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Francis Burney and feminine power or transforming spousal relevance

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Francis Burney

and Feminine

Power or,

Transforming

Spousal

Relevance.

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Francis Burney and
Feminine Power
or,
Transforming Spousal Relevance.

by

Theodore A. Blaisdell

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Abstract for "Transforming Spousal Relevance"

In her novel *Cecilia*, Frances Burney articulated a female vision of the institution of marriage. Her vision departs radically from its patriarchal counterpart. Her concept of marriage is founded on mutual love and respect as well as a joint work that tends to nurture community across boundaries rather than on fear and greed that tend to reinscribe existing boundaries of class and gender. In her novel, the relationship between Burney's heroine and a "mad" philanthropist named Albany bears remarkable similarities to the patriarchal institution of marriage yet models these transforming virtues. This study first establishes the marital parallels and then analyzes the transformed relationship as developed by Burney.

Monday & Tuesday [Old housekeeper of Mr. Scrase]—"Oh madam I liked it [*Cecilia*] all better than anything I ever saw in my life; but most of all I liked that good old gentleman Albany, that goes about telling people their duty, without so much as thinking of their fine clothes."

When Mrs. Thrale told us this at dinner, Doctor Johnson said, "I am all of the old housekeeper's mind; Mr. Albany I have always stood up for; he is one of my first favourites. Very fine indeed are the things he says."

My dear Doctor Johnson!—what condescension is this! He fully, also, enters into all my meaning in the high-flown language of Albany, from his partial insanity and unappeasable remorse.

(Diary [1904], Brighthelmstone '82)

Despite Dr. Johnson's partiality, and though the corpus of Burney criticism continues to expand, the character of Mr. Albany in *Cecilia* has not received much in the way of critical attention. In these critical works, he is variously "overlooked," dismissed as a prosy moralist or a madman, or, worse, damned as an exploitative and abusive villain. In any case, he tends to be given short shrift by virtually all commentators on *Cecilia*. The question of Albany's role in this novel is, I believe, much more significant and complex than has previously been appreciated.

That eighteenth-century courtship novels revolve around a romantic ideal that celebrates and re-inscribes a patriarchal system of values is a critical commonplace. The patriarchy simultaneously offered women protection in an adversarial world and a carefully prescribed sense of personal value. The latter precluded a woman's independent power. Frances Burney was one of the first female novelists to explore the contradictions that thoughtful women must embrace

under such a system. Critics have, perhaps as a result, located in her work both conservative patriarchal apologetics and radical proto-feminism. In *Divided Fictions*, Kristina Straub argues against an either/or interpretation of Burney's work, in which the author is understood as *either* a re-inscriber of oppressive patriarchal institutions *or* a radical feminist visionary condemning and subverting those institutions. Straub believes that Burney's fiction elaborates and explores the tensions created by the conflict between a woman's urge to find individual meaning in her life and patriarchal standards of feminine conduct.

This paper contends that, in *Cecilia*, Frances Burney innovatively problematized the stock romantic view of feminine value, a value constructed contingently upon the patriarchal institution of marriage, and contrasted this view with one in which her heroine sought a non-patriarchal solution to the problem of finding meaning in her life. Without renouncing the value of romantic love, Burney fashioned a heroine who sought and achieved personal agency in a fulfilling domestic life. Cecilia does so in collaboration with a unique character named Albany, her chosen mentor in philanthropy. The intimacy that these two develop is described in a language of love that is denied to the main romantic relationship in the novel. This language also contrasts sharply with that used to express the oppressive nature of other marriages in the novel. The unconventional "marriage" between Cecilia and Albany models a feminine concept of relationships and community. This concept of community becomes the aim of Cecilia's plan and the community thus formed becomes the domain within which Burney's heroine achieves her limited success.

The central struggle in *Cecilia* arises from the last will and testament of her uncle, which stipulates that the landed portion of Cecilia's estate shall revert to

another heir if her husband does not adopt her surname, Beverley, as his own. Her uncle has also selected three different men to be her guardians in her minority.

