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## Refusing To Go Silently: Female Wit As Combating A Culture Of Silence In Frances Burney And Elizabeth Inchbald's Texts

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Refusing To Go Silently: Female Wit As Combating A Culture Of Silence In Frances

Burney And Elizabeth Inchbald's Texts

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of English  
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Megan M. Weber

ABSTRACT

In the hands of two prominent authors, Elizabeth Inchbald and Frances Burney, a critical paradox concerning female silence arises: while both authors operate very successfully in the publishing world, both do so while subverting impositions of silence, exhibiting a clear breach of propriety. An examination of Inchbald's novel *A Simple Story* and play *Wives as they Were, Maids as they Are* and Burney's novel *Cecilia* and play *The Witlings*, elucidates how each author adapts literary genres to portray female wit, exposing eighteenth-century impositions of silence in the process. By engendering female characters with the ability to employ humor as young women, Burney and Inchbald develop characters with agency and articulation.

## Introduction

Beginning in the Restoration and continuing throughout the eighteenth-century, traditional depictions of romance and femininity undergo a dramatic shift. By the end of the eighteenth-century, female writers such as Frances Burney and Elizabeth Inchbald follow the tradition established by Aphra Behn of reappropriating the romance tradition to critique social impositions of silence upon women. Examining Behn's use of romance to subvert the imposition of patriarchal ideologies allows a more thorough examination of how completely Burney and Inchbald reinscribe male depictions of romance through a female pen.

In Medieval literature, the romance tradition served to solidify androcentric authority; myths of knight errantry, pursued in quest of a lady's hand, presented masculinity as redemptive and powerful. Femininity in turn became subservient, powerful only in its ability to inspire men. The English Restoration in 1660 witnessed Aphra Behn's efforts to include realism in her works, requiring a revision of traditional romance tropes (Brown 27). By publishing *Oroonoko* 1688, Behn utilizes the unrest and disorder of the period; according to Laura Brown, *Oroonoko* acknowledges "the tensions that arise when romance and realism are brought together" (27). Oddvar Holmesland further argues that Behn's appropriation of the romance trope "projects the categorical instability of her age...Her narrative reveals the fissures to which her conception of

verisimilitude is vulnerable” (75). By using the romance tradition, Behn works to rewrite several social conventions, including assumed male authority that accompanied the romance tradition.

Perhaps the most important reworking of the romance tradition witnessed in Behn’s work (and subsequently in Burney and Inchbald’s) is the transformation of silence between lovers. The romantic convention for silence stems from the medieval concept that “life is better for everyone when women are seen and not heard” (Williams 94). In her study of sexuality in fairy tales, Christy Williams determines that “sex happens and sexual desire is there, but it is not mentioned in the text. The king cannot value the heroine on the basis of her intelligence or personality, for she cannot speak” (94). Instead of employing the silent damsel-in-distress trope, Behn offers a heroine capable of expressing her resentment. Focusing on Behn’s appropriation of the romance tradition, communication between the two main characters Oroonoko and Imoinda occurs non-verbally. Working from a position of alterity, Behn’s characters still operate within the romantic tradition that lovers can speak with their eyes, but their communication occurs outside prescribed boundaries:

But as soon as the king was busied in looking on some fine thing of Imoinda’s making, she had time to tell the prince with her angry, but love-darting eyes, that she resented his coldness, and bemoaned her own miserable captivity. Nor were his eyes silent, but answered hers again, as much as eyes could do, instructed by the most tender, and most passionate heart that ever loved. And they spoke so well, and so effectually...And

‘twas this powerful language alone that in an instant conveyed all the thoughts of their souls to each other. (Behn 88)

The lover’s eyes indicate an ability to effectively communicate without words. Behn reworks romantic conventions of silence by keeping her heroine silent while still able to communicate non-verbally. An immensely popular text, Behn’s portrayal of female agency<sup>i</sup> demonstrated by Imoinda becomes libratory, if highly criticized. Communication is possible in silence, giving power to women without breaking codes of feminine silence.

The backlash against Behn during the second half of the eighteenth-century suggests that expectations of female silence became far more stringent, extending beyond fictional portrayals of women to socially codified behavior. In her study of conduct books and their societal effect, Kathryn Sutherland writes, “Through the prescription and management of female value, the conduct book implies larger social structures” (26). Conflating “generically diverse earlier forms,” the conduct book “create[s] a composite character kit” (26), working to define female-ness in the eighteenth-century. Social expectations and female education prescribe silence as a means of obtaining a husband and conforming to social decorum. Conduct book culture proliferates in the eighteenth-century, providing a means of education for women. Conduct books directly work to reverse the agency afforded women by Behn and her contemporaries; conduct books inform women of decorum and androcentric views of proper femininity, working to negate Behn’s portrayals of women as communicative beings.



