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“Henrietta and Harriet.” Considering the marginalized best

friend in Burney’s *Cecilia* and Austen’s *Emma*

A Thesis by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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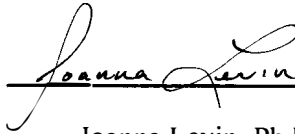
James Blaylock, M.A.

The thesis of Elena Goodenberger is approved.



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April 2023

“Henrietta and Harriet:” Considering the marginalized best friend in  
Burney’s *Cecilia* and Austen’s *Emma*

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## ABSTRACT

“Henrietta and Harriet:” Considering the marginalized best

friend in Burney’s *Cecilia* and Austen’s *Emma*

by Elena Goodenberger

Although much has been said about the authorial relationship between Frances Burney and Jane Austen generally, there is a gap in scholarship discussing Austen’s *Emma* in context with the Burney’s *Cecilia*. This paper argues that there are notable threads—heiresses with absent or inadequate father figures, charity-case best friends, and rushed endings—connecting *Emma* and *Cecilia*. Tracing these threads allows us to examine the possible influence of Burney’s writing on Austen and also calls attention to the author’s different approaches to female agency and minor character space. To accomplish this task, I look at the narrative space given to minor characters in Burney’s *Cecilia* and Austen’s *Emma*. Specifically, I assess the roles of the minor characters Henrietta Belfield in *Cecilia* and Harriet Smith in *Emma*. Both of these minor female characters function as charity cases for the heroines they befriend, emphasizing Cecilia’s and Emma’s respective good fortunes and superior social standings. I argue that the links between these two minor characters serves as a launching point into further discussions about marginalized women in the long eighteenth century and Burney’s and Austen’s different attitudes on the role of women in society. In *Cecilia*, both the heroine and Henrietta suffer socially, financially, and emotionally as a result of the manipulations of men. Yet, in *Emma*, the relationship between the heroine and the socially inferior Harriet grants the female protagonist with the authority to be the manipulator rather than the manipulated. Through these asymmetrical relationships between the heroine and her lower-class friend, Burney situates the traditional role of women in society as fixed, where Austen criticizes and complicates these same roles.

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## Introduction

On a crisp November morning in 2016, an eager undergraduate student found herself peering down at a letter in the library of St. John's College, Oxford. The letter—a missive written in 1797 by George Austen to Thomas Cadell—inquired if the renowned London publisher would be interested in procuring a novel manuscript “about the same length of Miss Burney’s *Evelina*.” The student—me—was quick to note the “return to sender” rejection scribbled across the two-hundred-plus-year-old document. Thanks to the luxury of historical retrospect, individuals such as myself can gawk and marvel that Cadell could be so shortsighted as to decline to publish Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (or, *First Impressions*, as it would have been titled at the time), proving that even the most beloved works of fiction were once subject to the burdens of circumstance and politics that continue to plague the world of publishing today. But despite being a great lesson in the arbitrary nature of rejection in publishing, there is another reason this letter between Austen and Cadell proves worthy of note: it demonstrates the great influence of one woman upon Jane Austen’s literary consciousness—Frances Burney. For when George Austen invoked Burney in his ill-fated query to Cadell, he tied the works of Jane Austen and Frances Burney together in ways that scholars are still trying to untangle more than two centuries later.

As two of the most beloved women writers of the long eighteenth century, Frances Burney and Jane Austen are remembered for their ability to write captivating novels that use subtext and satire to illuminate the complexities of female experiences during their lifetimes. Both of these novelists are credited with capturing the tension between a woman’s moral and economic worth, highlighting the dangers present in absentee or neglectful paternal figures, and suggesting that a woman’s duty to marry had the potential to negate her agency and selfhood.

These are just a few of the intricacies displayed both within the works of Burney and Austen. Despite these commonalities noted by scholars, there are also some key differences between the philosophies expressed within these works that are pertinent to modern readers. While Burney's novels call attention to the aforementioned realities of female experience during the eighteenth century, they seem to argue that these realities are fixed and incapable of change<sup>1</sup>—upholding the morals and strictures of Georgian society that keep women in subordinate positions. Moreover, Burney's surviving writings and journals express that the author was a conservative with traditional beliefs regarding the distinctive duties of men vs. women—i.e., that men are by nature fit for the practicality of politics and commerce while a woman's strengths lie with her virtue and sensitivity.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars know much less about the life and thoughts of Austen and primarily rely on what is written in her novels to speculate about the opinions and beliefs of the author. And although Austen's writing seems to both adopt the techniques of and emerge from the works of conservative women writers such as Burney, she also departs from them by subtly objecting to and exposing the way that traditional patriarchal strictures negatively impact the lives of female characters.<sup>3</sup> Thus, today Austen's novels are typically read as supporting a more forward-thinking view of women. Close readings of Burney's and Austen's works support this view, as

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<sup>1</sup> An example of Burney's fixed mindset is provided by Margaret Anne Doody in her introduction to the Oxford University Press Edition of *Cecilia*. Doody explains that Burney denied her readers a fully "happy ending" because "no character is capable of stepping outside" the oppressive social structure they inhabit (xxxix).

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Burney includes an apology for involving women in politics at the beginning of her pamphlet *Brief Reflections Relative to the French Emigrant Clergy*.

<sup>3</sup> Claudia L. Johnson names these techniques as irony, antithetical pairing, double plotting, and the testing or subverting of overt, doctrinaire statement with contrasting dramatic incident (xxiv).



the former holds to the traditions of the past where the latter slowly and subtly pushes towards the future.

While much has been said about the authorial relationship between Burney and Austen generally, there is a gap in scholarship discussing Austen's *Emma* in context with the novels of Burney. I argue that despite *Emma*'s lack of Burney-esque notes of melodrama and violence, much is hidden under the surface that suggests notable threads—heiresses with absent or inadequate father figures, charity-case best friends, and rushed endings—connect *Emma* with Burney's early novels. Tracing these threads not only allows one to see the possible influence of Burney's writing on Austen, but also calls attention to the women writers' divergent philosophies on the relationship between marriage, economy, and female agency.

To accomplish this task, I will look at the narrative space given to characters in Burney's *Cecilia* and Austen's *Emma*. Specifically, I will assess the roles of the minor characters Henrietta Belfield in *Cecilia* and Harriet Smith in *Emma*. In addition to their similar names, both of these minor female characters function as charity cases for the heroines they befriend, emphasizing Cecilia's and Emma's respective good fortunes and superior social standings. Though there is little mention of the connection between Henrietta and Harriet among literary scholars, I argue that the links between these two minor characters serves as a launching point into further discussions about marginalized women in the long eighteenth century and Burney's and Austen's different attitudes on the role of women in society. In *Cecilia*, both the heroine and Henrietta suffer socially, financially, and emotionally as a result of the manipulations of men. Yet, in *Emma*, the relationship between the heroine and the socially inferior Harriet grants the female protagonist with the authority to be the manipulator rather than the manipulated. Austen creates a morally imperfect heroine and then allows her the space to reflect and (mostly) right the wrongs

she commits. By examining how these two minor characters interact with their heroines and within the narrative space of the novel, we can see that Burney situates the role of women in society as fixed, where Austen covertly objects to these same roles.