The first of these, a spendthrift named Harrell, borrows hugely from Cecilia then commits suicide, leaving her dependent on her uncle's portion of her inheritance. Cecilia dreams of autonomous domestic happiness, yet these dreams are complicated when she becomes attracted to the son of one of her remaining guardians, one Mortimer Delvile, whose parents are obdurately opposed to the union because of the pernicious name clause. Eventually securing the blessings of Mortimer's mother, Cecilia and Delvile secretly marry. Their happiness, already precarious because of the elder Delvile's opposition, is further threatened when the heir at law to Cecilia's estate presses his claim for her uncle's inheritance, having learned that she has married without fulfilling the requirements of the will. Penniless, Cecilia seeks to join Delvile, who has gone to France, but while seeking help from Belfield, a mutual friend, she is discovered by Delvile who storms out of Belfield's house in a characteristically jealous rage. Wandering the streets of London searching for him, Cecilia loses her wits and is taken in by a pawnbroker. She is reunited with Delvile, recovers, and is subsequently welcomed into the family. In the end, Cecilia has settled down into married life with Mortimer with the "cheerfullest resignation."

At a time when Cecilia thinks she will remain single, disaffected by the dissipated lifestyle of the Harrells and their ilk, she formulates a dream of purpose for her life. This is the first of at least two dreams that establish Cecilia as the architect of her own philanthropic endeavors. The key features of what she calls her "Plan" are three in number. First, she articulates a desire to become mistress of her own time: Second, she will choose good friends who will further her

accomplishments and her enjoyment of life. And finally, she will employ her wealth for the welfare of the unfortunate.

[H]er affluence she therefore considered as a debt contracted with the poor, and her independence, as a tie upon her liberality to pay it with interest.

(*Cecilia*, 55)

The very fact that Cecilia dreams of a life in which she assumes a role of control and power suggests the presence of the kind of subversive consciousness that will produce tension within the patriarchy. Despite the fact that she refers to Cecilia's dream at one point as absurd, Margaret Doody identifies this tension when she observes,

Cecilia's scheme of happiness is ambitious, and takes for granted her own power to act as an independent agent.

(Doody, 116)

Cecilia's sense of the power of her wealth differs fundamentally from that of the men in the novel. While characters like Harrell and Briggs reflect the extremes of unhealthy absorption with financial concerns, genteel profligacy in the former and bourgeois avarice in the latter, more "representative" patriarchal figures, like Monckton and the elder Delvile, operate upon the assumption that money is to be managed by men. The men of the novel who speak of money do so in terms that clarify their sense of financial power as a power that necessarily segregates—a power that must be kept in its proper patriarchal sphere. Theirs is an aggressive masculine vision of power and it stands in sharp contrast to Cecilia's attitude toward her wealth.

Cecilia does not perceive the responsible use of her financial resources as a means to aggrandize nor to isolate or protect herself, but as a means to foster relationships with others. This unconventional dream of a philanthropic vocation forged in a domestic domain and presided over by an unmarried female rests upon

the assumption that feminine power is a force that fosters community. To achieve her end, Cecilia actively seeks a relationship with a mentor who can help her realize her dream—Mr. Albany. However, his character creates its own share of textual complications and ambiguities, even if the critics who mention him in passing tend to accept Miss Larolles' superficial assessment that he is "a crazy man." Surprisingly, Julia Epstein does not even mention his name in her study of *Cecilia*, despite her energetic interest in the elements of chaos and anarchy in the book. This omission seems strange because Albany is one individual in the book who threatens the other characters with the chaos of his "madness."

Critics more concerned to explore Albany's character focus on his important conversation with Cecilia, revealing that his guilt arises from a history of violence toward women. He is, then, quickly dismissed as a thinly disguised "wife beater" whose predisposition to exploit the "weaker" sex is merely reincarnated in his relationship with Cecilia. To suggest that this is the position taken by Doody does a gross injustice to the complexity of her study. But her final statement about Albany is:

We begin to see by the time we get to Albany's tale that there is a general taint, that those men who advance themselves expect unconsciously to do so at the expense of women.

