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Frances Burney's journals offer many insights into the way she viewed herself as a professional writer, and three of her preoccupations are striking. One concerned an anxiety that her published writing should conform to contemporary, prescribed linguistic forms.[1] Another related to her consciousness of her status as a female writer, and the responsibility culturally invested in that role to write, and to be *seen* to be writing, with a "moral" purpose.[2] A third pertained to conversation; tirelessly recording real conversations which she then analyzed and judged, Burney revealed her acute interest in spoken interaction.[3]

Contemporary critical reception of her fiction suggests that Burney was mostly successful in addressing such concerns, especially in her first three novels, *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), and *Camilla* (1796), which shared the common theme of a young woman's entrance into urban society. A review of *Evelina* in *The Gentleman's Magazine* notes the naturalness of Burney's dialogue, commending her knowledge of "such characters as occur in the world"[4]; and *The British Critic* praises *Camilla* for its "morality and . . . instruction."[5] To some extent then, critical reviews gave her credit for her conservative agenda. However, although they focused on her moral import, her choice of language, and her character representation, Burney's contemporary reviewers overlooked her mediation of vari-

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[1] Burney carefully corrected her novels for subsequent editions. See Tieken-Boon Van Ostade 1991 for discussion of Burney's preparation of her journals for publication.

[2] In the dedicatory letter of *The Wanderer* Burney identifies her work with fiction which "when recommending right, has always been permitted and cultivated, not alone by the moral, but by the pious instructor" (1991: 9).

[3] Burney carried a journal sheet in her pocket, on which she recorded conversations. See Burney 1888, I: 18–19.

[4] 48 (September 1778): 425. See Grau, 1981: 23–28 for this and note 5. For a broader discussion of the interest in conversation, see Burke, and Miller.

[5] November 8, 1796: 527. See also the *English Review* 1, 1783: 16; *The New Annual Register* 3, 1782: 247; and *The Monthly Review* 21, 1796: 163.

ous contemporary debates about the moral significance of conversation, a context which enhanced the educative aspect of her work.

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Burney's anxiety about getting her language "right" can be located in contemporary discourses promoting a centralized standard dialect whilst marginalizing others.[6] In the last two decades, socio- and historical-linguistic studies have cast the period's initiatives to standardize the English language as an effort to forge national identity (e.g., Crowley), a mainstream identity which was regionally and socially exclusive (Sorensen, and Muggleston 1995a).[7] The letters and journals of such writers as James Boswell and Burney herself reflect the eighteenth-century view of language as a social marker and an indicator of social networks (Tieken-Boon Van Ostade, 1994, 2006: 267–70). What scholars have not fully explored, however, is the way eighteenth-century ideas linked linguistic correctness to aesthetic and ethical judgments.[8]

A plethora of reference books published in the 1700s judged communication in terms loaded with aesthetic and moral value. Dictionaries distinguished between formal words and words which they described as "barbarous," "gross," or "cant"; grammar books listed so-called "vulgar" solecisms, and laid down rules of linguistic usage, with influential works like that of Robert Lowth (1762) running to multiple editions.[9] Thus, as diachronic studies of English agree, by the end of the eighteenth century there existed a standard based on southern, élite forms.[10] Moreover, the

[6] Marginalized forms of eighteenth-century language have been the focus of early studies; see Matthews and Platt. More recently, Berry has examined the cant or "flash language" in the 1747 anonymous *Life and Character of Moll King*.

[7] Colley's study sees the impact of British nationalism on Scottish regionalism in the second half of the eighteenth century in more positive terms.

[8] Scholars have discussed contemporary debates relating to language and the mind (e.g., Land) and to class and the qualities of mind (Smith 1984). However, despite their interest in language and ethics in nineteenth-century novels (e.g. Mugglestone 1995b, Michaelson, and Tandon), few have noticed that Burney's novels assign distinct moral values to different sociolects and dialects.

[9] For recent work on grammars, see Tieken-Boon Van Ostade 2008: 101–47. For an overview of texts on synonyms and their critical reception, see Noyes.

[10] An account of the prescriptions and prohibitions which contributed to the formulation of Standard English can be found in the classic text by Baugh and Cable 253–95. For a more detailed discussion see Gorlach. Knowles's study discourages over-simplification of prescriptive approaches.

"hegemony of language which had been forming since at least 1750" derived from "the supposition that language revealed the mind" (Olivia Smith 2, 3). By 1785, the influential writer Thomas Reid could argue that the aesthetic quality of an external object consists in its expressing an aesthetic quality of mind (Essay VIII). For Reid, the moral and the aesthetic intersected. Thus language, as an external property, could be seen as having the potential to express thoughts and values; by extension, a beautiful, regulated language would express a righteous and refined identity, national or personal. Concurrent with this development was an increasing tendency to equate the standard dialect with truth and integrity, and to perceive the users of non-standard forms as foolish and lacking moral fiber. Such perceptions helped establish a concept of vulgarity which included moral as well as language shibboleths. In the eyes of many writers these shibboleths were most prevalent among the lower orders of society. However, impoverished language was seen as reflecting a paucity of moral values which could extend *beyond* the lower orders: the title page of Thomas Sheridan's treatise on education (1757) suggested that the immorality which "generally" prevailed might be rectified by the "Art of Speaking and the Study of our Language"; writing in 1797, Duncan Mackintosh, who taught English to French students, boasted that he eschewed "familiar, cursory" pronunciation as "a dangerous corrupter of language, politeness and morals."[11] By the end of the century, marginalized ("vulgar") language varieties included colloquial and familiar registers as well as non-standard linguistic forms and were frequently associated with base ideas and brutish emotions, irrespective of the speaker's rank.

Conversation was similarly debated and codified by eighteenth-century thinkers. The link between taste and conversation was considered in a wide range of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourses, resulting in the prescription of ideals and the formation of norms. As the eighteenth century progressed, it was generally the social function of speech which interested linguists, so that by the end of the 1700s, the primary goals of effective spoken language use were "gentleness" (Murray Cohen 72) and "sincerity" (Sorensen 202), the focus being on unaffected, unpretentious and inoffensive discourse, charged with an appropriate amount of emotion and underpinned by reason.