A few key texts that lay the foundation for this investigation and will appear frequently within this paper. The first is Claudia L. Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988), which aims to complicate the traditional assertion that Austen was a conservative, apolitical writer. Conversely, Johnson paints Austen as a writer who is able to make keen judgements about her complex world and the abuses women suffer as a result of the social and political structures acting upon them. This is a view I will also adopt as I look at Austen's *Emma*. Additionally, I mention Johnson's work in this paper because of the social and political posturing of Austen's work alongside her contemporaries. Johnson frequently notes the connections between Frances Burney and Jane Austen stating that "Burney and Austen alike are able to show, beneath the nominally conventional surfaces of their novels, truths about the absence or arbitrariness of fathers, the self-importance of brothers, and the bad faith of mentors which, if not as daring or sweeping, are still as disturbing as any of the indictments made by radical novelists" (26). Chapter six ("Woman, Lovely Woman Reigns Alone") of Johnson's book offers a discussion of *Emma* that is particularly useful for this research as she focuses on the issue of female authority, noting Emma's uniqueness as a woman who has power and agency. Johnson juxtaposes Emma's assertion of authority with Austen's lack of power and value in her own social and familial circles. One can equate Austen's lack of authority and social value with the situations of many of her minor characters, including the dense but loveable Harriet Smith—whose role in *Emma* is a focus of the second and third parts of this paper.

Another foundational text that is valuable to consider in relation to this research is Alex Woloch's *The One Vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist In the Novel* (2003). Woloch's book focuses on the narrative space given to certain characters in nineteenth century novels. He argues that "minor" characters are not given the narrative attention they deserve because that would disrupt the structure of the novel and/or the fictional universe the author creates. By employing terms such as "character space" and "character system," Woloch explores the problem of characterization within contemporary literary theory, citing the complex relationship between notions of characters and the types of human beings they represent. The author goes so far as to claim a Marxist connection, asserting that "minor characters are the proletariat of the novel" (27). Additionally, Woloch theorizes that there are two types of minor characters: "the worker" and "the eccentric." The worker is a flat character with a single purpose in the story. The eccentric is a character that disrupts the narrative and is usually removed from the story by its conclusion. Since my research surrounds two minor characters, Henrietta Belfield in *Cecilia* and Harriet Smith in *Emma*, Woloch's theory on character space proves a useful framework to analyze how the depiction of these minor female characters reflects the economic and social values of the types of women they represent.

Finally, Lynda A. Hall's *Women and "Value" in Jane Austen's Novels: Settling, Speculating and Superfluity* (2017). Hall exposes the discrepancies between expressed and intrinsic value of women on the marriage market through an examination of minor female characters in Jane Austen's novels. Hall begins by pointing out that Jane Austen herself had little "expressed" value in her family and society as a single woman. Though Austen's fiction is not directly political, it mirrors the social and economic situations she experienced and observed. Hall's first few chapters offer a discussion of the economic foundations and cultural perspectives

from which Austen writes, noting how factors such as money, circulation, and credit all impacted a woman's prospect as a wife and commodity. Hall explores how Austen's minor characters reflect the realistic value of women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds in England's long eighteenth century. Although Austen's heroines are able to transcend their own socioeconomic values to claim happy marriages, the minor characters reflect the fragile position of real women in marginalized position. Hall places these minor characters in three separate categories depending on their relationships to the marriage market. The three categories are settling (Charlotte Lucas, Maria Bertram, Jane Fairfax), speculating (Isabella Thorpe, Lucy Steele, Mary Crawford), and superfluous (Miss Bates, Mrs. Smith). Hall states that Austen's inclusion of minor women characters calls into question a culture that prioritizes economic value over individual, moral worth. Though Hall does not offer an in-depth analysis of Harriet Smith in this book, the categories she outlines for the types of women these characters offers a framework to examine Harriet's role in *Emma* further as it compares to Henrietta's role in Burney's *Cecilia*.

#### Part One: Connecting Burney and Austen

A broad look at the connections between Burney's and Austen's lives and novels will lay the foundation for the comparison of *Cecilia* and *Emma* and the exploration of the relationship between Henrietta, Harriet, and their respective heroines. For, as Virginia Woolf states in *A Room of One's Own*, "Jane Austen should have laid a wreath on the grave of Fanny Burney (55)." Indeed, a great deal of scholarship exists that speculates about the influence of Frances Burney on Jane Austen. Though the two women writers' lifetimes overlapped, their lives and experiences were vastly different from one another. Frances Burney (later Madame d'Arbly) was the daughter of socially-ambitious music teacher Dr. Charles Burney and spent much of her upbringing in bustling London amidst literary giants including Samuel Johnson. Despite her

impressive friends and the fact that her most-beloved novel, *Evelina*, was published when Burney was just seventeen, the young author was known for being meek and conservative throughout her public and private lives.

When modern readers pick up Burney's novels, they often want to equate her satirical storytelling and melodramatic marriage plots with an early form of feminism; however, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, Frances Burney was a known proponent of the Marriage Act of 1753, which stated that a woman was under the control of her father or husband until she died or was widowed and left to her own protection. In other words, Burney held a traditional view of marriage as an economic and moral transaction from father to husband. In Miranda Burgess's essay, Burney's romances are painted as a reflection of these conservative values; namely, that a woman's worth is tied to her financial status and domestic standards. Much of Burgess's argument centers on credit—an ambiguous term that tries to connect moral worth with economic value. The struggle between moral and financial credit is something all of Burney's heroines must grapple with as the men in their lives manipulate them for their own self-interests (like Mr. Harrell in *Cecilia* and Lionel in *Camilla*). Under this view, Burney is not a feminist, but a conservative whose novels do not critique the transactional nature of marriage, but target the laissez-faire economy that allows individuals to fall prey to luxury and artifice. Indeed, even sensibility is posed as a type of credit in Burney's novels, as her heroines' abilities to display feeling and romantic love is commodified by both male characters and the readers who purchase subscriptions to the novels.

Ironically, though Frances Burney displays ample support for the Marriage Act throughout her novels, she entered into a non-traditional union when she married liberal Frenchman Alexander d'Arblay in 1793. As a former French General living in exile, d'Arblay

came to England with little means to support a wife and family. This was not helped by his unrealistic scheming with money. Again, one is reminded of characters such as the heroine's brother Lionel in *Camilla*, a man prone to gambling and purchasing things on credit that he could not afford. Coincidentally (or perhaps not so coincidentally), Burney wrote *Camilla* as a means to support her family at a time her husband could not.<sup>4</sup> This reversal of the traditional marriage roles in Burney's personal life is fascinating to consider alongside her economic romances, as the transactional nature of marriage is reflected and upheld by stories that were bought and sold as commodities of the very culture that Burney critiques. Additionally, accounts of Burney's life seen through her journals, the biography she wrote of her father, and her collection of letters to her sister, often reflect a self-consciousness of her writing and a consuming desire to please her father above all else. From twelve years spent in Queen Charlotte's court, to her marriage to an exiled Frenchman, to a struggle with breast cancer that resulted in a double mastectomy, Frances Burney's life seems nearly as long and convoluted as her novels.

Jane Austen, on the other hand, did not live a long life—nor did she experience the same level of fame and recognition within her lifetime. Jane Austen's father was a gentleman vicar in Hampshire but had little to offer her in terms of money and inheritance. And unlike Burney, Austen never made enough money as a writer to support herself professionally. She spent much of her adulthood displaced and in varying degrees of genteel poverty and might have felt more of a kinship with characters such as the spinster Miss Bates than she did for heroines like Emma or even Elizabeth Bennet. Yet, Austen's posthumous reputation far surpasses that of Frances

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<sup>4</sup> Claire Harman's biography of Frances Burney offers a comprehensive look at the author's long life and her influence on the literary canon. Regarding Burney's financial positioning in her marriage to d'Arblay, Harman explains that the author was not worried about her husband's penchant for gambling and "lack of realism" as she was "inwardly confident" that her writing would support them (242).

Burney, posing an important question: Why? And what, as suggested by Woolf, does Austen owe to the literary legacy of Frances Burney, Madame D'Arblay?