(Doody, 130)

Doody seems only too ready to discount Albany's spiritual insights because he "derived [them] from an injury done to a woman" (Doody, 129). Kristina Straub argues more forcefully for a dark reading of Albany's mentorship:

Cecilia is induced to charitable action prior to her majority by the emotional blackmail of Albany, a half-crazy moralist and philanthropist whom she meets at the beginning of her "entrance into the world" ... her impulse to "ACT RIGHT" serving as the means to her manipulation rather than her empowerment.

(Straub, 124)

Straub emphasizes Cecilia's naiveté and her inflexible thinking (indicated by the use of upper case letters) and she uses the term "emotional blackmail," reducing Albany's significance to a temporary and lamentable interruption in Cecilia's life.

Katherine Rogers indicts Albany, perhaps most damningly, for the unavoidable appearance of self-interest in his relationship with Cecilia. Rogers says:

Despite his benevolence, Albany's interaction with Cecilia is controlled by what he expects from her. Regardless of her situation or preoccupations, he interprets her behavior in terms of meeting or failing to meet his demands. ... His language has the familiar ring of the moralist who reviles women for not acting in accordance with his expectations: 'Why didst thou fail me?'
(Rogers, 45)

These critics see Albany's involvement in Cecilia's affairs as intrusive. His advice and actions are perceived as subverting rather than facilitating her efforts at autonomy. Burney's language does not always clarify the issue. I believe that Burney appropriates much of the language of romantic love to express the intimacy that develops between Cecilia and her mentor. In so doing, Burney exposes herself to the accusation of re-inscribing the patriarchy by adopting language that is hopelessly compromised. In a very different way, however, I would contend that her language may be interpreted as re-figuring feminine power in conjunction with her plot.

The spiritual intimacy between Cecilia and Albany is described in language that is normally associated with romantic love, and their relationship bears a number of similarities to a companionate marriage. The points of similarity are worth considering, particularly because Albany helps Cecilia achieve her autonomy within a transformed domestic sphere. But to frame their relationship as a marriage may suggest a re-inscription of the traditional male institution. In the

eighteenth century, the most idyllic "companionate marriage" left control firmly in the hands of the man. The problem in the eyes of a benign patriarch was not how to reconstruct the institution, but how to choose the proper companion.

Cecilia's opportunities to embrace institutional marriage would not have been lost on the contemporary reader. Burney confronts her heroine with a bewildering array of potential husbands. Mr. Monckton, Mr. Belfield, Mr. Morrice, Mr. Arnott, Sir Robert Floyer, Lord Ernolf's son, and Mr. Marriot all provide options for the matchmaking patriarchal reader. And there is a spokesperson for such a choice in the text. Lady Honoria Pemberton urges Cecilia to marry anyone as long as he is docile. Lady Honoria advocates the acquisition of power by prudently-selected proxy. She even censures Cecilia for not marrying Lord Ernolf's son because "she might have done exactly what she pleased with him, which, all together, would have been no inconvenient circumstance." (*Cecilia*, 465) Cecilia rejects the radically cynical view of love and marriage informing Lady Honoria's viewpoint.

Burney also challenges the benevolent intentions of all Cecilia's potential spouses in a chapter entitled "An Opera Rehearsal." Albany prophetically identifies the risk to Cecilia. He says,

"Poor simple victim! hast thou already so many pursuers? yet seest thou not that thou art marked for sacrifice! yet knowest not that thou art destined for prey!

(*Cecilia*, 69)

The men who surround her, individually, perceive the statement as a personal indictment:

Nor was the rest of the company much less discomposed: Sir Robert, Mr. Monckton and Mr. Arnott, each conscious of their own particular plans, were each apprehensive that the warning pointed at himself.

(*Cecilia*, 69)

These men, in the guilt they feel, force the readers to recognize that every man in the novel, with the possible exception of Albany, has a personal agenda for Cecilia that does not include nurturing her independence. Such a revelation must cause the considerate reader to inspect more closely the marital motives of each candidate before yoking Cecilia to a husband.