The focus on emotion was intrinsic to the phenomenon of sensibility which transformed ideas of "good conversation" in the second half of

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[11] Quoted in Gorlach 91.

the eighteenth century: feeling became evidence of authenticity. Sensibility became invested with moral values which validated feeling and, as developed by moral-sense philosophers, provided inferential access to the thoughts and emotions of another. Hume described sensitivity of consciousness as "sympathy," which he valorized as "that propensity we have to sympathize with others and to receive by communication their inclination and sentiments" (206). The propensity described by Hume is an innate faculty which could be further refined. Modern discussions of sensibility recognize the primacy of consciousness and privacy which underpinned its exaltation of selfhood (Barker-Benfield xviii, Warren 28, Mullan 16). In addition, the sensible person could express his or her own selfhood whilst accessing that of another.

Whereas such inferential access could be achieved by silent communion, the most effective vehicle for sympathetic communication was conversation. Leland Warren draws attention to the apparent paradoxes involved in the interdependency of sensibility and conversation in the eighteenth century, the former being private, "more or less innate" (28) and not possible to teach (30), the latter being a social act the arts of which could be a matter of instruction. Philip Carter helps resolve such tensions by suggesting that the physical manifestations of sensibility could also be learned and feigned, and that it is for this reason that sensibility, like politeness, came to be "a victim of its own codes" (336). These codes are illustrated in conduct books[12] whose publication reflected a sustained interest in issues of conversational behavior throughout the eighteenth century[13] and which provide evidence of a growing concern with naturalness and expressiveness.[14] Conduct books teaching how readers could appear

[12] Philosophical precepts were disseminated in conduct books. Michael Curtin linked courtesy ideas to the principles of the Christian tradition and to Evangelism (401 and 407); however, the writings of influential conduct-book authors such as James Fordyce and John Gregory were also "a key route by which new moral-philosophical discourses reached general audiences" (Taylor 32). On the dissemination of such ideas in periodical essays, see Uhlig.

[13] Major publications like those of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1774) and James Fordyce (1777) ran to several editions and were popular well into the nineteenth century. The second half of the eighteenth century saw an accelerated production of courtesy books specifically for women, with Fordyce's successful *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) followed by the influential works of Mrs Chapone (1777), Hannah More (1777), and John Gregory (1792).

[14] Carter argues that the publication of Chesterfield's letters, many written decades earlier, coincided with the high point of interest in sensibility; this timing helps to account for the generally adverse reception of the letters.

natural and expressive failed to articulate the contradiction inherent in such precepts, though the ambivalence with which politeness and sensibility were viewed by some eighteenth-century writers indicates that the potential hypocrisy was not lost on all readers. Further, the "suits-all" nature of their prescriptions left little room for the unusual. In Burney's fiction, the staging of conversation in the specific context of delicate social situations actually identifies conduct literature's blind spots.

Burney's keenness to be acknowledged as a moral writer can be seen as an anxiety about reputation which she shared with her female contemporaries, under pressure to produce work of recognizably moral value. Following Joyce Hemlow's seminal study (1950), scholarship has tended to highlight aspects of Burney's work which engage with advice on prudent, delicate behavior, especially for women (e.g., Todd, Epstein). However, men as well as women were influenced by secularized codes of morality that thinkers in various fields formulated during the long eighteenth century, codes which stigmatized egocentric behavior in favor of sympathetic engagement and sensitivity to the needs of others. Indeed, the role of conversation in maintaining a civilized and moral society, a central tenet of prominent moral philosophers, was embraced by various writers of novels throughout the eighteenth century. Writers like Maria Edgeworth and Hannah More, for example, used conversational interchanges in their novels as "well-scripted tutorials" so that readers, even children could learn the "interdependence of subjectivity and society" (Sutherland 410).[15]

Thus, eighteenth-century ideas about language and conversation went beyond mere social stratification; they prominently involved communication, discursive practices which contributed to key debates over such issues as nationhood, gender, and morality. Burney intervened in such debates, by using contemporary language and conduct prescriptions for thematic and ethical purposes.[16]

[15] Michèle Cohen (2008) examines domestic, informal conversations as well as conversational models in educational books, arguing that conversation came to be "perceived as an educational mode" (105).

[16] Critical studies have tended to elide the interrelatedness of language, conversation and morality in her representations of speech. The ground they covered was Burney's rendering of gendered language (Richetti, McMaster, Fraiman) and her use of characters' speech to point to social distinctions (McIntosh). N. F. Blake notes that by the end of the eighteenth century "characters of whom the authors disapprove may now use grammatical solecisms or slang"; like Carey McIntosh, however, he sees this as an indicator of such characters' "lack of true breeding" (125) rather than moral deviancy. Some studies of the 1970s briefly highlight Burney's characters' conversation and their moral worth — see, e.g., Lillian and

The discussion which follows addresses these questions by examining key passages from Burney's first three novels which place conversation at the centre of the edifying process. Focusing largely on the heroines' perceptions of the people they meet when they are removed from their childhood homes, Burney challenges her heroines to decipher who is and who is not to be befriended and trusted and to learn how to protect themselves against the untrustworthy. Early conversations are therefore crucial to the heroines' impressions of the values and moral codes of new acquaintances. Burney also uses language as a signifier of her speakers' morality: inappropriate vocabulary or grammar, in a given context, are perceived as a mark of base character. However, Burney shows that language alone cannot be relied on as a badge of morality, since education and background can equip a speaker like Mr. Monckton in *Cecilia*, with the means to construct the façade of gentlemanly polish. In Burney's novels language and interaction work together to express a speaker's authentic moral worth.

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Burney shared with her contemporaries an interest in the interplay of the demands of the self with those of others; she engaged with current debates concerning the accommodations that the private individual makes for the sake of social goals. Such adjustments have interested many modern linguists who theorize on how speakers might best accommodate the "face"[17] needs of their interlocutors through "politeness,"[18] and how far such efforts to achieve social concord are, in fact, a social "drama." I shall

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Edward Bloom (222). A decade later, Gina Campbell explores the conflicts in the text but refers only briefly to the opposition of Willoughby's "seductive rattle" and Evelina's "language of virtue" (571 and 572). Alexander H. Pitovsky has discussed poor listening skills and boorishness in *Evelina*.

[17] Goffman described "face" as the site of an individual's personal sense of dignity and autonomy, the locus of self-respect defined by a notion of the position of self in the greater matrix of society (1967: 5).