When critics cite the influence of Frances Burney on Jane Austen, they often reference the title of Austen's most famous work—*Pride and Prejudice*. For in the conclusion to Burney's second novel *Cecilia*, the wise Dr. Lyster pronounces to the hero and heroine, “[I]f to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you owe your miseries, so wonderfully is good and evil balanced, that to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you will also owe their termination” (931). This moral is presented to readers by the doctor after 900 pages of turmoil and heartache. For Cecilia—the titular heroine—cannot be with the man she loves because her deceased uncle has tied her inheritance to a clause requiring her future husband takes her family name. And Mortimer Delvile—the gentleman in question—comes from an extremely proud, noble family who believe they will be disgraced if he does not keep the Delvile surname. Because of this convoluted situation, Cecilia and Delvile marry in secret. Cecilia forfeits her inheritance but, thanks to her charming demeanor, is provided a fortune by some of Delvile's relatives. Thus, Dr. Lyster highlights the irony in the fact that now that Cecilia bears the Delvile name, the pride and prejudice of the elder generation dictates that she be accepted and protected as a member of the family.

This is very different from how the term pride and prejudice is employed in Austen's novel—something that Elaine Bander is quick to point out. Bander explains that the conflict in *Cecilia* exists largely outside of the character's individual psyche. Outside meddlers are the ones who keep Cecilia and Delvile from seizing happiness together, thus stripping Cecilia of her agency. In *Pride and Prejudice*, on the other hand, the obstacles that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy must overcome to be together exist primarily within themselves—their own internal pride and prejudices. And when it comes to the one external opponent they face—Lady Catherine—Austen

allows her heroine to stand up for herself rather than take a verbal beating or allow the hero to defend her. As Bander concludes, “[I]n Austen’s novel no Dr. Lyster has to work the trick. Elizabeth has done most of the work herself (4).” Just as external figures place obstacles in the path of Cecilia and Delvile’s happiness, it takes the outside counsel of Dr. Lyster to provide the ironic moral to the story. In contrast, Elizabeth Bennet discovers that she must state her own truth in order to claim happiness. Thus, while the title of *Pride and Prejudice* may signal Burney’s influence, it also calls attention to some of the author’s differences in philosophy. Mainly, that while the novels of Burney and many of her contemporaries demonstrate a woman’s inability to defend herself against “predators” and “malevolent external forces,” Austen heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet are empowered to resolve their own conflicts, suggesting an overall more progressive outlook on ability of women to assert agency over their lives (Bander 4).

In addition to *Pride and Prejudice*’s title, another piece of evidence that supports the theory that Austen was a great admirer of Burney’s novels comes from the scene in *Northanger Abbey* where Austen defends Burney’s *Camilla* and *Cecilia* (in addition to Edgeworth’s *Belinda*). The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* claims that in these novels, the “greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language” (38). Austen’s elevation of the novel genre—which Claudia L. Johnson refers to as “dauntlessly self-affirming”—demonstrates the author’s appreciation of her predecessors and her willingness to not only work within the narrative space of the eighteenth-century novel, but also make strides to move beyond it (24). So, while much has been said about echoes of Frances Burney’s writing in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, there is less scholarship connecting Burney’s writing to *Emma*. This is perhaps understandable—



as on the surface there is little that connects *Emma* to the novels of Frances Burney. Burney's novels reflect a looming sense of darkness and paranoia—a female trauma that is largely absent (or at least, less ostentatious) in Austen's work.

John Wiltshire attributes this disparity between Burney and Austen to the settings portrayed in the novels. According to Wiltshire, most of Burney's novels are set in the city, a place full of danger and violence—especially for women (219). Indeed, Austen's novels are firmly rooted in the countryside—a much safer and more secure place for women than Georgian London. And when one thinks of the Austen novel that best displays the comforts and tranquility of the countryside, *Emma* comes to mind. In fact, the heroine's father, Mr. Woodhouse, often grieves that his eldest daughter “poor Isabella” lives so far away in London. Despite the fact that London is only sixteen miles away from their home in Highbury, Emma herself has never been actually been there, probably in part due to her father's fear of the city and its bad air. When Isabella visits Highbury, Mr. Woodhouse worries over the “evils of the journey” for his daughter's family, and even the horses and coachman that accompany them. The hypochondriac goes on to lament, “Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be. It is a dreadful thing to have you forced to live there! so far off!—and the air so bad!” (122).

While Mr. Woodhouse's paranoia about the dangers of the city acts as a form of comedic relief in *Emma*, Burney's metropolitan novels suggest that this fear of the city is not wholly unmerited. In *Evelina*, the heroine is forced on numerous occasions to fend off not only illness, but also violent attacks as a result of her misadventures in London. On an outing to Vauxhall, Evelina is coerced by her low-born cousins the Miss Branghtons to visit the “dark walks,” a section of the garden notorious as a den for danger and debauchery. Evelina is separated from her cousins and comes across a “riotous” party of gentlemen and is saved by Sir Willoughby,

who then attempts to take advantage of her situation (197). Thus, in *Evelina*, it is not the city with its “bad air” and crowds that menace innocent young women, but the men who take advantage of such innocence.

Further instance of Burney’s reliance upon the dangers of the city emerges in *Cecilia*. As mentioned, *Cecilia* tells the story of a beautiful, orphaned young heiress as she navigates the perils of London society. When Cecilia’s uncle passes away, he places her under the guardianship of three men who are meant to protect the young woman and her fortune until she comes of age or marries. Yet, as Margaret Anne Doody claims, “Father-figures in this novel are not part of a solution, they are part of the problem” (xxi). The novel begins when Cecilia, just months’ shy of turning twenty-one, leaves her childhood home in the country to go to London for the first time. While Cecilia is yet to meet any of these guardians at the beginning of the story, her country neighbor Mr. Monckton fills an advisor/mentor role and is the closest thing she possesses to a fatherly figure. Of course, readers soon find out that the married Mr. Monckton lusts after Cecilia’s beauty, wealth, and innocence and secretly hopes to marry her once his elderly wife passes. Monckton feels frequent pain when he sees Cecilia part with her money at various places in the text because he is hopeful that someday the money will be his. Though Mr. Monckton acts as an “honorary” guardian to Cecilia, Burney demonstrates time and time again that the only thing Monckton guards is his own self-interest. Burney carries this thread of inadequate, disaster-bringing father-figures throughout the novel.

In London, Cecilia stays with one of her guardians, Mr. Harrel, who is married to Cecilia’s childhood friend Priscilla. Unfortunately, the Harrels live well above their means and are drowning in debt by the time Cecilia arrives. Rather than protecting the naive Cecilia, Mr. Harrel manipulates her by threatening to harm himself if he does not receive the money to begin

paying off his debts. In an effort to save his soul, Cecilia agrees to give Mr. Harrel money; but, because she cannot access her fortune for another few months, she ironically takes on her own debt in order to prevent the Harrels from meeting financial and moral ruin. In the end, Mr. Harrel commits suicide on an outing to the pleasure gardens, an occurrence which marks an incredibly dark part of in Cecilia's story. Mr. Harrel's death leaves both Mrs. Harrel and Cecilia in a state of extreme helplessness as the women are left in the gardens with no chaperone. Even amongst a scene of such horror and grief, Cecilia must fend off men such as Mr. Marriott and Sir Robert Floyer who hope to take advantage of her vulnerability. Thus, Burney demonstrates that it is Cecilia's reliance upon these inadequate, immoral men that cause her to experience suffering.