One of the most popular conduct books of the late eighteenth-century was James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, a book intimately known by Frances Burney.<sup>ii</sup> Fordyce insists that "Wisdom is never so attractive as when she smiles" (90), as when she is happy in her silence. Echoing Fordyce is Dr. Gregory's *Letters to His Daughters*, who writes, "This modesty, which I think so essential in your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one. People of sense and discernment will never mistake such silence for dullness" (24). Gregory proleptically negates arguments that silence may be misconstrued as "dullness" or simplicity, arguing that silence is the indicator of learning and social position. Women are then meant to express their intellectual depth and cultural prowess without saying a word, merely standing in polite society and nodding when appropriate.

Instances of silence proliferate throughout the long eighteenth-century, eventually becoming a trope representative of proper femininity. While Behn's use of romance still posits silence's ability to communicate, during the final two decades of the eighteenth-century the connection between silence and portrayals of romance undergo a major shift. In Frances Burney and Elizabeth Inchbald's works, silence fails to provide a means of communication. Rather, a comparison of Burney's play *The Witlings* to her novel *Cecelia* and a comparison Inchbald's novel *A Simple Story* to her play *Wives as They Were, Maids as They Are*, reveals silence's distinct *prevention* of communication. Whereas Oroonoko and Imoinda could communicate effectively through glances, Burney's and Inchbald's characters beget confusion and misunderstanding in moments of silence. Romance and its place in marriage culture comes under a distinct critique from both

authors, who employ the silence trope to expose impositions of patriarchal<sup>iii</sup> hegemony on women. Through their manipulations of and understandings of silence, Burney and Inchbald engender characters who begin as witty, social women; however, after entering the marriage market, the women become silent, continually acted upon by the men in their lives. The occasions of female silence become increasingly dangerous as the eighteenth-century progresses, as evidenced in the following examinations. Silence comes to stand for verbal *non*-communication, marking a distinction between late seventeenth- and late eighteenth-century depictions of romance. Through examining Burney's and Inchbald's reactions to impositions of female silence, this work seeks to illuminate both why the shift in silence occurs and how the shift manifests in fictional writing of the late eighteenth-century.

A critical paradox concerning female silence arises in the works of Burney and Inchbald. Both authors operate successfully, critically and financially, in the publishing world, but both do so while subverting expectations of female silence. Ellen Donkin examines the female role in a male-dominated profession, arguing that eighteenth-century culture deemed women's writing "a profession" that "violated all the rules of conduct [because] it conferred on women a public voice" (18). Complicating their writing is Burney's and Inchbald's favoring of genres that promote both direct and indirect speech, in the play and the novel respectively. Both Burney and Inchbald also allow for non-verbal communication between women, but remove romantic access to non-verbal communication. For Behn, Oroonoko and Imoninda's non-verbal communication allowed them to avoid the patriarchal injunctions preventing their love; because both Burney and

Inchbald further transform the romance tradition, allowing women non-verbal communication but denying lovers access, the suggestion arises that the authors interpret female friendship as salvageable outside of patriarchal hegemony, but communication between lovers is not.

The public voice “conferred” upon Burney’s and Inchbald’s characters is complicated by their use of humor. Female wit<sup>iv</sup> allows women to speak in public settings, discoursing with their male counterparts. For the purpose of this study, female wit refers to women’s ability to both laugh and incite laughter in others. Wit also refers to a woman’s ability to find humor in arguably dark situations, using humor to deflate potentially dangerous situations. Through wit, women develop their agency and their ability to speak with mature, effective language. Currently, most scholarship about humor in eighteenth-century women’s writings refers to the author’s ability to use humor as a vehicle for social criticism.<sup>v</sup> Here, I examine how *individual* characters employ wit to develop language; what makes Burney and Inchbald ideal candidates for the study of female wit is their connection between humor and silence. In all four texts, the female characters begin as social, engaging women; however, almost immediately after entering the marriage market or a marriage contract, their ability to speak vanishes, leaving once vocal characters dependant and silent. This study moves through the texts chronologically, beginning with Burney’s *The Witlings* and examining how Burney transforms the play into her novel *Cecilia*. Next, the first two volumes of Inchbald’s novel *A Simple Story* are treated, followed by a study of Inchbald’s *Wives as They Were, Maids as They Are*. Through their exploration of the effect of culturally imposed silence

upon women, Burney and Inchbald present explicit critiques of social constructions, including gender, education, and marriage culture.<sup>vi</sup>