[18] Following Goffman, politeness and impoliteness have been the focus of much recent research by linguists concerned with the possible universality of such concepts. Discussions of "face-threatening" features of conversation correlate, in many instances, with conversational shibboleths defined by eighteenth-century courtesy literature (for example, interruptions, whispering, or abrupt changes of topic). For the development of Goffman's views in terms of positive and negative politeness see Brown and Levinson. For a review of recent developments of face theory, see Locher (52).

employ the classic work of Erving Goffman (1967 [1959]) and his successors in the analysis of Burney's fictional conversations. Since Burney shared with her contemporaries an acceptance of social stereotypes and sometimes categorized her characters as "the voluble" or "the ennuyé," or by aptronymic epithets like "my tormentor" or "the madman," discussion focuses on her depiction of such stock figures as "the libertine," "the fashionable," "the vulgar," and "the fop."[19] Using examples from the three novels as case studies, I show how Burney uses conversational interchanges and spoken language shibboleths as indices of the characters' moral worth or deviancy.

The "Libertine"[20]

Burney's characterizations are often structured as binaries. Worthy characters are offered as opposites of their deviant counterparts, their centripetal dialects throwing into relief the aberrant varieties of speakers on the margins of morality. One such pairing is to be found in *Evelina*: Lord Orville is the idealized masculine figure presented as deserving to win the heroine in a companionate marriage, and Sir Clement Willoughby is the "libertine" (97) who tries to abduct her. When introduced (28), Willoughby is described as the "gay-looking man" who questions Orville about Evelina. This conversation is, in Goffman's terms, off the centre-stage of a public performance of self.[21] Even through the doubly-filtered narrative of a conversation overheard by Miss Mirvan and reported to Evelina (who records it for her guardian), Willoughby is recognizable as dangerous to know. Although this is a private, colluding chat, the contrast between Orville and Willoughby emerges from the difference in their speech styles: Burney employs neutral verbs like "said" and "answered" to register Orville's impartial tone, and more emotionally charged verbs like "cried" and "demanded" to convey Willoughby's forceful interest. Willoughby's utterances include inflated vocabulary and are followed by punctuation marks denoting exclamatory and exaggerative accents (e.g., "By Jove . . . she is the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life!"

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[19] See Bloom and Bloom (218). Doody asserts that Burney was "one of the first novelists to see that each person is the bearer or representative of . . . an 'ideology,'" the burden of which, Doody explains, is political but also a "platform of their values" (118).

[20] This tag is given to Sir Clement Willoughby by Mr Villars (*Evelina* 97).

[21] Goffman describes such private acts as "backstage" where people, like performers, can drop their "front" or social mask and relax (114).

28). Moreover, he focuses on Evelina's physical attributes while Orville comments on her mind.

This unguarded conversation between the men establishes the values of each, an initial insight which remains a foundation for the further development of their opposing ethical presences in the novel. Orville is preserved as a stable, conservative force. Recognized by the acerbic Mrs. Selwyn as a young man whose courtesy represents values from "the last age" (233), he is clearly the man who can supplant the idolized guardian, Mr. Villars, in Evelina's affections. Compared repeatedly to Villars, Orville is placed firmly at the moral centre of the novel. His language is moderately expressive, never deviates from the norm, and rarely contravenes conversational rules. In contrast, Willoughby's egocentric philosophy is the antithesis of Orville's socio-centric model. Ignoring the promptings of what in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Adam Smith described as self-spectatorship, Willoughby has not developed a moral sense.[22] Indeed, he unfolds as a man who will use any means to satisfy his ends. At first Evelina mistakes his cultivated polish for intrinsic worth — in fact, at one point, she is grateful for his conversation as a welcome release from her pretentious cousins: he uses standard structures, avoids vulgarisms, and can employ various politeness markers in keeping with his status of a gentleman. However, for all Willoughby's linguistic competence, he lacks *communicative* competence: his excessive expressiveness is impolite and domineering; it places him on the margins of morality and indicates his lack of sympathetic engagement with others, especially women. Furthermore, in contrast to Orville's speech patterns, Willoughby's idiolect is composed of elements from different domains and registers, an indication of his shifty values and his ability to mask his intentions, locating his styles at the heart of eighteenth-century debates concerning language and truth.

In a key passage dramatizing Willoughby's egocentricity, Burney shows how he manipulates etiquette in order to dance with Evelina. His

[22] The term "moral sense" was used by Lord Shaftesbury in "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue" (167) in *Characteristics*. Shaftesbury argued that people were born with the potential to be good, but that this potential needed refining by the "right" education, a notion which was not incompatible with the Lockean view that "[h]e that is a good, a virtuous and able Man, must be made so from within. And therefore, what he is to receive from Education, what is to sway and influence his life, must be something put into him betimes." Eighteenth-century discussions concerning the impact of an individual's goodness on others tended to favour the anti-egoistical response of Shaftesbury who argued that goodness can only exist as part of a social system, performed through affection, not through self-motivation (167–72).

immoral propensities are also suggested by his breaking of conversation rules. Letter XIII recounts the incident where Mrs Mirvan struggles to preserve her feminine politeness whilst dealing with a situation about which she is not fully informed. Gradually made aware of Evelina's confusion, Mrs Mirvan becomes "perplexed." In keeping with conduct-book strictures, however, she does not immediately intervene, only voicing her surprise when Willoughby's language and manner become theatrically exaggerated and offensive ("'Ungrateful puppy! — I could bastinado him!'"). She collects herself rapidly, however, and distances Willoughby politely by reminding him of the requirements of social ceremony: "'Sir,' answered she, gravely, 'I have not the pleasure of being acquainted'" (35).[23] However, Willoughby uses the rules of politeness against Mrs. Mirvan, to position her in the wrong, and she is caught in the conversational dilemma of having to be assertive to protect Evelina without causing a gentleman to lose face:

> Mrs. Mirvan, with an embarrassed air, replied, "I do not at all mean, Sir, to doubt your being a gentleman, — but —"
>   "But what, Madam? — that doubt removed, why a but?" (35)

Mrs. Mirvan's metalinguistic softener, "I do not at all mean," her respectful vocative, "Sir," and the hypercorrect use of the gerund, "your being a gentleman" all come to nothing, for at this point it is Willoughby who commits a face-threatening act: he interrupts her. Aware of the incivility of Willoughby's speech and of the conduct book advice against pointing out another's faults, Mrs. Mirvan switches code and tries to imitate his style: "'Well sir,' said Mrs. Mirvan (with a good humoured smile), 'I will even treat you with your own plainness, and try what effect that will have on you: I must therefore tell you, once and for all —'" (35). However, her lengthy softeners only provide Willoughby with an opportunity to interrupt again, seizing the conversational floor in a coup which silences her. Mrs. Mirvan rallies, with one final attempt to harness social conventions in a dismissive remark: "'Sir,' answered she, 'favours and strangers have with me no connection'" (36). But she is finally overcome by Willoughby's appeal to her benevolence, an appeal that she cannot refuse. Willoughby is adept at inverting moral values and manipulating social codes so that the virtuous Evelina, caught in a web of social niceties and ethical conundrums, is frequently swept into compliance. In this instance, Mrs.