Towards the conclusion of the novel, Cecilia's descent to madness serves as another dark moment and point of crisis. Cecilia has lost everything and been abandoned. She has forfeited her uncle's money by marrying Delvile and taking his name. She has squandered her personal fortune and damaged her reputation by engaging with a Jewish money lender to help the undeserving Mr. Harrel.<sup>5</sup> She loses the trust of her husband when she entreats Mr. Belfield for help after being displaced from her home. Lastly, Cecilia fears losing Delvile after he duels with Mr. Monckton. These horrible circumstances cannot be reconciled and culminate when Cecilia is refused an audience with her father-in-law and literally runs mad in the streets. Not only does she attract a mob wandering the streets of London, but she is taken in by a pawn broker who holds her hostage in the hopes of making some reward money. The pawn broker's wife keeps Cecilia

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<sup>5</sup> Because her guardians will not allow her to access her personal fortune, Cecilia is convinced by Mr. Harrel to borrow from a moneylender in order to help him pay his debts. Cecilia does not understand the concept of interest. Unfortunately, this act of borrowing money ruins Cecilia's reputation because women, especially young women of genteel birth, were not supposed to deal with finances. Additionally, the negative stereotypes of Jews at the time that falsely painted them as liars and cheats further condemns Cecilia for her dealings with them.

in a small room with no light, which only increases Cecilia's panic and confusion. The narrator explains, "thus dreadfully passed the night; and in the morning, when the woman of the house came to after her, she found her raving with such frenzy, and desperation, that her conscience was perfectly at ease in the treatment she had given her, being now firmly satisfied she required the strictest confinement" (899). Readers cannot blame Cecilia for succumbing to "raving with such frenzy" after what she endures. Cecilia is eventually found by the eccentric Mr. Albany in a state of illness and insanity. After reuniting with Delvile and learning he will not hang for his crimes, her rationality returns. As in *Evelina*, Cecilia finds that the city streets prove dangerous for a young woman, but only because the people who were supposed to protect these women from London's evils fail to do so.

In contrast to Burney's dark walks and heroines driven to madness, Austen's *Emma* appears to be a relatively tame, domestic novel concerned with the ordinary village of Highbury and its residents. To Austen's contemporaries, the mundaneness of Emma's world leaves much to be desired in comparison to the melodramatic occurrences in books like *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and even *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. In fact, *Emma* is the only one of Austen's novels that takes place entirely within a single village (Bree 134). Yet, with much more subtlety, Austen tackles some of the same issues as Burney's metropolitan dramas, suggesting that even the tame countryside could lead to danger for women in marginalized roles. One example of this in *Emma* is when Harriet Smith and another parlour boarder are "attacked" by "gypsies" on the walk back to Mrs. Goddard's the morning after the ball (294). I place the word attacked in quotations as the narrator relates the tale in a comedic fashion, noting, "How the trampers might have behaved, had the young ladies been more courageous, must be doubtful; but such an invitation could not be resisted" (294). The narrator is also deliberate to point out that the majority of these

“trampers” are children. Kristin Fleiger Samuelian argues that this scene functions to highlight Harriet’s precarious situation as the legal daughter of no one, with no name to protect her socially or physically (25). Harriet’s illegitimate status will be discussed further later on in this paper, but her encounter with gypsies demonstrates the fine line between her situation and that of the displaced children begging her for money.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the confrontation is that it is Frank Churchill who rescues Harriet from the “attack” and brings her to Highbury. Frank, who fills the typical Austen-seducer role, is charming, manipulative, and likes to play hero. Frank Churchill’s rescue is a slightly less ominous version of the scene in *Evelina* where the heroine is found and rescued by the rakish Sir Willoughby. While Frank makes no improper advances with Harriet (as Willoughby does with *Evelina*), readers later learn that he is engaged to another minor character—Jane Fairfax. Though Jane Fairfax is provided with a genteel upbringing by her guardians, The Campbell’s, the narrator of *Emma* is quick to point out that Jane is only educated with the intention of attracting a husband with her accomplishments; or, if that fails, accept employment as a governess. At the beginning of Volume II, readers learn that “[Jane] had resolved at one-and-twenty to complete the sacrifice, and retire from all the pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification forever (173).” Jane glimpses an alternative ending for herself when she meets Frank Churchill at Weymouth and enters into a clandestine engagement. Hall categorizes Jane Fairfax as a “settling” character, noting her dismal options as either a governess or a wife. Hall claims, “Since Jane ends up married to a flawed would-be hero who has humiliated her while publicly flirting with another woman, we might conclude that Jane Fairfax’s choice is not one to be celebrated” (106). Because of her inferior rank and limited choices, Jane feels she must risk the secret engagement.

She is powerless and subjected to the whims of a man who may claim to love her, but he does not protect her as he ought to and takes her loyalty and inferior social standing for granted.

For an early nineteenth century reader, the concealment of the engagement brings Jane's and Frank's morality into question as a secretive marriage is a threat to society. However, as Hall explains, Jane has little choice. And even when the engagement is revealed, Jane's marginality means she can be forgiven for this transgression because she was simply trying to choose between two objectionable options. Again, one can see echoes of Burney's stories within this situation. For Cecilia, too, becomes secretly engaged to (and eventually marries) Delvile.<sup>6</sup> Cecilia's distress over the secrecy of her marriage is evident as she knows such an act would mar her in the eyes of many. Her love for Delvile (and his persuasiveness) eventually prevails over Cecilia's ethical objections. Still, one could argue that Burney punishes Cecilia for this choice as the heroine endures further suffering instead of instant happiness as a result of her secret marriage. Nevertheless, for both Jane Fairfax and Cecilia, the choice of a secret engagement or marriage is deemed the lesser evil in comparison to the vulnerability present in a life unwed.

Burney and Austen seem to agree that a woman's fate is dictated by her wealth and status with little room for individual choice or agency. Ironically, the contrast Austen exposes between Emma and Jane, and even Jane and Harriet, while highlighting the dangers for women with limited social and monetary value, also acts to distort what Burney seems to uphold. Essentially, Burney's *Cecilia* suggests that even a morally perfect heroine is powerless in the face of these patriarchal strictures. While a few of Austen's novels feature protagonists who exist within the margins of their world (Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* being the most notable example), *Emma*

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<sup>6</sup> The clandestine marriage is a plot device often used to test the moral fitness of heroines and condemn those who elope or marry in secret (Campbell 86).

stands alone as Austen's novel in which the heroine is farthest removed from this kind of "minority." Emma exists outside the bounds of the patriarchy and is granted the privilege of receiving a moral education over the course of the narrative. She is "handsome, clever, and rich," and certain of her place at the top of the Highbury social hierarchy (55). Austen even specifies Emma's exact monetary value—thirty-thousand pounds—to emphasize her advantageous social and economic powers.

Emma may be drawn to an individual such as Harriet Smith—one who is inexperienced and displaced—because she resembles the heroines of Frances Burney's earlier narratives. Stephanie Hershinow places *Emma* as a novel that demonstrates Austen's reaction to and appreciation for the types of novels written by Frances Burney. I agree with this claim, as Austen seems to reposition literary heiresses who exist on the margins (like Burney's Cecilia and Evelina) through Emma—a heroine with the ability to wield power and influence within her limited sphere of existence. In this way, Austen's novels propel the narrative of the inexperienced female forward. The significance of this repositioning of the literary heiress can be further explored by examining the relationship between the heroine and her lower-class friend: Henrietta and Harriet. By examining how these two minor characters function as charity cases for the heroines and disrupt the narrative space of the novels, we can see that Burney upholds the status quo while Austen propels the narrative of the inexperienced female forward.

