney, *Cecilia*, 929.

Although he likes her character and finds her attractive, it is apparent that the main draw is, in fact, her fortune.

Last, but definitely not least, of the dissipated characters worth mentioning is *Evelina*'s Sir John Belmont. A rake and libertine, his dissipation shows in his treatment of women. Not only did he abandon his mistress, Macartney's mother, but his total disregard for his legal wife, manifested by his destruction of their marriage licence upon finding her lacking financially—her dowry was controlled by her mother, who was enraged by their elopement—further proves his disreputable character. His exclamation: “how many more sons and daughters may be brought to me, I am yet to learn”<sup>180</sup> further proves his libertinism, as he is unable to ascertain how many children he might have fathered as a wild youth.

Koehler points out Burney's “attempts to reprove and reform libertine desire,”<sup>181</sup> which is clearly apparent and manifested in her characters' expressed opinions regarding the rakes and libertines. However, as an observer and commentator of society, even though she did not approve of them, Burney could not avoid touching the issue of dissipation, as it constituted a big part of the polite society of her time.

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<sup>180</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 371.

<sup>181</sup> Martha J. Koehler, “‘Faultless Monsters’ and Monstrous Egos: The Disruption of the Model Selves in *Evelina*,” in *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laoclos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 158.

## CONCLUSION

Frances Burney's novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia* both point out the significance of social status, which manifests in various forms in the novels. By putting people's social standing into the focus of her literary works, Burney is emphasising the tendency of the society of her time to place importance upon one's position in the social hierarchy and their inclination for having superior attitude toward those of lower social status. Her mostly realistic portrayal of characters of various social ranks is based on the author's own experience and it speaks to the quality of her observations that they accurately depict people of the eighteenth century with respect to their conduct, way of living and choice of companions as pertaining to their social classification. While social status, the one based on one's origins and wealth, was undoubtedly important in the eighteenth century, it does not necessarily follow that Burney herself placed so much significance upon social standing based on these criteria. The criticism of the "old ways," which she projected in her novels, speaks to the contrary, and even though she was conscious of her place in society, her preference for personal merit and accomplishments over bloodlines is apparent.

Burney represents social status as an integral part of one's personal identity, which explains her preoccupation with names. In my analysis of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, I came to the conclusion that the issue of name is central to both novels, despite the fact that it projects differently in each of them. Furthermore, I considered the consequences of name on various characters, such as Evelina Anville, Cecilia Beverley, Mr. Macartney, but also Mortimer Delvile and Mr. Belfield, and determined that Burney's emphasis on the issue of names indicates her critique of society that disregards virtuous and accomplished people on account of their less-than-desirable origins and favours inherited bloodlines over individual worth. Furthermore, I established a possible connection between the names of some characters, such as Dame Green and Lord Orville, and the development of the plots of the two novels.

Burney's novels clearly reflect her stance regarding social mobility. In my analysis, I focused on the author's projected attitude toward social elevation and came to the conclusion that while Burney is very critical of those who aspire to higher social position than they occupy, she is not against social promotion if, and



only if, it is justified by excellence of character, personal integrity, and dignified conduct, the lack of which leads to failure of either the whole process of social elevation, as in Mr. Smith's case, or ultimately denies the desired effect of social promotion on the perception of the person in question, which happened in the case of Madame Duval. The character of Mr. Belfield provides the author with the opportunity to state her opinion on social mobility. Despite his elevation to the ranks of gentlemen, Belfield's inability to find happiness and independence, as well as his callous behaviour toward his family, is Burney's way of emphasising the effects social mobility has on one's life and the possibility of failure despite the initial, fleeting success.

I determined behaviour and general conduct to be the most visible marks that distinguish people of various social ranks. Their values, their way of living, and furthermore their mindset differ, therefore they act and conduct themselves differently, and people who presume to aspire to higher social position than the one afforded to them by birth are, in most cases, unsuccessful because their social origins are revealed by their behaviour. For this purpose, Burney frequently uses her comic characters, such as Madame Duval or Mr. Smith, through which she points out the typical character traits connected to the middle class.

As the novels clearly show and my thesis concludes, the matter of clothing is crucial to the discussion of social status, as it constitutes one of the instances that can blur the lines between different social classes. The prominent and rising middle class, with their ability to afford quality clothes, threatened the social elite, who used clothes to exhibit their social prominence, and this in turn led to the extravagancy of the upper classes. Burney criticises the society's preoccupation with clothing not only in the scenes in which Madame Duval's clothes are destroyed, but also during the ball scenes, where she unfavourably comments on the fops present.