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[23] Modern linguistic research suggests that tone is more influential than vocabulary in the interpretation of utterances. See Mehrabian.

Mirvan's experience mirrors that of the heroine, though the former copes with a dignity and autonomy often inaccessible to the latter. The complex demands on an individual's social and personal identity are brilliantly conceived by Burney in scenes such as this, which subliminally point to the fatuousness of some conduct-book advice: even worthy and experienced women like Mrs. Mirvan sometimes have to struggle to square the requirements of politeness with the promptings of moral sense.

In this incident the narrative also reveals the discomfort the heroine feels when faced with the inappropriate compliments which Willoughby uses to assert his dominance. Gallantry was generally recognized by enlightenment texts as a civilizing force. The historian Barbara Taylor has shown that British politeness discourses rejected what was seen as "Gallic, lascivious gallantry," defining their "own native code of female modesty and male self-restraint" associated with "chaste conviviality" (37). It is possible that Burney had the French model in mind when she framed his conversations. His hyperbolic compliments elevate Evelina as a goddess even whilst they insult her and question her integrity: one moment he describes her as "patience on a monument" and "an angel," but the next he objectifies her as a "charming creature" and signals his mastery over her by possessive determiners ("my dear creature"); this he mingles with a reading of her behavior which inverts her moral code, as he suggests that she "wantonly" and "barbari[cally]" "trifle[s]" with him. Evelina feels "real disgust" at such exaggerated gallantry which implies a man's right to pronounce judgment on a woman's appearance and motives.[24] As we have seen, Willoughby's conversation belies Evelina's "solid virtue" by his articulation of her would-be vicious motives, superimposing his own sexual reading on her words and actions. Thus, Willoughby uses language as a palimpsest to create his own version of Evelina, denying her moral agency.

Burney condemns Willoughby's gallant declarations even further by, paradoxically, making them eloquent and persuasive. As Adam Potkay has shown, many eighteenth-century thinkers saw the elaborative effects associated with eloquence as deceptive and distrusted their persuasive power, regarding those who employed them as anti-sympathetic egoists who try to impose their will on others. Indeed, Willoughby is often an

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[24] Mary Wollstonecraft notes the assumption of power underpinning such flattery, observing that it deprives women "of every solid virtue" (21), rendering"them vain and useless" (99).

agent who brings out the worst in people, making them act and speak like him. Thus in this episode Burney allows her heroine to lie in order to avoid dancing with him, and to flout the strictures of politeness ("I must insist on your leaving me; you are quite a stranger to me, and I am both unused, and averse to your language and manners" [34]). Evelina's reference to Willoughby as her "evil genius" (39) points not only to his transgressive propensities but also to his representing the potential for transgression within herself.

This theme, however, is not granted a development in Burney's early fiction: if Evelina is tempted by Willoughby it is owing to his social prowess and his mainstream elocution. Willoughby's membership in the right sort of English-speaking club guarantees his access to Evelina's circle and stands him in good stead. This is not to say, however, that Burney is questioning the prescriptive norms by showing how they can mask wickedness: Willoughby's language, though largely standard, shows him to be a linguistic shape-shifter, and one who breaks pragmatic rules. It is the perfectly-spoken Orville who weds linguistic correctness to expressive, pragmatic politeness in order to marry the heroine. Dramatizing the consequence of failing to acquire a solid moral sense, the novel associates Willoughby's failure with his inability to develop a central dialect, the stable base of which should be sensitivity to the needs of different contexts and audiences rather than a wildly protean force in the service of his own ends.

The "Fashionable"[25]

Burney's work scrutinizes the behavior of the *bon ton,* whose chief characteristics are depicted as selfish and shallow. In *Cecilia*, Burney sketches members of this class using such social stereotypes as the volubles and the ennuyés along with more fully realized characters like Sir Robert Floyer and the Harrels. All these characters break linguistic and conversational rules, evincing common moral deviancies. Located centrally in terms of society and fashion, this homogeneous group is, nonetheless, situated on the margins of the moral space that Burney's heroine inhabits.

Burney's third-person narrative in *Cecilia* spells out for the reader the moral failings of her fashionable characters. The first description of Sir

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[25] In *Cecilia* this tag is used by the narration to describe Mr Harrel (2) and Mrs Harrel (30); it is also associated with the "Ton misses" (34). Mr Harrel uses the adjective to describe Sir Robert Floyer (46).

Robert Floyer, "the accomplished man of the town," begins by focusing on his face, which conveys "invincible assurance," and then moves to his manners and air, which project "the high opinion he cherished of his own importance" (30). Burney describes his bold assessment of Cecilia's face as an indicator of his consumerist values; if Willoughby coveted Evelina licentiously, Burney's later villainous character has more material motivations. Insensible of both Cecilia's "beautiful soul"[26] *and* her face, Floyer observes her with the attention "of a man on the point of making a bargain" (31). At first the narrative reports rather than shows Floyer's conversation, and this has the effect of projecting his menacing impact on Cecilia, whom he does not address. His wit is employed cruelly, and Cecilia also notes the "injudicious subjects of pleasantry" which dominate his conversation with others (31). Here is a speaker who eschews sympathetic engagement with others and who might be seen to illustrate why conduct-book writers felt the need to codify politeness. Dismissive of what Chesterfield called "the art of pleasing," Floyer's speech, when we meet him again, is littered with such interjections as "faith" and "hang it," (36). Floyer's ungallant observation of Cecilia's appearance is a serious face-threatening act, unmitigated by any attempts at polite discourse; indeed, when asked why he has not spoken to Cecilia, he retorts, "Who the d—l will fatigue himself with dancing attendance upon the women, when keeping them at a distance makes them dance attendance on us" (36). Burney intended the reader to despise Sir Robert Floyer, not just because he is fashionable and superficial, but because of his predatory motivation. His cool assessment of Cecilia's financial and social potential is the antithesis of the way Burney's heroes appreciate the moral worth and solid virtues of her female protagonists.