### Part Two: The Charity Case

It is here that the heroine's friends and beneficiaries—Henrietta and Harriet—enter the conversation. Shifting the discussion towards these minor characters and their functions both in the heroines' lives, and also in the overall narrative structure of *Cecilia* and *Emma* allows us to explore the possible influence of Burney on Austen while also underscoring their different

philosophies on the lives of women. John Wiltshire is one of the few scholars to note the connection between Austen's Harriet Smith and Burney's Henrietta Belfield. Wiltshire draws a parallel between these two minor female characters and their treatment by the novels' heroines, suggesting that Austen was "amused to notice that Cecilia, to cure Henrietta's broken heart, pairs her off with her own reject" (225). While this statement acts as a kind of side note for Wiltshire, his insistence on the similarities between these two minor characters warrants further exploration. Elaine Bander also notes the similarities between Henrietta and Harriet. Both Bander and Wiltshire attribute the connection to Austen's admiration of Burney's work, as well as her willingness to poke fun at the trope of the simple-minded best friend who falls in love with the heroine's own love interest. Yet, I believe there is more to be dissected from this connection than just amusement. A closer look at the role of these two minor characters in *Cecilia* and *Emma* reveals a great deal about women on the margins and about the authors' divergent philosophies on potential for women's agency in novels and in Georgian society.

To begin, both Austen and Burney situate Henrietta and Harriet as beneficiaries of the heroine's charity within the texts. Charity in the eighteenth century was seen as a social responsibility and duty for individuals in possession of great wealth. In *Cecilia*, the friendship between Cecilia and Henrietta emerges as a result of Cecilia's desire to do good and help the less fortunate. Readers first meet Henrietta when Mr. Albany, an eccentric older gentleman, brings Cecilia to the Belfield's homely apartment to "give comfort to the fallen and dejected" (205). Cecilia herself has philanthropic inclinations, as she has just taken it upon herself to give money to the destitute Mrs. Hill, whose husband was fatally injured working for Cecilia's guardian, Mr. Harrel. Cecilia expects Mr. Albany to bring her to hungry children or the dying poor, and instead finds "one fair, young, and delicate, —an introduction so singular to an object so unthought of,



deprived her of all power but that of shewing her amazement” (207). Cecilia takes an immediate liking to Henrietta, despite their forced meeting. Henrietta, on the other hand, is horrified that Mr. Albany has made her out to be a kind of beggar, exclaiming that Albany does not realize that a person suffering from genteel poverty “would rather starve” than ask for charity (209). Cecilia feels a great deal of compassion towards Henrietta’s circumstances and internally vows to help her: “her youth, and the uncommon artlessness of her conversation, added to her melancholy situation, and the loveliness of her person, excited in her a desire to serve, and an inclination to love her” (212). The instant love Cecilia feels for Henrietta could be interpreted in several different ways—the most wholesome explanation being that Cecilia longed for companionship and is attracted to Henrietta’s “artlessness” as a result of the heroine’s constant manipulation by everyone else in her life. Henrietta claims to want nothing from Cecilia, and that within itself secures Henrietta’s place in Cecilia’s heart and story.

Burney paints Cecilia’s desire to help Henrietta as a reflection of the heroine’s moral goodness. Though Henrietta’s self-consciousness surrounding her poverty is emphasized, Burney does not situate Cecilia as the cause of this embarrassment, but merely a passive observer. It is Mr. Albany who embarrasses Henrietta at the two women’s initial meeting. Ann Campbell discusses Burney’s “pointedly ironic account of Henrietta’s repugnance” at being considered an object of charity in context with the novel’s ending. Campbell states, “ultimately, marriage renders Cecilia, the benefactor of so many women left without means because men failed to support them, herself an object of Mr. Albany’s charity” (91). Here, Campbell refers to the fact that it is Mr. Albany who finds Cecilia at the pawn broker’s house after her touch with madness and brings a group of children into Cecilia’s room to observe her state. Albany’s demeanor changes when he realizes that Cecilia is unable to speak and believes she is dying, exclaiming,

“how will the poor rue this day!” (916). Albany continues to emphasize the forfeiture of Cecilia as a benefactress to these children, suggesting he mourns the potential absence of her charity more than the absence of her person. While Cecilia makes a full recovery from her episode, she does not recover her personal fortune. Yet, the narrator tells us, “she gave to herself all her former benevolent pleasure, in solacing [Mr. Albany’s] afflictions, while she softened his asperity, by restoring him to his favorite office of being her almoner and monitor” (939). Though Cecilia learns she must bestow her charity with caution, she still relies on Mr. Albany to guide her in these altruistic endeavors, and through that guidance restores their mutual happiness.

Like Henrietta, Cecilia is forced to rely on the charity of others to survive in an ironic twist that suggests Burney saw the line between women in power and women in poverty as unstable and constantly shifting. It is only through becoming an object of charity herself that Cecilia is able to continue bestowing charity upon her pensioners by the conclusion of the story. This full-circle moment restores Cecilia to the state of heiress (though the amount is much smaller than the fortune originally left to her by her uncle), yet this suggests that even heroines who occupy a centralized position within the narrative can be pushed to the edge of society and forced to endure pain and suffering. In addition to exposing the irony in the fact that Cecilia becomes an object of charity by the end of the novel, the complicated relationship between heroine, friend, and charity in *Cecilia* is also interesting to consider in comparison with *Emma*. The fact that Cecilia becomes an object of charity by the end of the novel is something Austen may have pondered while writing *Emma* several decades later. Where Burney paints charity as transactional—a giving and receiving of funds from the fortunate to the impoverished or the indebted—Mr. Knightley’s schooling of the heroine throughout *Emma* suggests that charity also involves compassion, reflection, and reason.

Where Mr. Knightley acts as the moral center of *Emma*—educating Emma on what is right and just in a way that Emma’s parental figures fail to do—Cecilia’s guardian figures are all inherently flawed and use her and her money to further their own interests. Cecilia’s uncle provides her fortune as a way to pass on his family name after he is dead. Mr. Harrel abuses Cecilia’s goodness in attempts to pay off his debts. The miser Mr. Briggs guards Cecilia’s money to fuel his own obsession. Mr. Monckton pretends to be a father-figure, when in reality he lusts after Cecilia for both her beauty and her fortune. All of these men want to possess Cecilia and her money for their own purposes. Even the pious and charitable Mr. Albany uses Cecilia to fulfill his own desire to demonstrate the importance of repentance. In this way, Cecilia’s character arc differs greatly from Austen’s heroine in *Emma*, as Cecilia is painted as already morally perfect, though naïve. It is the morally corrupted individuals—especially the men—within Cecilia’s life that cause her grief and suffering.

A similar instant friendship to Cecilia and Henrietta emerges between the heroine and Harriet Smith in *Emma*. The narrator informs readers that Miss Smith is a parlour boarder at the school run by Mrs. Goddard, “where girls might be sent to be out of the way and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies” (68). Though Harriet’s parentage is unknown, Emma is convinced she is the daughter of a gentleman and is pleased when Mrs. Goddard requests to bring Miss Smith along on a visit to Hartfield. As with Cecilia and Henrietta, Emma admires and appreciates Harriet’s beauty and demeanor, noting especially that she is “artlessly impressed” with Hartfield. In fact, both Henrietta and Harriet are frequently described as artless in their respective novels, a term that implies the kind of innocent simplicity necessary to highlight the benevolence of the heroine, but never overtake her in beauty or rank.