Genre is implicit in the comparison of various depictions of female silence. Burney and Inchbald manipulate genre in disparate manners. The cultural difference between plays and novels (with plays interpreted as inherently public and novels as private) directly affects each author's approach to cultural critique. Nora Nachumi recognizes drama's ability to unsettle gender expectations in *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists in the Eighteenth Century*: "Their ability to portray a variety of fictional characters raised the unsettling possibility that all women could act and appear unlike themselves" (3). Nachumi further argues that "Burney's career as a novelist proved far more amenable to her desire to adhere to conventional models of feminine deportment" (131). Therefore, although *The Witlings* presents a far riskier portrayal of society, Burney uses her novel *Cecilia* to present the same critiques, although in a subtler manner. These works exemplify Laura J. Rosenthal's argument that "the drama often confronts head-on certain issues that the novel tends to raise only obliquely or implicitly" (174). By writing a play that certainly confronts social issues, Burney moves beyond the social critiques implicit in her first novel *Evelina*. For Burney, female silence ultimately engenders moments of madness; silence is both transformative and destructive for Burney.

Conversely, Inchbald thrived in drama, but presented her most explicit cultural critiques through her novel. *A Simple Story*'s attention to "the power of silence and of simple signs calls attention to the way in which Inchbald dramatizes characters' emotions through their bodies" (Nachumi 79). Lauded by her contemporary Maria Edgeworth, who

praised Inchbald's technique as "leaving more than most other writers to the imagination" (qtd. in Boaden 2:152-53), Inchbald's ability to transfer her success on the stage to the novel is apparent. *Wives as They Were* presents silence as making marriage accessible for a disgraced woman. While the depiction of silence is not exactly hopeful in *Wives*, *A Simple Story* directly rejects female silence as transformative. While Burney's characters develop mature voices after becoming silent, Inchbald's characters never regain their voices.

**Chapter One:**  
**Playing Upon Silence: Social Constructions of Gender in Frances Burney's *The Witlings***

Conflating the intersection between the public and the private lives of authors is a tenuous position, especially when examining female authors. However, with Burney's *The Witlings*, the convergence of private and public is necessary for analyzing the text. *The Witlings* is Burney's first attempt at comedy, urged by Hester Thrale and Richard Brinsley Sheridan after the immense success of *Evelina* (Sabor and Sill 9). Written in 1779, Burney's play was neither performed nor printed until the twentieth century, censored and suppressed by her "two Daddys," her father Dr. Charles Burney and her "elderly friend and literary censor" Samuel Crisp (9). As Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill's examination of Burney's journals elucidates, Burney presented her manuscript to a private audience with confidence, "showing herself well aware that her play could be staged and could succeed" (13). Therefore, when expecting constructive criticism, Burney's journal reflects her shock at Dr. Burney and Crisp's joint letter, which her journal calls a "Hissing, groaning, catcalling Epistle" (240). Instead of rewriting the play with improvements, Burney's attempt at comedy is silenced, much as Burney's female contemporaries were silenced by society. Crisp recognizes Burney's success at humor, but refuses to accept the comedy: "the Play has *Wit* enough, & enough—but the Story & the incidents don't appear to me interesting enough to seize & keep hold of the

Attention” (13). Dr. Burney takes his critique further, preventing not only the production of, but silencing the entire play: “not only the Whole Piece, but the *plot* had best be kept secret, from every body” (13). Ellen Donkin examines Dr. Burney’s reaction to Burney’s play, asserting that Burney’s independent publication of *Evelina* “had undermined his role as paternal guardian,” leading him to “reposition her as daughter” by demanding that she not stage *The Witlings* (140).

One of the critical reasons for the suppression of *The Witlings* is the close resemblance of some characters to the Bluestocking Group.<sup>vii</sup> Sill and Sabor examine Dr. Burney’s rejection of the play’s “uncomfortable resemblance” to “a recognizable portrait of some influential literary women of the time, particularly the leader of the Bluestocking group, Elizabeth Montagu” (12). Margaret Anne Doody adds credence to the theory, suggesting that Dr. Burney fears displeasing Montagu because “it took his supports away” (93). Historically, the Bluestockings were “an institution of public dimensions, governed and in large part constituted by women, whose self-described purpose is the practice of what they call ‘reason’ or ‘rational conversation’” (Heller 60). Burney’s satire on women’s salons is apparent, but, as Sabor and Sill argue, “Burney’s witlings are not a bluestocking group” (14).