In fact, the novel contains no examples of successful marriages. Its unrelenting message seems to be that, for women, even the best traditional marriages carry a significant risk of unhappiness, insecurity, and disempowerment. To envision a mutually empowering and satisfying relationship that could give her heroine tangibly what a companionate marriage offered only in the abstract, Burney had to reconfigure the marital relationship without undermining the power of the underlying romantic assumptions about intimacy, passion, and soul sharing. Cecilia's and Albany's unconventional marriage, and by extension the "marriages" created by their philanthropic activity, like that between Cecilia and Henrietta Belfield, are marriages founded on a mutual desire to love and serve others. This model provides a concept of intimacy that may simultaneously embrace the positive and reformulate the negative values of the otherwise hopelessly patriarchal relationship.

Let us examine three ways in which the alliance between these two resembles a marriage. The most overt adoption of "romantic" language occurs in a passage that comes after Cecilia has, once again, experienced a failure in her perpetually problematic romantic relationship with Delvile. Her prospects for realizing a lasting happiness in marriage seem to be extremely poor. Achieving her majority at just this time, and resolved upon a single life, Cecilia independently establishes herself in her house and re-establishes Albany as her

"Almoner and Monitor." She then begins the charitable work of which she has dreamed. Albany takes great joy in this process. The descriptive language is worth quoting at some length:

He [Albany] made it his business to seek objects of distress, and always but too certain to find them, of conducting her himself to their habitations, and then leaving to her own liberality the assistance their several cases demanded: and, in the overflowing of his zeal upon these occasions, and the rapture of his heart in thus disposing, almost at his pleasure, of her noble fortune, he seemed, at times, to feel an extasy that, from its novelty and its excess, was almost too exquisite to be borne.

(*Cecilia*, 790)

A harsh reading of this passage would highlight the fact that Albany is using Cecilia for his own penitential purposes and is self-indulgently reveling in the power he has obtained over Cecilia. That power is demonstrated by the fact that he may dispose "almost at his pleasure" of her vast resources. This reading focuses on Albany's need to control the woman while excusing the fact that he is exploiting her by labeling his motive altruistic. The description of the "extasy" he experiences is evocative of sexual ecstasy and this suggests a parallel between Albany's economic or emotional extortion of Cecilia (Straub's "emotional blackmail") and the exploitation of the flesh that is a more common feature of oppressive patriarchal relationships criticized by feminists.

This reading may not be easily dismissed, but it bases itself upon a patriarchal view of the distribution of power within relationships between men and women. That is, traditional marriage encodes power as a continuous tension between domination and submission, in which the male is dominant and the female submissive. When Lady Honoria proposes to invert the traditional power relationship, her proposal retains this binary opposition of domination and submission. The most benign traditional description of this type of marriage

emphasizes that the two become one because the woman surrenders her will to the will of her husband. She must lose herself for the relationship, precisely because the binary between domination and submission offers the only way of perceiving power within the relationship. Not only is Burney aware of this reality about marriage, but the unspoken demand of patriarchal marriage starkly confronts the patriarchs themselves in the name clause attached to Cecilia's estate.

A gentler reading of the same passage is more consistent with the relationship between Albany and Cecilia as it is fully developed by Burney. The foundation of their relationship lies in their mutual attempt to discover meaning in their lives through service to others. From the first, Cecilia listens to Albany not because he has seduced her, but because his advice resonates with her own thoughts regarding her obligation to the poor. Albany independently identifies and validates the goals toward which Cecilia is already aiming in her "Plan." Together they seek to cultivate and use their power to help people. The centrality of this vision in Cecilia's life, and her autonomy in establishing it as a priority, is underscored throughout the early sections of *Cecilia*. The two characters, therefore, have a mutual "will" before they enter into relationship with each other; neither one needs to submit his will to the other or to relinquish an ideal that each finds personally illuminating. The autonomy of both is preserved. The "marriage," in their case, is a product of their shared vision, not a primary goal that then requires of one of them the submission of their will to the other.