Cecilia's dotting on Henrietta is meant to act as proof of Cecilia's own goodness. Emma believes her friendship with Harriet will accomplish a similar task—highlighting her power, station, and kindness. Austen cues readers in on this through her signature narrative style of revealing multiple character's thoughts through free-indirect discourse<sup>7</sup>. The narrator explains:

*She* would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers. (69)

In this situation, Austen's innovative narrative style enables readers to enter Emma's interior thoughts, thus showing her agency as a woman capable of both thought and action. Here, Emma views Harriet as a project—someone to possess and improve and demonstrate she is capable of a “very kind undertaking.” The irony of the situation, as Austen hints at through her clever narration, is that these reasons Emma provides for befriending Harriet, while well-intentioned, are of an almost entirely selfish nature. One is reminded of Cecilia's guardians who, like Emma with Harriet, manipulate Cecilia for their own gains. Of course, Cecilia's guardians are all men and representative of the patriarchal strictures that act as obstacles to the heroine's happiness. Yet, the fact that Emma traverses the traditionally male spaces of mentor and guardian is worthy of note, as it highlights Austen's ability to move at least some of her female characters beyond the role of the traditional hapless female and into a space in which she can be an agent of change within her narrative and her world.

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<sup>7</sup> Austen relies heavily on free-indirect discourse as a tool to reveal the thoughts and feelings of multiple characters while still maintaining a third-person narrator. This narrative style is another way that Austen propels the genre of the novel forward both as a tool for storytelling and as a way of demonstrating female agency and introspection.

For Emma, a friendship with Harriet provides both entertainment and an opportunity to demonstrate the heroine's own good influence. Linda Bree claims that Emma's snobbery is a result of her social status and intellectual laziness, which "absolves her from having to think through the strengths and weaknesses of each individual case" (137). The most dramatic example of this occurs when Emma mocks the spinster Miss Bates on an outing to Box Hill towards the end of the novel. In this case, Emma allows herself to insult Miss Bates while disregarding the spinster's poverty and inferior rank. It is Mr. Knightley who acts as the moral center of the novel time and time again, as he is the person who continually schools Emma to consider the effects of her actions. Regarding Miss Bates, Mr. Knightley reminds Emma that "She is poor, she has sunk from the comforts she was born to. . . It was badly done indeed!" (369). In reminding Emma of Miss Bates's disadvantages in life and demonstrating his own disappointment, Mr. Knightley finally breaks through Emma's unfeeling façade.

Austen may be employing the exchanges between Emma and Mr. Knightley as an avenue to impose her own notions of social morality upon her characters. After being chastised once again by Mr. Knightley, Austen writes of Emma that "as she reflected more, she seemed but to feel more," (370). The use of the word "reflected" in this context highlights how Austen may understand reflection to be a crucial part of becoming a compassionate human being and something that Emma must learn in order to complete her character arc and be rewarded with marriage to a man she loves. Although Emma may be irrational and deluded at the beginning of the novel, over time she acquires the necessary skill of introspection. Emma's ability to consider the feelings of others testifies to the utilization of introspective skills, a trait that any rational

creature would possess.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Emma is flawed and Austen grants her the space and time to learn from her mistakes (unlike Cecilia, who is painted as always internally and morally perfect, but marred by external forces) supports a more forward-thinking outlook on the lives of women. At the same time, it is Emma's socioeconomic positioning that allows for this optimistic conclusion.

Emma's friendship with Harriet also offers evidence of this transformation as her positioning enables her to ignore the dangers present in convincing Harriet she might make a match with a man such as Mr. Elton, while Harriet's parentage remains unknown. Emma's inability to comprehend her own delusions is apparent in her matchmaking endeavors. Emma is so determined that Harriet should marry Mr. Elton that she is unable to see the social discrepancies evident between the two individuals. When Emma persuades Harriet to refuse Robert Martin's proposal, Mr. Knightley scolds, "Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have, is almost enough to make me think so too. Better be without sense, than misapply as you do" (61). Although Emma herself cannot see—or perhaps refuses to acknowledge—that Mr. Elton would never "throw himself away" on a woman of inferior monetary value such as Harriet, Mr. Knightley necessarily critiques Emma for her meddling (64). Still, for much of the novel Emma manipulates and makes fun of her social circle with little regard for the consequences.

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<sup>8</sup> In this manner, Austen builds upon the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft states, "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone." This idea that women are "rational creatures" was novel in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet, both Austen and Wollstonecraft incorporate the notion into their works. In *Emma*—and the majority of Austen novels—the author personifies both irrational and rational female characters.

Mr. Knightley does express his concerns about the relationship between Emma and Harriet early on to Mrs. Weston, Emma's former governess. Unlike Mrs. Weston, Mr. Knightley sees the friendship between the two young women as a "bad thing" and ponders "how can Emma imagine she has anything to learn herself, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority?" (80). Ironically, though Mrs. Weston was once Emma's governess and charged with educating her, through Mr. Knightley's concerns Austen demonstrates that Emma still has much to learn about behaving in a way that is morally just, especially to those who are socially inferior. It is no wonder that Claudia L. Johnson positions Emma as the most masculine of all of Austen's heroines— noting Emma's uniqueness as a woman who has power and unapologetically wields it just like a man (121). Like many of Austen's heroines, Emma is oblivious to her own flaws until the conclusion of the story, when she is ultimately transformed from a self-absorbed, deluded girl to a rational and caring woman. Ultimately, Emma is rewarded for this moral transformation in that she marries the man she loves. Austen's positioning of this heroine alongside marginalized characters provides an opening for women to grasp power in a society that constantly limits their worth to their financial value. Where the minority of the socially and economically inferior friend in *Cecilia* mirrors the heroine's own marginality, Harriet in *Emma* highlights the heroine's own unique privilege.

### Part Three: Henrietta, Harriet, and "Character Space"

In addition to their roles as beneficiaries of the heroine's charity, Henrietta Belfield and Harriet Smith occupy a unique "character space" (to adopt Woloch's term) in that they, at some point in the novel, develop feelings for the heroine's love interest. While both Henrietta and Harriet enter the texts as individuals existing in a lower social position compared to their respective heroines, at one point in the narrative the authors raise these minor characters to the

level of romantic rival. Through this shift, the pitiable, helpless female suddenly emerges as one with the potential to threaten the heiress's happiness—and becomes an obstacle within the marriage plot. As Woloch explains, most realist novels of the nineteenth century consist of a “fully realized central protagonist and a manifold group of delimited, specialized minor characters” (34). According to this kind of narrative theory, the point of a minor character is to contrast the position of the protagonist, support the main character in her endeavors, or disrupt the narrative to advance the plot. Henrietta Belfield and Harriet Smith fill all of these roles at some point in *Cecilia* and *Emma*.

Consider Cecilia's discovery that Henrietta Belfield is in love with Delvile, the object of Cecilia's own desire. This discovery comes at the beginning of the third volume. Cecilia, distraught by Delvile's seemingly shifting feelings towards her, begins to spend more time with Henrietta as a means of distraction and avoidance of her own heartache. One morning when Henrietta visits, Delvile also calls on Cecilia. At the mention of Delvile's name, Henrietta becomes flustered and embarrassed and the narrator informs us that “an apprehension the most painful now took possession of Cecilia” rendering her “silent and immoveable” (348). Cecilia's apprehension—that Henrietta has developed a fondness for Delvile—proves warranted and Cecilia laments that her favorite friend has now become her rival. Cecilia's silence and in this circumstance is not surprising, as Burney has made it clear that despite her fortune, Cecilia exists in the margins of her world where she has little agency, especially in matters of the heart.

When Cecilia learns that her friend is in love with Delvile, it causes great distress but does little to alter her circumstances as a young woman longing for young Delvile's love, yet unlikely to receive it. For almost immediately after this encounter, Cecilia informs readers that she “harboured not any suspicion” that Mr. Delvile could possibly return Henrietta's affections.