In *Cecilia*, fashionable females include Mrs. Harrel, Miss Larolles, and Miss Leeson. Like Sir Robert Floyer, Miss Leeson uses silence to signify her disregard for Cecilia's status and values. Labeled "SUPERCILIOUS" by the sarcastic Mr. Gosport (37), Miss Leeson's snobbery is manifest in her use of silence to block out those whom she deems beneath her notice. On her second meeting with Miss Leeson, Cecilia tries to talk to her in order to escape the watchful glare of Sir Robert Floyer. "Chilled by the coldness of her aspect" and "her forbidding looks," (34) Cecilia searches her mind for an opener, finally asking if Miss Leeson

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[26] For a discussion of the development of the concept of the beautiful soul in the context of aesthetic morality see Norton 55–99.

has seen Miss Larolles. Miss Leeson answers such closed questions with minimal responses, "No ma'am," the expressionless tone of her voice and multiple silences making it impossible for Cecilia to understand whether her social advances are welcome or not. Even when Cecilia asks an open question, she is met with a rebuff. Some modern-day linguists have associated the use of silence and minimal responses with masculine efforts to block conversation with women (e.g., DeFrancisco); however, Burney's representation of the phenomenon seems rather to associate it with power. Miss Leeson maintains her superior conversational status by making herself exclusive. However, her controlled and controlling conversational style signifies her emotional detachment as well as her elitism, and as such marks her as lacking humanity. In her essay "Thoughts on Conversation," Hannah More, whom Burney admired, echoed many conduct strictures advocating female reserve when she wrote, "How easily and effectively may a well-bred woman promote the most useful and elegant conversation almost without saying a word . . . sparkling intelligence . . . illuminated countenance . . . proves she understands" (40–41).[27] However, dogged silence like Miss Leeson's was discouraged as impolite, moderation in modesty being key to successful and appropriate conversation.

At the other end of the scale, Burney offers Miss Larolles, the "VOLUBLE" (37) in *Cecilia*, who constantly breaks the rules of conversation with her excessive talk. In an introductory interchange with Cecilia (19–21), her contributions make up most of the turn-taking, overshadowing the more sympathetic utterances of the heroine.[28] Her egocentricity is manifest in her string of questions, leaving no room for answers. When Miss Larolles is introduced in Chapter III of Book I, her idiolect is distinguished by phrases which convey her exaggerated responses to her own anecdotes, which are variously evaluated as "horrid provoking," "monstrous," "vilest," or "sweetest" and "vastly well" (19–20). Johnson's dictionary labeled words like "horrid," when used as intensifiers, as "women's cant"; but in *The Idler* (No. 78) he associated such phrases with a fashionable man, Will Startle, who "passes his life between rapture and horror," his responses revealed by such "exclamations" as "*Vile, odious, horrid, detestable* and *sweet, charming, delightful, astonishing*" (II: 145). Burney's use of such lexis emphasizes Miss Larolles's need to portray everything she does as a melodrama and a complete obsession

[27] See also Fordyce 1766: 151.

[28] Miss Larolles utters 404 words compared to Cecilia's 76.

with self which leads her to dominate most conversations. The influential work of James Harris and other universal grammarians of the mid-eighteenth century described the functions of the mind in terms of reflection and sensation; Harris privileged the function which performs acts of reasoning by the process of generalization over the function which processes sensations by focusing on particulars (1751: 347). In his discussion of verbs Harris argued that the "Species of Knowledge" of the present was the lowest, since it was common "to all animal Beings" (113); James Burnett, (Lord Monboddo) associated such a focus on the present with opinions, the body, and its needs — a focus which is "to be considered as degraded" (1773, 1. 47). These ideas were located in debates about the origins of language and primitive states. Hugh Blair's consideration of metaphors led him to conclusions that primitive language lacked "the proper names for objects," and was "prone to exaggeration" when subject to strong feeling (1765: 2–3). Miss Larolles's hyperbolic statements and preoccupation with the quotidian paraphernalia of fashionable life ("dresses," "hair-dresser," "tickets") as well as her focus on her own feelings and needs invite us to see sensation as the dominating function of her mind, a mind which, in Harris's terms, is of "wax," merely passively receiving "the impressions of the external world" (47). Burney thus associates Miss Larolles's language with inferior qualities of the mind, not "worthy of their divine original" (Harris 47), morally as well as intellectually primitive (Blair 1780, II: 82).[29]

Miss Larolles's grammatical and lexical choices also violate the rules of polite discourse. She revels in Cecilia's ignorance of the new use of the word "ticket" (20), and her utterances are marked by fashionable slang like "it's quite the thing" and "half so good a fancy"; she utters what Chesterfield termed a vulgarity when she says "Oh, you're vastly well" (20).[30] Her clichés and informalities overlap, in some instances, with what was perceived as lower-class idioms; she also favors solecisms, as in her non-standard use of auxiliaries in the question, "You shall be there?" (19), and of the negative when she says, "he is so immensely absent he don't hear one half that one says" (128). Burney, like Johnson, preferred to form negatives by inversion rather than by using the auxiliary verb "do"; but Miss Larolles is assigned a negative which employs this verb in a form also lacking grammatical concord. Furthermore, Burney presents

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[29] When considering the gaiety of the "dissipated and vicious part of mankind" Blair explains that their gaiety "is owing to a total want of reflection (1780, II: 82).

[30] Chesterfield, *The Accomplished Gentleman* 97.