Despite the importance of social status and good reputation, which Burney's novels emphasise, at times one's social standing is disregarded in favour of personal inclinations. This applies not only to the rakes and libertines, such as Lord Merton or Sir Clement Willoughby, or dissipated gamblers like Mr. Harrel and Sir Robert Floyer, but also to the behaviour of the heroines. Evelina's breaking of the rules of social decorum in order to help Mr. Macartney, and Cecilia's association with the Jew, even though she was only trying to help her

friends, threaten their position in society. Furthermore, in connection to the perceived need of guidance and mentorship for young ladies, I identified Burney's propensity to include more than one mentor-guardian. By including more characters with a power over the heroines, I believe it was Burney's intention to not only point out the importance of proper guidance, but also the possible dangers of having an improper guardian.

In my analysis, I came to the conclusion that public personas do not, in most cases, correspond to people's true selves and that society people use their masks to hide their deficiencies. Contrarily, the lack of social polish is evident in characters that have no use for it, such as Mr. Briggs, but also in those who are inexperienced in the society's ways, such as Evelina. The masquerade scene in *Cecilia* also proves my point regarding the discrepancy between the public and private selves. When they are given the opportunity, people disregard social rules of decorum and act according to their wishes.

Burney's preoccupation with proper manners shows her preference for people who behave according to the rules of conduct. Unlike Richardson, she does not believe in the paragons and her portrayal of Lord Orville, the overly proper aristocrat, is a mockery of the idea itself. However, despite her critique of paragons, she still favoured people of honourable conduct, which projects in her treatment of the dissipated characters in her novels. It is my belief that the fact that Burney included such characters in her novels, regardless of her dislike of such behaviour, shows not only the scope of her knowledge of society, which was extensive, but also her desire to express her unfavourable opinion on dissipation and gambling.

Social status is crucial in both *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, in which various aspects connected to one's social position that are discussed in my thesis are linked together. The issue of Evelina's "illegitimacy" and precarious standing in society is a direct result of her father's behaviour, whose libertine's ways, disregard of the sanctity of marriage, and his disrespect toward his wife defy the standards of conduct he is supposed to follow. Evelina's whole future depends on the acknowledgment, which would reinstate her to the rank she was born into, and this speaks to the significance of social status in Burney's epistolary debut. Similarly, her second novel *Cecilia* is filled with scenes that emphasise the importance of social status. The premise of the novel itself is based on the

inequality of rank between the heroine and her future husband, which, however, proves to be an inadequate measuring criterion. Through Cecilia's selfless and virtuous behaviour, Burney points out the hypocrisy of the upper classes and undermines the whole social structure by presenting a very noble character of not-so-noble birth. Social status is, therefore, undeniably an important part of Burney's novels.

## RESUMÉ

Moje diplomová práce je zaměřená na dva romány Frances Burney, konkrétně *Evelina* (1778) a *Cecilia* (1782), které jsou zkoumány s důrazem na společenské postavení jednotlivých postav. Cílem práce bylo analyzovat postavy ze stejných i z různých sociálních tříd a zaměřit se na okolnosti jejich postavení, stejně jako poukázat na možné problémy, které jsou spojeny s jejich zařazením do jednotlivých sociálních skupin.

První kapitola je zaměřená na kulturní pozadí doby, ve které Frances Burney žila. Část kapitoly se věnuje samotné definici sociálního postavení a fenoménů, které se k němu pojí. Za použití Johnsonova *Slovníku anglického jazyka* (1755) poukazují na rozdíl mezi terminologií spojenou se sociálním rozdělením obyvatel používanou v 18. a 19. století, zejména ve spojitosti s termínem „sociální třída“ (social class), jejichž definice se v daných stoletích znatelně liší. Dále na základě reálných faktů týkajících se 18. století rozebírám jednotlivé sociální třídy, jejich chování, postoj k životu a možné vyhlídky na zlepšení jejich sociálního postavení.

Druhá kapitola je věnována autorce analyzovaných románů a jejímu osobnímu životu. Velkou roli v jejím životě hrál její otec, který měl kritický vliv na její literární tvorbu, dále postoj její nevlastní matky k jejím literárním sklonům a také její působení u dvora krále Jiřího III. Kapitola se dále zabývá lidmi a situacemi, kterými se Frances inspirovala v jejích dílech, a také tématy, která se často objevují v jejích románech a která mají základ v životě samotné autorky, stejně jako její další tvorbou a důležitými událostmi, které ovlivnily nejen její život, ale i její tvorbu.

Třetí kapitola se věnuje problematice jména. Jméno, které v době Frances Burney sloužilo jako symbol společenského postavení, zaujímá v jejích románech důležitou pozici a Burney ho často používá na komplikování dějové linky. Díky analýze dvou románů, v nichž jméno hraje prominentní roli, jsem došla k závěru, že problematika jména, spojená nejen s hlavními hrdinkami, ale i vedlejšími postavami, představuje jedno z ústředních témat, kterým se Burney věnuje ve své literární tvorbě.