Cecilia pities Henrietta, but she is also jealous and questions the extent of the relationship between Delvile and Henrietta. Even amidst Cecilia's pity and apprehension, Burney is clear to remind readers of both Cecilia's and Henrietta's situations. Cecilia fears a "higher rival" – a woman who would satisfy Delvile's "aspiring spirit" in a way that Cecilia could not due to the entailment on her uncle's estate requiring her future husband to take on the Beverly name in order to receive the inheritance. In other words, though Cecilia is rich, a marriage to Delvile remains (at this point in the story) nearly impossible, as it would not satisfy the proud Delviles' desire to elevate the family name (350). Upon the discovery of Henrietta's feelings, Cecilia initially expresses certainty that Delvile could not reciprocate. For Burney, this certainty emerges as an economic argument rather than one born out of love or even rationality. Cecilia reflects that "for however precarious her own chance was with young Delvile, Miss Belfield she was sure could not have any" (352). Cecilia is sure that Miss Belfield is not a true rival, despite her anxieties. The narrator goes on to state that Henrietta's lack of fortune, as well as her low birth and inferior education are further marks against her when it comes to making a match with Delvile.

As a commodity (for really, what are women but commodities according to eighteenth century logic?), Henrietta Belfield has a very low value as potential bride for anyone, let alone Delvile. This knowledge distresses Cecilia, as it poses the moral dilemma of whether discouraging Henrietta's feelings would be for Henrietta's own benefit, or for Cecilia's desire to have Delvile for herself. And even the knowledge of Henrietta's lowly position cannot fully prevent Cecilia from jumping to conclusions about Delvile's feelings on the matter. On a visit to Delvile's mother, Cecilia finds Delvile in the drawing room, where he begins to question her about her friendship with Henrietta. Readers can clearly comprehend that Delvile's interest stems

from his admiration of Cecilia's "goodness" rather than any feelings of love towards Henrietta (361). Nevertheless, the exchange casts doubt in Cecilia's mind about her previous judgement on the matter between Henrietta and Delvile. She worries that Henrietta's feelings are encouraged by Delvile and wonders how her friend could have "inspired a passion so disinterested" as to "humble the most insolent of thy superiors, and teach even the *wealthiest* to envy thee!" (363). The reference to Cecilia's wealth acts as a reminder of this transactional nature of marriage and also reflects Cecilia's unspoken (and perhaps unconscious) frustrations with young Delvile at this point in the novel. For if Delvile loves Henrietta enough to disregard her inferior position, it makes a rejection of Cecilia—whose only flaw is that getting her fortune would mean forfeiting the Delvile name—all the more painful.

Although it takes readers nearly two hundred more pages for Cecilia to hear Delvile's denial of his feelings for Henrietta ("I have both admired and pitied her. But far indeed is she removed from all chance of rivalry in my heart"), Burney is clear from the start that Henrietta and Delvile are ill-suited for one another. In Burney's world, there are no Cinderella-esque endings where the low-born girl falls in love and gets to marry the prince. Even in *Evelina*—a slightly less dark novel about a beautiful, naïve orphan—Burney's use of the foundling motif acts not to subvert societal ideals about class and status, but to reassert them. In the novel, the heroine's suffering results from her noble father's decision to provide for his illegitimate daughter Polly Green rather than his legal one (Evelina). By the conclusion of the novel, this mistake is reversed and Evelina is restored to her father, which in turn transforms her into a suitable match for the rich hero, Lord Orville. However, Evelina's previous misfortune as a displaced child is transferred to Polly Green because there can only be one "real" daughter. In the case of *Evelina*, Woloch would describe Polly Green as an "eccentric" character as her

appearance disrupts the narrative and so she must disappear by the conclusion of the story so the main character can grasp a satisfying conclusion (25).

Lisa Zunshine contextualizes this ending for modern readers by pointing out that Burney's middle-class audience would have been more concerned with the bastardy of Polly Green from an economic standpoint rather than from a moral one. There can only be one "true" daughter in the case of *Evelina* because to acknowledge two children would not only disrupt the ending of the narrative, but also the socioeconomic realities this conclusion imitates. In *Cecilia*, the heroine's uncle stipulates that her future husband must take on the Beverly name because if she takes a different name that money and land would technically pass on to someone outside the family. Even Delvile in *Cecilia* is constrained by these conventions, as the same kind of family pride that drove Cecilia's uncle to entail her inheritance obstructs the Delviles from considering Cecilia a suitable marriage match.

We can see evidence of this same system at play in *Pride and Prejudice*, where the custom of primogeniture means that the living at Longbourn will pass on to Mr. Collins because all of the Bennet children are female. Again, one is reminded of the connection between Dr. Lyster's words in *Cecilia* ("[I]f to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you owe your miseries. . .to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you will also owe their termination") and the title of Austen's book. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Lyster's statement suggests the pride and prejudice of the elder generation is both what causes the heroine suffering, and what eventually leads to Cecilia's protection under the Delvile name. Cecilia's eventual fate as Mrs. Delvile, while allowing her to be with the man she loves, still asks her to sacrifice a part of herself (her name, her inheritance, and briefly, her sanity) to satisfy the patriarchal structures of her world. Part of the appeal of Jane Austen's novels are that these societal conventions upheld by Burney still exist within the narrative, but

the heroine is eventually able to subvert them. Or, in the case of Elizabeth Bennet, ignore them. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins speaks the truth when he claims that a transactional marriage between himself and Elizabeth would be beneficial as it would provide the protection that primogeniture will strip from the female Bennets upon Mr. Bennet's death. In contrast to *Cecilia*, the emphasis here is not on the loss of the family name or pride, but on the physical and financial security of the Bennet women.

For Burney, the impossibility of a match between Henrietta and Delvile reflects this economic backbone of marriage in the eighteenth century. A match between Harriet and Mr. Knightley is equally as improbable. Yet, Harriet's admission serves another purpose in addition to highlighting the social and economic realities of marriage—it forces Emma to examine the situation rationally and reflect on her own impact on others' lives. Like Cecilia, Emma is shocked into silence upon learning of her friend's affections. Although Cecilia is aware of her own feelings for Delvile before learning that Henrietta is also in love with him, Emma's discovery of Harriet's feelings is the catalyst for her own realization—she herself is in love with Mr. Knightley. Austen writes, “Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart.” (350). Ironically, though Mr. Knightley encourages Emma to use her intelligence and reason throughout the novel, it is only through the potential that he could love someone else that Emma acknowledges her own love for him. And, even when Emma admits to herself that she loves Mr. Knightley, she fails to hope that he may love her back. When Harriet informs Emma of her love for Mr. Knightley, Austen states, “Till now that she was threatened with its loss, Emma had never known how much of her happiness depended on being *first* with Mr. Knightley, first in interest and affection,” (408). Thus, Harriet's admission serves

multiple purposes within the narrative—acting as a catalyst of sorts for the rest of the plot to move forward.

While the most obvious effect of Harriet’s admission is that Emma finally acknowledges her love for Mr. Knightley, the occurrence also causes Emma to begin to think rationally and use her intelligence for introspection rather than amusement. Emma *should* know that Harriet’s unknown parentage makes it unlikely she would ever marry a man such as Mr. Elton or Frank Churchill. But Emma’s “intellectual laziness” (to use Bree’s term) and superior social positioning allows her to forgo introspection in favor of her own amusement. Zunshine explains that Austen relies on her reader’s awareness of the foundling trope—the young, lost child discovering their genteel origins—and “encouraged those expectations only to quash them” (153). Emma imagines herself as the wealthy benefactress who will propel Harriet up into the world. However, as in *Cecilia*, the heroine is tested when she realizes she and her friend are in love with the same man.