Miss Larolles's overuse of standard, informal contractions, like "can't," "it's" and "sha'n't" (19) on an occasion explicitly described as ceremonial.[31]

The speech of Burney's trio of fashionable women throws into relief the intelligent and sensitive responses of the heroine. Miss Larolles's conversation flits from subject to subject, signifying that her reflective faculties are unsound. Mrs. Harrel's flawed thinking is reflected in her grammar: her syntax slips out of control as easily as money, with epanalepsis pointing at undeveloped faculties. When discussing her expenditure, for example, she exclaims,

> $_{MnCl}$ [Lord, I can't tell] — but $_{MnCl}$[I know $_{Sb\ Noun\ Cl}$ [it is $_{Sb\ Adverbial\ Cl}$ [— because — I am very certain $_{Sb\ Noun\ Cl}$ [it is]]] (188)

Here, the adverbial clause of reason provides no reason, but merely reiterates her selfish compulsion to spend — McIntosh associated such over-concatenation with lower-class English, but here it goes beyond a sociolinguistic function, assuming moral significance.

All these speakers violate the ideals of polite sociability based on Humean notions of mutual sympathy and developed by conduct book writers like Mrs. Chapone, who encouraged her readers "to enter into the feelings" of their companions (1775: 29).

The "Vulgar"[32]

Burney's narrative presents social pretensions as a mark of egoism. Whereas characters like Lord Orville in *Evelina* treat everyone equally, pretentious characters assert their superiority by derogating others while aping the behavior and appropriating the values of the fashionable élite.

In *Evelina* the conversational rule-breaking and "vulgar" linguistic forms employed by Evelina's relatives, Madame Duval and the Branghtons, are evident in all their interchanges. Miss Branghton's idiolect is distinguished by fillers like "I'm sure," and "I dare say," expressions that have long been identified in British English with the uneducated lower-class dialect of those seeking to present themselves as "genteel." Non-standard uses of grammar also betray a lack of knowledge of pre-

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[31] Gorlach notes (80) that contracted verbs were stigmatized and only tolerated in informal contexts.

[32] The word "vulgar" is used by Lady Howard to describe Madame Duval (8), and by Evelina to describe the Branghtons (79).

scribed forms. Burney assigns to Miss Branghton the use of the adjective "fine" as an adverb — "He dresses so fine" (172) — perhaps to indicate her ignorance. Burney may have had in mind Johnson's observation in *The Idler* (No.77) that "those who aspire to gentle elegance, collect female phrases and fashionable barbarisms" (138), "fine" being labeled as a female phrase as early as 1718.[33] Madame Duval always uses double negatives, a grammatical structure that by the late 1700s all authoritative grammar books proscribed. She also constantly utters French phrases like "*Oh ma foi!*" Although viewed as prestigious, French was often used in the eighteenth-century text as a signifier of decadent morality, luxury, and frivolous artificiality (McCreery 208) — all of which are pertinent to Madame Duval. She is a widow, traveling in what was considered a somewhat dubious relationship with a Frenchman; she dresses in excessive finery and paints her face, further indicators of affectation and "art." However, although Madame Duval has lived in France, she is an Englishwoman of "low" birth. Thus Burney's assigning her the persistent use of French suggests pretentiousness, as Madame Duval seeks to associate herself with a "prestige" language. Her use of a different language also signifies her readiness to refashion her identity, passing herself off as a society widow, as if to the manner born. As with the Branghtons, Burney's objection is not so much to Madame Duval's new wealth but to the way she uses it to claim superiority over others. Thus Burney is merciless in revealing the paucity of moral and cultural capital which lies beneath such social aspirations. The clash of moral traits and sociocultural claims is made manifest in bifurcated language: Madame Duval's miscellany of "incorrect" English and prestigious French; and the Miss Branghtons' would-be genteel manner of speech undermined by "vulgar" expressions.

Madame Duval and her London relations all fail to respond to the moral worth of Evelina, seeing only her potential for social and financial advantage. Such lack of family loyalty and compassion also characterizes their relationships with each other and finds expression in their conversations. In Letter XIV of Volume II, for example, Burney presents their disagreements over a social engagement without narrational comment, allowing the negativity and lack of concord to speak for themselves:

> "Why, then, Papa," said Miss Branghton, "we'll go to Don Saltero's. Mr. Smith likes that place, so may be he'll go along with us."

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[33] Charles Gildon 1718: 224.

"No, no," said the son, "I'm for White-Conduit House; so let's go there."

"White-Conduit House, indeed!" cried his sister; "no, Tom, that I won't."

"Why, then, let it alone; nobody wants your company; — we shall do as well without you, I'll be sworn, and better too."

"I'll tell you what, Tom, if you don't hold your tongue, I'll make you repent it, — that I assure you." (158)

This interchange illustrates face-threatening acts, lack of respect for individual status escalating into a threat. The discussion deteriorates further when Evelina tries to involve the melancholy Mr. Macartney in the plans, and the Branghtons laugh in his face, a further indication of their sociopathic egocentricity.

Burney's fashionable and vulgar characters are shown to be largely incapable of being impressed by contact with others. In *Camilla* Burney indicates her belief in the efficacy of "experience which teaches the lesson of truth" (8). The empiricist Thomas Reid wrote that "impressions are stamped upon the mind" as on wax or copper-plate, implying "some change of purpose or will" (30-31), a change he saw as activated by "the moral sense or conscience" (520). Echoing this view, Burney associates such agency with feeling, and argues that "'Tis on the bitterness of personal proof alone, in suffering and feeling, in erring and repeating, that experience comes home or impresses to any use" (*Camilla* 8). But Burney presents vulgar and fashionable characters who are of a different metal. In a subversion of Reid's thought about experience, mediated by the moral faculty, leaving its mark, Burney's fashionable character Mrs. Arlbery observes, "We are almost all . . . of a nature so pitifully plastic that we act from circumstances, and are fashioned by situation" (*Camilla* 398). Like Sir Clement Willoughby, the libertine, Burney's vulgar and fashionable are malleable but unstable, failing to process their experiences internally and therefore unable to develop or respond to a guiding moral sense.

"The Fop"[34]

Social pretentiousness is not the only target of Burney's satire. Burney engaged with debates relating to masculine codes of behavior, which in-

[34] In *Camilla*, the narrative describes Sir Sedley Clarendel as "bordering" on foppery (64), then as "burying" foppery to help Camilla (324); elsewhere the tag is used of him by other characters. Lovel is described in an aptronimic way by Evelina as "that fop" (26).

tersected discussions of social and personal morality and indicated that concepts of goodness were, to some extent, gendered.