Cecilia maintains her autonomy in her relationship with Albany. Theirs is a marriage without the "violent hierarchy" implicit in a patriarchal relationship. The "extasy" the old man experiences may be read as a spiritual ecstasy arising from the redemptive acts of charity produced by their communal effort. The two

conjoin in work and experience a mutual intense pleasure that Burney describes with the most intense descriptor of pleasure that the language affords. The imagery of a transformed, and now consummated, nuptial relationship is further developed in these conflations of spiritual and sensual language.

The harsher reading also depends on two questionable assumptions: first, that Albany has not fundamentally changed as a result of his suffering; and second, that Cecilia is not a reliable judge of character or motives. While Cecilia does seriously misjudge the intentions of both Mrs. Delvile and Monckton, as well as others, in each of those cases Cecilia learns to regret her errors. Such regret is completely lacking in her estimation of Albany. The reader comes to trust Cecilia's sensibility, especially with respect to her own motives, and her conscious choice of Albany as her tutor.

As to the first assumption, Albany's suffering may have made him uniquely capable of meeting Cecilia's specific needs. The marital imagery and the language describing it become even more vivid in a telling passage when Albany deepens his intimacy with Cecilia by telling her the story of the unhappiness in his life. It is out of his woundedness that Albany provides lessons that encourage Cecilia in her altruistic project. Albany's woundedness is the topic of a conversation in which he relates his suffering so that she may "know [her] own felicity, lest, ignorant it means nothing but innocence, thou shouldst lose it, unconscious of its value."

(*Cecilia*, 704) His proposal about his teaching is quite graphic:

...to awaken thee from this dream of fancied sorrow, I will open
all my wounds and thou shalt probe them with fresh shame.

(*Cecilia*, 704)

This metaphor has significant sexual ramifications. Wounds may be metaphorical vaginal equivalents. As such they may be employed to explore the

feminine side of the character who is wounded. Along with his advanced age, these wounds de-emphasize Albany's masculinity and emphasize his femininity. In this instance, the metaphor also performs the extreme gesture of developing the masculine side of Cecilia, as she is enjoined to "probe" Albany's wounds. In the larger metaphor of this female-empowering "marriage," this observation suggests that Cecilia will assume a masculine role in that relationship, that of penetration. By again conflating the language of sensuality with that of spirituality or higher cognition, Burney draws new lines defining relationship. Penetration metaphorically refers to a physical act, but here Albany specifically demands that she "penetrate" his soul, his memories. Burney is telling the reader that patriarchal views of intimacy will not suffice in this new vision. By blurring these gender distinctions, Burney foils the reader's attempt to seek some indication of familiar patriarchal domination or submission. It is precisely out of his woundedness and weakness that Albany becomes the perfect person to mentor Cecilia. And she becomes the redeeming pupil for him.

A number of other passages support a marital reading of the intimacy between Albany and Cecilia. Perhaps one more explicit example will confirm the analogy. After Cecilia has gone mad and during her subsequent recovery over the shop of a pawnbroker, Albany visits her, bringing with him three needy children "clothed and fed by [Cecilia's] bounty." (*Cecilia*, 916) The children represent, in a very present and tangible way, the product or offspring of Cecilia's relationship with Albany. This relationship has been symbolically blessed with children while her relationship with her husband is not only barren but uncomfortable.

The domain in which Albany and Cecilia jointly thrive is a re-configured domestic sphere in which the principles of community building and intimacy

supersede those of oppressive control that maintain the patriarchy. Kristina Straub voices a key objection to an optimistic reading of Cecilia's philanthropic plan. She says:

Another problem with Cecilia's plan for a life of charitable works is that even when it does not expose her to the public gaze, and even when she manages to perform her social duty with a degree of autonomy, it fails to satisfy the need for human intimacy, the locus, for Burney, of female empowerment.