Důraz, který Burney kladla na pojmenování svých postav, stejně jako důležitost, která je připisována jejich příjmením, které slouží jako odraz jejich

postavení ve společnosti, poukazuje na rozdílnost dnešní doby a doby, ve které autorka žila, a vede mě k závěru, že právě důrazem na důležitost jména, zejména v románu *Cecilia*, se Burney snažila poukázat na tendenci její společnosti cenit si více rodových linií než kvalit jednotlivce.

Čtvrtá kapitola je zaměřená na možnou změnu sociálního postavení a věnuje se postavám, které se o tento společenský posun pokouší. Především román *Evelina* je velmi bohatý na ambiciózní postavy, které se snaží zlepšit jejich současnou situaci. Po důkladné analýze obou románů jsem rozdělila postavy na ty, které byly úspěšné a které naopak neúspěšné v jejich pokusu o společenský posun, a dále jsem se zaměřila na důvody jejich neúspěšnosti. Kapitola se také věnuje scénám a chování, které přispívají ke zhoršení sociálního postavení vybraných postav.

Analýzou obou románů a relevantních scén jsem přišla k názoru, že ačkoliv se někteří odborníci domnívají, že Burney se vyhrazuje proti sociálnímu posunu, zejména její druhý publikovaný román toto tvrzení alespoň částečně popírá. Zobrazením postavy pana Belfielda Burney poukazuje na možnost zlepšení postavení člověka, ale pouze za předpokladu, že toto zlepšení je zasloužené a založené na osobních kvalitách daného člověka, což je postoj, který Burney ve svých dílech vyzdvihuje.

V páté kapitole jsem se zaměřila na nástroje, které postavy používají, aby ukázaly jejich vesměs prominentní společenské postavení, popřípadě jejich posun do vyšší společenské třídy. Problematiku oblékání vyšších a středních vrstev, poukázanou na konkrétních případech z románů, jsem doplnila diskuzí o rozdílnosti mluvy mezi různými sociálními třídami. Kapitola se dále věnuje tomu, jak se postavy chovají ve společnosti a jak se liší chování nejen postav různého postavení, ale i postav v rámci jedné sociální třídy.

Poslední, šestá kapitola je zaměřená na postavy, jejichž chování neodpovídá standardům slušné společnosti. Jedná se především o vysoce postavené osoby, které se nechovají podle očekávání a jejichž zlozvyky odporují principům, které jsou spojeny s jejich sociální význačností. Kapitola se také věnuje sociálním maskám jakožto způsobu, kterým se postavy prezentují ve společnosti, a také problematice maškarních bálů, které vedou k rozvolnění morálky a pozměněnému chování.

Frances Burney ve svých románech *Evelina* a *Cecilia* poukazuje na důležitost společenského postavení v její době a na fenomény spojené se rozdělením obyvatel do sociálních tříd. Zatímco příběhy těchto románů se od sebe velmi liší, z hlediska společenského postavení a jeho znázornění k sobě mají velmi blízko. Jméno, způsob života a oblékání, stejně jako mluva jsou úzce spjaty se sociálním dělením společnosti a hrají velkou roli v těchto románech, protože pomáhají rozdělit postavy do jejich sociálních tříd a případně poukázat na jejich úsilí o sociální posun. Způsob, kterým Burney znázornila různé sociální třídy, svědčí o její rozsáhlé znalosti společnosti její doby. Poukázáním na faktory, které mají vliv na chování postav, se autorka snažila projevit svůj nesouhlas a kritiku lidí, kteří, ačkoliv by měli jít spíše příkladem, se věnují pochybným zálibám na úkor nejen jejich rodin a přátel, ale také na úkor jejich postavení ve společnosti.

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## ANNOTATION

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Abstract: The focus of this thesis is on the social status in Frances Burney's novels *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782). The author's knowledge of the society of her time undeniably projects in her literary works, in which she connects the issues of social status with related phenomena of naming, clothing, language, and social conduct, and furthermore with social mobility. The aim of this thesis is to analyse characters of different social ranks, identify general tendencies as pertaining to various social classes, and determine the significance of social status in Burney's novels.

## ANOTACE

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Abstrakt: Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na společenské postavení v románech *Evelina* (1778) a *Cecilia* (1782) od Frances Burney. Autorčina znalost společnosti její doby se promítá v jejích literárních dílech, ve kterých spojuje společenské postavení s problematikou jmen a oblékání, mluvou a společenským chováním a ve kterých se zabývá také posunem do jiné sociální třídy. Cílem práce je analyzovat postavy, které mají různá společenská postavení, rozpoznat všeobecné sklony jednotlivých sociálních tříd a rozhodnout o důležitosti společenského postavení v románech od Frances Burney.