As the letters of Chesterfield indicate, self-presentation was a key issue for men, but this was modified by a need to be sincere, open, and considerate. Sociability was encouraged, and silence was advocated as a means of avoiding discord. Loquacity, in men and women, was discouraged. Notions of English masculinity in the late eighteenth century questioned earlier continental models of courtliness. In addition, masculine ideals were impacted by notions of sensibility, a development which corresponded with contemporary recognition of women's influence in socializing men. Chesterfield advised his son to seek out the conversation of women in order to improve his own discourse skills (1782: 18). Feminized masculinity was the key. Concurrent with such ideas, however, was an overt distrust of effeminacy, whose nature is "best illustrated by the character of the fop" (Cohen 1996: 37).

In tune with such a mood, *Evelina* offers polarized examples of manhood, which Burney condemns equally: the ridiculed foppery of Mr. Lovel, whose discourse articulates his effeminacy, and the hyper-masculinity of Captain Mirvan, whose naval jargon, oaths, imperatives, interruptions, and sheer conversational dominance mark him as a man who has rejected all the co-operative skills usually associated with women. Burney equates such aberrant speech with immoral propensities: Lovel is cruel, vindictive, and a genuine social threat to Evelina; Mirvan is physically and verbally abusive, terrorizing his family and acquaintances for his amusement. Both men are located at the centre of the social world Burney creates, but she marginalizes their moral values by *de*centralizing their dialogue.

Burney's use of effeminacy to signal moral deviancy becomes more nuanced in her handling of the figure of the fop in *Camilla.* Sir Sedley Clarendel possesses some attributes of the stereotypical fop: he is described as being "dressed so completely in the extreme of fashion, as more than to border on foppery" (64); he is a close associate of a woman, Mrs. Arlbery; and he affects to be feeble, self-centered, and vain. Unlike Lovel, however, Clarendel is witty, and his affectations disguise a more sensitive and intuitive intellect. When introducing Clarendel, Burney explicitly mentions "an archness in his eye that promised . . . a secret disposition to deride the very follies he was practicing" (64). Clarendel's speech mirrors his dichotomous nature. His more private and natural idiolect is courteous and correct, but *in public* he uses a rich tapestry of idioms and literary allusions, an intriguing mixture of "vulgar" colloquialisms and

classical references, which, to some extent, places him beyond feminini-
ty by articulating his masculine (classical) education. When Camilla first
meets him, he blames the waiters for their lack of attention, calling them
"Barbarians," "Goths," and "Vandals" before switching to Early Modern
English: "Art thou deaf? Why dost thou not bring this lady a chair?" (65).
These cultural references are at odds with the banal content of his con-
versation: the overall effect is comic and somewhat endearing. However,
Clarendel's biting wit oversteps the mark of conduct-book courtesy, and
his over-familiar invitation to Camilla to join in his fun violates social
rules. Further, he frequently breaks conversational expectations. When
Camilla meets him for the first time at an assembly, his initial utterance
is neutral enough, "What a vastly bad room this is for dancing!" (65), but
his throwing himself into a seat and pouring cologne on his handkerchief
suggests self-obsession. Further, he seems to address his comment to no
one in particular, a lack of courtesy further compounded by his refusal to
relinquish his seat to Miss Margland (Indiana's governess) and his dis-
concerting examination of Camilla "with much attention" (66). On first
appearances, then, Clarendel's behavior resembles Sir Robert Floyer's
lack of gallantry.

However, Burney does not condemn Clarendel's behavior. It is Miss
Margland who labels him an "impertinent fop" (68), and the narrative has
already marked her as a selfish parasite, ill-equipped for her role as an
educator. We are not meant to accept Clarendel's foppery at face value;
nor do we censure his rudeness to Miss Margland. Rather, we applaud
his sarcastic feedback when he acknowledges Miss Margland's views,
"Vastly true ma'am" (66), and we recognize the author's criticism of *her*
conversation when Clarendel ironically praises it: "Immeasurably well-
spoken ma'am" (68). Clarendel employs his wit in destructive ways, but
his targets are invariably those whom the narrative has already estab-
lished as deserving satire. Thus, of the pretentious and misogynistic Mr.
Dubster, Clarendel observes:

> "if there's not that delightful creature again, with his bran-new clothes?
> And they sit upon him so tight, he can't turn round his vastly droll figure,
> except like a puppet with one jerk for the whole body. He really is an im-
> mense treat." (69)

Clarendel shares with Burney's fashionable speakers a predilection for
such proscribed language features as contracted verbs, adjectives used
as adverbs ("tight") and the exaggeration "vastly" that was considered
vulgar. However, although Clarendel breaks the rules of conduct and lan-

guage, it is difficult not to credit the insight and the accuracy of his judg-
ments and not to admire his ability to "make sport for his neighbors, and
to laugh at them in return,"[35] especially since those he laughs at deserve
it. To some extent also, Clarendel's wit resembles that of Mrs. Selwyn in
Evelina, whose shrewd remarks expose the selfish and vain propensities
of her peers.[36] This use of characters as mouth-pieces for social and moral
satire allows Burney to access what was seen as a traditionally masculine
discourse while preserving her status as a "proper" lady author.

The dialogic tensions in Clarendel's speech can be read metonymi-
cally as indicators of his self-constructed character, for, as the novel
progresses, Burney fulfills the promise of his "secret disposition" (64).
Transformed gradually into a figure with heroic potential when he res-
cues Camilla from a carriage accident, Clarendel grows in stature: first
he aligns himself with Camilla's moral sympathy by rescuing the abused
birds from their cruel owner; then he saves Camilla's brother Lionel from
financial straits by lending him money. This movement in the narrative,
which reveals Clarendel's humaneness, is reflected in the shifts in his
speech-style and manners, described in the middle chapters of the novel
as "unaffected," "pleasantly natural" (406), and "all that was attentive,
obliging and pleasing" (429). When he is confident that Camilla esteems
him, his conversation with her is courteous and respectful; he presents his
generosity to Lionel as "an honour to his name" and a "worthy" use for
his wealth. When pressing his own suit with Camilla, he empowers her,
even at his most urgent, turning his imperative into supplications: "'Do
not go,' cried he, gently detaining her, 'incomparable Camilla. I have a
thousand things to say. Will you not hear them? . . . when may I see you
again?'" Clarendel's hesitation when he stops "as if irresolute how to
finish his phrase" (513–14) might be read as his awareness of Camilla's
"negative face," that is, her desire not to be offended. Thus it can be seen
that the earlier version of his character presented by Clarendel demon-
strates what Goffman describes as negative idealization, a deliberate un-
derperformance which Adam Smith ascribes to people's being "ashamed
of unfashionable virtues, which they sometimes practice [sic] in secret
and for which they have secretly some degree of real veneration" (75).