(Straub, 125)

This premise that intimacy represents the "locus" of feminine empowerment for Burney, I would not gainsay. I would argue, however, that this prerequisite is satisfied in the relationships that Cecilia and Albany develop between themselves and between them and the objects of their philanthropy.

If Cecilia is to achieve the intimacy that Straub seeks, that intimacy must transcend the distinctions implicit in those institutions that obstruct the kind of community and intimacy she seeks. This would include, most prominently, distinctions of class and gender. Albany's first lesson to Cecilia emphasizes this point. The scene provides an example of the kind of intimacy Albany is trying to help Cecilia achieve. Cecilia follows Albany, with some trepidation, to Swallow street where she is introduced to Henrietta Belfield, who is washing china. His lesson to the two of them emphasizes the importance of mutual concerns that transcend the constructed barriers of wealth, class, and gender. The symbolism of the act of joining their hands is reinforced by Albany's words:

You ... who though rich, are not hardened, and you, who though poor, are not debased, why should ye not love, why should ye not cherish each other?

(Cecilia, 206)

In a sense these words and those that follow paraphrase a wedding ceremony between two women and transcend class difference. The ceremony also starkly

delineates the difference between the characteristics of community embraced by Albany and Cecilia and those espoused by the patriarchy.

One of the most profound lessons that Albany teaches Cecilia is the importance of listening to the disadvantaged, of validating their existence by acknowledging them and their suffering. This affirmation, denied the underclass by the strictures of capitalism (witness the abominable treatment of the Hills at the hands of Mr. Harrell), is precisely the same privilege that the patriarchy denies women. When Albany brings Cecilia to the sick or suffering, his first command to them is to tell her their story. Consider his charge to Henrietta Belfield:

Tell here thy story, plainly, roundly, truly; abate nothing of the indigence, repress nothing of her liberality. ... lighten the burthen of each other's cares, by the heart-soothing exchange of gratitude for beneficence!

(*Cecilia*, 206)

The intimacy between them deepens, as it did between Cecilia and Albany when he told his own story of suffering and exposed his pain for her to share. Albany enjoins Henrietta to build community with altruism. This is accomplished by transforming the principle of alms-giving by adding the operation of healing narration. This kind of giving transforms alms into charity, and charity into the creation of community. Albany reinforces the importance of this transformation by identifying the mutual risk to friendship implicit in an unequal distribution of wealth: for Cecilia the risk of prejudice, and for Henrietta the risk of pride. Dr. Lyster yokes these terms later to characterize the circumstances that complicate Cecilia's romance with Mortimer, but they work equally well in this instance. The image of the marital relationship as a symbol of the intimacy that creates this new community extends not only to Albany but also to the relationships fostered by the mutual work he does with Cecilia.

In focusing on shared philanthropy as a means to create an intimacy and community more empowering than patriarchal marriage, Burney echoes some eighteenth-century debates on the operation of charity. As Donna Andrew has shown in her work *Philanthropy and the Police*, a transition was taking place throughout the eighteenth century toward a modern conception of charitable giving. Her research suggests that while the premodern attitude focused on the beneficial effect of providing alms on the giver (to the point of disregarding the recipient of the charity), the modern attitude:

considered the effect of charitable donation on the recipient, stressing its pernicious influences on the character and personality of the object aided, urging instead a manly self-reliance and determination to be free of the taint of charity.

(Andrew, 3)

Andrew points out that this shift in emphasis required a concomitant centralized evaluation process to determine the merit of needy cases. She then traces the influence of this shift on the development of charitable institutions in the eighteenth century. Here too, Cecilia and Albany circumvent the options that their society dictated to them, forging a more complex and highly personal form of charity. They seem to defy both approaches to the subject of charity. They seek a different form of community. Unlike the premodern attitude that Andrew describes, Cecilia and Albany perceive the individual as a vital participant in the process because the act of service creates community between the giver and the receiver. Unlike the modern attitude, however, they preserve the personal involvement in the administration of charity. This rejection of the power relationships fundamental to a patriarchal and capitalistic world view, this paradigm shift in the vision of the ideal nature of human relationships, is Frances Burney's bold invention.