In this sense, Harriet acts as a hybrid of Woloch’s worker vs. eccentric model for minor characters. On the one hand, Harriet could be described as a “worker” because she has the “functional use” of getting Emma to recognize her feelings for Mr. Knightley, which in turn facilitates the happy resolution to the marriage plot. Yet, I would argue that Harriet also functions as an eccentric disrupter in that her declaration of love for Mr. Knightley “grates against her position” as both an unclaimed daughter *and* a minor character (Woloch 25). According to Woloch, these eccentric characters typically must experience some form of consequence or punishment as a result of their attempts to transcend their positions. But Harriet Smith does not suffer or experience any serious consequences, perhaps because it was the heroine’s own actions that led to the narrative transgression and not any perceived immorality on

Harriet's part. The "consequence" for Harriet is that she discovers she is not the daughter of a gentleman, but one of a tradesman. Another aspect of this model is that the eccentric minor character must be metaphorically "killed off" in some way and removed from the remainder of the novel (as with Polly Green in *Evelina*). Even Emma seems to be aware of this narrative structure, as she laments that the union between herself and Knightley means Harriet must be "excluded from Hartfield" in "charitable caution" (380). Nonetheless, Austen complicates this model as Harriet is not removed from the text altogether, but rather removed from Emma's romantic imagination.

In typical Austen fashion, Harriet's ending instead consists of marriage. This brings us to the final thread between Henrietta and Harriet I want to consider, and it relates to what Wiltshire mentions in his essay. Both of these minor characters are at some point in the narrative paired off with the heroine's "rejected suitors." Interestingly, pairing off minor characters with one another continues to be a common trope in romantic fiction and films. Countless romantic comedies feature an offbeat but supportive best friend who is slightly less pretty than the hero/heroine and therefore ends up with the rejected suitor (or, in some cases, the hero's best friend). As readers and viewers familiar with this trope, we almost come to expect this narrative pattern. Henrietta Belfield is no exception to the rule because she ends up with Mr. Arnott, a man who initially fell for Cecilia. In the final chapter of *Cecilia*, Burney explains that after enduring "the violence of untamed grief" Henrietta finds Mr. Arnott "as wretched as herself" and they eventually form an attachment (940). Marriage to Henrietta "healed the wound" of Mr. Arnott's unrequited love for Cecilia. Are we meant to feel pity for these sidelined characters who have been rejected in love? Or do we buy into the hasty marriages the authors arrange for them? The

minorness of both Henrietta and Mr. Arnott is echoed in the minor space provided for their quickened, second-rate conclusion.

Harriet's ending, on the other hand, is slightly more satisfying and only slightly less rushed compared to Henrietta's. Mr. Knightley discloses Harriet's fate, claiming she has accepted Robert Martin's second proposal. This news surprises Emma but leaves her "perfectly satisfied" as it eases some of her anxieties about Harriet's grief surrounding Emma's marriage to Mr. Knightley (398). In the final chapter of the novel, the narrator informs us that when Harriet returns from London "Robert Martin had thoroughly supplanted Mr. Knightley" in her heart and mind. Harriet's happiness overshadows any distress she feels over her previous attachment: "But having once owned that she had been presumptuous and silly, and self-deceived, before, her pain and confusion seemed to die away with the words, and leave her without a care for the past, and with the fullest exultation in the present and future" (403). The fact that Harriet feels "self-deceived" is ironic considering it was Emma who encouraged her to set her sights higher than a mere farmer in the first place.

Indeed, though Emma does not personally reject Robert Martin as a suitor for herself (as Cecilia does with Mr. Arnott), she initially rejects him for Harriet. She even goes so far as to claim that a marriage to Robert Martin would force her to lose all acquaintance with Harriet as Emma could never be friends with the wife of a farmer. Emma, too, benefits from the match between Harriet and Mr. Martin as it alleviates her own guilt for causing Harriet previous suffering. In the end, Emma finds it within herself to acknowledge the suitability of a match between Harriet and Robert Martin and even attends the wedding, once again demonstrating that a woman is capable of reflection and internal reform. Nonetheless, as in *Cecilia*, the hasty

marriage of the heroine's best friend is meant to highlight the heroine's own satisfactory ending rather than pave the way for the minor character's happiness.

### Conclusion

As this exploration of *Cecilia*, *Emma*, heroines, and minor characters has emphasized, the novels of Frances Burney and Jane Austen are both strictly situated within the conventions of the marriage-plot novel. Katherine Sobba Green is quick to point out that marriage-plot novels may end in happiness for the heroine, but “their minor characters alone—women won with promises; ruined, and abandoned, wives turned shrews—would have sufficed as a warning about how uncommon the ideal domestic relationship was in real life” (53). Along these same lines, Lynda Hall suggests that for many of Austen's minor characters (Charlotte Lucas, Jane Fairfax, and Maria Bertram), marriage is a matter of survival rather than happiness. The narrators of *Cecilia* and *Emma* do not provide any evidence that Henrietta or Harriet object to their individual fates; their endings are symbolic of the narrative devices surrounding their roles in the novels—they must work for the plot and ultimately support the heroine, rather than undermine her. While Burney situates these roles of women as fixed, Austen covertly criticizes them by granting the heroine Emma with the agency to manipulate Harriet to her own problematic ends. The fact that Austen creates such a morally flawed heroine and then allows her the space to reflect on the wrongs she commits promotes a more progressive and inclusive outlook on the role of women both as characters in novels and as agents of change within society.

I also cannot fail to mention that within marriage plot novels and the patriarchal strictures of the long eighteenth century “the progression from girlhood to womanhood was a natural plotline”—something to be achieved or, more commonly, endured (Greene 54). The remnants of this system permeate our world today, making it all the more important to pay attention to the



Henriettas and Harriets who exist on the margins of our world and of the media we consume. For example, a recent video on the pop-culture channel “The Take” explored the best friend trope in modern film and television, describing the best friend character as a “token.” The video claims, “while the story’s hero tends to be white, straight, and conventionally attractive, the best friend might more often be a person of color, LGBTQ, or belong to another marginalized community.” As in the case of Cecilia and Henrietta and Emma and Harriet, the asymmetrical nature of the narrative is mirrored by the unbalanced friendship, where the best friend character is frequently sacrificed for the sake of the protagonist. At the same time, the placement of a minor character on the margins of the story can also liberate them by freeing them from the confines of the novel structure.

This is by no means to say that Frances Burney and Austen should be ridiculed for adhering to the genre and the limited narrative space provided for minor characters. On the contrary, both of these women writers are celebrated because they work so well within the conventions of courtship novels while still finding ways to reveal and protest the injustices of their world. Without Burney’s precedent of using comedy and satire to expose the state of marginalized women in Georgian society, Austen’s heroines may never have found their place in the literary canon. And what a shame that would have been. For Austen and perhaps Austen alone possessed a unique ability to not only highlight the injustices of the female experience, but give her heroines the capability and yes, *rationality*, to grasp their own happy endings. Still, women writers such as Burney and Austen experienced the same marginality and oppressive strictures as the majority of their characters. Austen’s minor characters may not be heroines, but they are often survivors of difficult circumstances that reflect the grim realities of life for women in Georgian England (Hall 8). I mentioned Cadell’s rejection of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in

the introduction—an appropriate symbol of the precariousness of female authorship at this time as Austen had to rely on her father to advocate on her behalf. And despite her father's summoning of the beloved *Evelina* in his inquiry, Austen was met with a mere form rejection. In this sense, Austen represents a kind of minor character herself—the Harriet to Austen's Emma—somewhat overlooked within her lifetime, but nonetheless important in moving the narrative of the woman's novel forward into modernity.

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