[35] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Book III, Chapter 15.

[36] Writing in the *Spectator* in May 1711, Addison distinguishes between true and false
wit, true wit containing unusual juxtapositions which "give Delight and Surprise" (10), a no-
tion approved by Pope in *Essay on Criticism,* ll. 297–98). Johnson's definition of wit (1755)
imbues it with distinctly masculine values, his fourth and fifth citations referring to "A man
of fancy" and "A man of genius."

Clarendel is a developing character. When he first appears in the novel, there is some indication that he rejects marriage; he removes himself from the marriage market by consciously marginalizing himself in respect to mainstream masculinity by his behavior and speech. Later in the novel we see a different Clarendel, one who is drawn to Camilla's moral worth; and as his feelings become more engaged, his speech is revealed as more centralized, more convergent with that of the protagonist and with the authorial narration. Only when he starts to think that he has been a "passive instrument" in Camilla's coquettish games does Clarendel's language revert to its former hyperbole. With his pride under threat, he retreats to his former role-playing, a face-saving act which becomes more overt when his courtship is rejected by Camilla.

Murray Cohen has noted (80) that during the eighteenth century there was a shift of focus from language and logical meaning to language and feeling: in particular, "new literary values included sympathy and sentiment, tone and taste" — and taste "as a capacity for response." Such a "taste" corresponds to ideas relating to sympathy and the moral sense in philosophy, and to the cultural phenomenon of sensibility, the civilising influences of which were recognized by many late eighteenth-century thinkers. Clarendel's capacity to feel and his ability to recognize Camilla's "beautiful soul" distinguish him from the other speakers discussed in this study. The revelation of his "finer" qualities is prepared for by the author's assigning him improper linguistic choices as part of a disguise which masks his inner worth. However, such a disguise is censured by Burney who, like many eighteenth-century thinkers, advocated honesty, naturalness, and ease of social intercourse. Burney withholds overt censure, but ultimately to Clarendel's instability — of character and conversation, as well as character *in* conversation — she prefers the solidity of the monologic hero, Edgar Mandlebert.

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Writing in a period of prescription and proscription, Burney promoted conventional views about standard language and polite conversation to support her educative purpose. She embraced the moral authority which the final decades of the eighteenth century assigned to women writers and appropriated a discourse the roots of which are to be found in classical representations of language as a vehicle for truth and social harmony. Burney created fictional worlds where speech marks the man. Such a

fusion of moral and linguistic signification distinguishes Burney's representation of speech from that of many of her literary predecessors who allocated "inferior" varieties, or peculiar spoken shibboleths, to socially inferior, uneducated, or comic characters. Indeed, her shift of focus from regional dialects to more subtle aberrations mediated by gender and social aspirations anticipates later writers who employed "educated standard speech for virtuous characters even of a lower social class" (Chapman 10) [37] and equated "moral [with] linguistic fallibility" (Muggleston 1995b: 16).

This raises questions concerning Burney's views on language and innate moral sense. Her belief in the innateness of a faculty for language and conversation is evident in her representation of the native interaction skills of those from less privileged backgrounds which she contrasts with the conversational inadequacies of speakers who are rich and educated but ethically deficient. Implicit also is Burney's acceptance of an innate faculty for morality,[38] a belief not incompatible with trust in the potential impact of experiences. Receptivity seems to be the key: thus Camilla and Lionel, born into the same family, with similar early experience and ethical guidance, use their moral faculty differently. Like language and the ability to converse, morality is seen as innate but subject to individual agency as well as to external influences associated with social contact.[39] For Burney sensibility is the key issue here: in individuals who are finely tuned and sensitive to the qualities and emotions of others, sensibility mediates both language and morality.

Modern commentators assert that sensibility is "more or less innate" and that it cannot be taught (Warren 28). But taking Burney's educative purposes to their logical conclusion suggests that sensibility could be acquired and developed. In the process of reading Burney's novels, the discerning reader could learn from the fictional experience depicted: from social contact by proxy. The fictional communities created by Burney are inhabited by characters with varying degrees of responsiveness to the ethical codes which she endorses. On the margins of morality are

[37] Burney, indeed, sometimes grants educated and expressive speech to lower-class characters, such as Mrs Hill (*Cecilia*) and the female petitioner (*Camilla*).

[38] In *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) Reid wrote that "the first principles" of virtue "are written in [men's] hearts, in characters so legible, that no man can pretend ignorance of them, or of his obligation to practice them . . . for nature has put this knowledge within the reach of all men" (VII: 687).

[39] See also McGinn 1997: 45 on analogous comments of Noam Chomsky.

character types whose shifting public performances are completely self-serving, with little evidence of receptivity to ameliorating influences. Inside this centrifugalized circle of stereotypes are those who are "pitifully plastic." Indicating Burney's belief that the receptive personality could change and develop over time, characters like Sir Sedley Clarendel, who are touched by the loveliness of virtuous characters, nevertheless lack the psychological strength to reject the egocentric norms of their social networks. At the moral centre of the novels are more stable individuals whose centralized speech-styles symbolize their readiness to conform to the consensual codes of ethics and social mores. However, as the maturing consciousness of her protagonists shows, Burney complicates her accounts of the development of moral agency, exploring the negotiations and adjustments which her moral figures make in their shoring-up of personal and social needs. This accords with the late eighteenth-century phenomenon identified by Dror Wahrman as the "new, alternative identity regime . . . defined by a fundamental emphasis on self" (xiii) and presupposing "an essential core of selfhood" (xi), "a stable, unique centred self" (xii) which negotiates the challenges of multifarious social contexts while accommodating the demands of an individual's "collective grouping" (xii). Thus language and conversation can express self as well as mainstream morality, the varying dialects and interaction styles of eighteenth-century English allowing Burney to create moral hierarchies which go beyond class and gender.

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