Why does Cecilia ultimately turn away from this non-marital alternative, an alternative that provides her with some of the little real pleasure she experiences? In the early articulations of her plan the idea of marriage was irrelevant. Her experiences with the Delviles give her serious reasons to question the value of marriage. The central section of the novel deals with the vicissitudes of love and marriage and, I believe, explains Cecilia's ultimate rejection of the plan she pursues with Albany. During this period of joys and trials (extending from page 294 to page 701) Albany is conspicuously absent. Cecilia during this time experiences the institutional patriarchal community. She knows the headiness of passion in her love affair with Mortimer Delvile. She is also deeply affected by the solicitude of Mrs. Delvile. These forms of intimacy, she learns, have a price. That price is conformity to custom. Cecilia discovers that attempts to reassert her autonomy are met with the patriarchal threat of ostracism. The establishment of a sense of community with members of the patriarchal community immediately renders Cecilia vulnerable to the withdrawal of that intimacy, and this withdrawal is constantly, though surreptitiously, threatened. As the tension in her personal circumstances escalates, Cecilia finds her options for self-sufficiency progressively limited.

Michel Foucault, the French "cultural anthropologist" as he styled himself, spoke of madness as an inevitable product of irreconcilable differences between institutions of power and individuals who pose a threat to them. A conventional reading of *Cecilia* proffers the tension between her love for Delvile and her duty to the patriarchy as the source of her madness. There is precedent abounding in other courtship romances (Clementina della Porretta in *Sir Charles Grandison*, to name just one). I believe that Cecilia's madness is more complex.

Cecilia is disappointed in love a number of times in the novel. While saddened by this disappointment, she consistently returns to her project of altruism. Finally she moves into her own home and creates her autonomous domestic sphere from which she daily sets out to tend to the needs of the poor. Once this independence is accomplished, Cecilia's romantic prospects suddenly reverse. Mrs. Delvile agrees to the nuptials between Cecilia and Mortimer and a second clandestine marriage is attempted, now successfully. The danger to Cecilia's independence is deftly foreshadowed:

She only...took her maid in the chaise, and attended by one servant on horseback, at six o'clock the next morning, she quitted her mansion, to enter into an engagement by which she was soon to resign it forever.

(*Cecilia*, 826)

Cecilia's clandestine marriage is followed by the loss of her house, fortune, and independence when Mr. Eggleston makes his claim on the basis of the Dean's will. Penniless and homeless, Cecilia encounters Delvile at Belfield's, causing a flair of his vicious temper. Caught between the loss of her own independence and the threat of the loss of Delvile's love, Cecilia goes mad. In this sense, the institution of patriarchy plays a key role in Cecilia's madness. Cecilia loses her independence as a result of the irreconcilable clash between the Dean's will, in which he attempts to maintain control over her life even from the grave, and Delvile's pride. The patriarchal repercussions begin as soon as she establishes an autonomous sphere for herself. It is the attempt to be independent that leads to Cecilia's madness, and it is the loss of that independence for which I believe she expresses regret in the novel's closing sentence.

Cecilia recovers but she is chastened. She has experienced the chaos that can threaten an individual when patriarchal forces are challenged. She has sought

autonomy in the domestic sphere and achieved it, albeit briefly. She resumes her altruistic activities and her previous relationships with a measure of happiness. But her happiness is diminished by her struggle and the result is that state of "cheerfullest resignation" in which we leave her.

And we may feel that Burney, too, has "missed the mark" in failing to oppose the patriarchal forces her novel has exposed. Straub concludes that Burney's employs a cognitive shift in her fiction. She values both the traditional roles afforded women under patriarchy and the urge to be independent. By writing a novel in which the heroine achieves and loses her autonomy, Burney prepares her readers for a future in which more and more women will pursue that autonomy. And she points to the sphere of domesticity as one realm in which they will most likely find success.

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VITA

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