Instead, the Esprit Club Dr. Burney so adamantly fears is an amalgamation of stock characters, each a critique of certain sectors of eighteenth-century culture. Lady Smatter, whom Dr. Burney reads as mocking Montagu, portrays the “smattering” of learning women obtain; Dabler “dabbles” in poetry, often confusing forms and meanings; and Mr. Codger is slow and obstinate, often returning to conversations long after their

ending. Burney's satire on society is therefore not limited to women or to bluestockings, but is non-discriminatory, encompassing men as well as women (14). If Burney uses the bluestockings at all, it is to showcase the difficulties women's salons experienced in gaining credibility. Kathryn Shevelov's *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* examines the bind placed upon women desiring to enter print or literary culture, using her study to "delineate the process of simultaneous enfranchisement and restriction that marked women's visible entrance into print culture" (2). Burney employs her satire of witlings to expose social impediments preventing women's effective entrance into the literary world, be it through print or through literary circles.

Dr. Burney's reading of Lady Smatter provides only a shallow understanding of the character; if Lady Smatter is properly read as a critique of eighteenth-century culture, then she serves to embody the mis-education of women, a topic prevalent in Burney's writings. Insisting that her studies focus primarily upon Shakespeare and Pope (2.1.50), Lady Smatter reads and conflates multiple authors throughout the play. While her access to literary works is apparent, equally poignant is Burney's critique on the disjointed education that women of fashion receive. Lady Smatter's ambivalence between helping the heroine Cecilia and disowning her after Cecilia's bankruptcy reveals eighteenth-century pressures to conform to social expectations, expectations which were not always clear: "I am quite distressed how to act, for the Eyes of all the World will be upon me!" (2.1.644-5). Lady Smatter's exclamation presents the ambivalence experienced in eighteenth-century culture between appearing to be and actually being virtuous; the only



reason Lady Smatter considers *not* tossing Cecilia from her home is the fear of social repercussions. The distress occurs because Lady Smatter's personal desire conflicts with what she worries the world will say.

Repeatedly, Lady Smatter appears as a "ridiculous woman whose head is stuffed with snippets of quotations that she attributes to the most unlikely authors" (Sabor and Sill 21). Disregarding social expectations of silence, Lady Smatter chatters continually, always expressing her assumed erudition with a misquotation or inappropriate attribution of an idea. Although it is quite easy to disregard Lady Smatter as a silly, ineffective character, Burney manipulates Lady Smatter's ridiculous characterization to announce a critique of women's position in educated society. As Regina Barreca examines in *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, "Women have traditionally been considered objects of comedy because they are perceived as powerless" (12). Lady Smatter is so easily laughed at because women as a sex were so easily dismissed in eighteenth-century culture; however, Lady Smatter is potentially disruptive because of her social standing. An affluent woman, Lady Smatter is not without a certain degree of power. Barreca argues that Burney's comedy was easily dismissed by her daddies because popular consensus assumed women *incapable* of humor: "they are perceived as humorless because it is assumed that they simply refuse to get the joke" (12). Burney proves she gets the joke, that women who speak too much or out of turn appear ridiculous to society. However, Burney manipulates the joke to critique women's education as ineffective by creating women such as Lady Smatter, incapable of implementing their learning and effectively communicating what they read. Lady Smatter then becomes "a

victim of the practice of depriving women of the systematic education afforded to men” (Sabor and Sill 22). Her inability to speak effectively presents an intrinsic error in women’s education, a system that lauds the accomplishments and social acuity over erudition.

One catalyst for the shift in women’s access to public speech is conduct book culture. William St. Clair argues for its “near-ubiquity...in the homes of the middle and lower classes” post-Copyright Act of 1774 (quoted in Halsey 275-6). Dr. Gregory tells women to enjoy their health “in grateful silence” because men “recoil” at a boisterous woman (32). Aware of popular conduct literature, Burney critiques conduct culture and its impositions upon the lower and middle classes through Mrs. Voluble, a character as unaware of her social position as she is unable to adhere to prescribed silence. According to Sutherland’s examination of conduct books, the literature gave the lower and middle classes insight into how to behave like the aristocracy (26). Mrs. Voluble’s incessant demands for her son’s silence reveal her awareness of the social prescription for silence, but her demands also show her inability to understand and effectively implement her reading into society, much like Lady Smatter. Although Mrs. Voluble’s stock name means to speak incessantly, she ironically chastises her son’s constant chatter: “Be quiet, will you? Jabber, jabber, jabber,—there’s no making you hold your Tongue a minute” (3.2.471-2). Admittedly, conduct books generally applied to young women;<sup>viii</sup> however, Burney pairs comedy and anger, making light of Mrs. Voluble’s shouting in order to “subvert existing conventional structures” (Barrecca 5). Burney seems to ask if inane speech from a man is worth more than from a woman or if both are equally superfluous.

Mrs. Voluble and her son both exercise their ability to speak loquaciously, interrupting and speaking whenever they please. Both are equally obnoxious in their chatter, leading to Burney's critique of silence. Mrs. Voluble's demands for silence serve as negative examples of women's speech; her hyperbolic shouting places a negative value on speech, making silence wished for in women.

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The play's main action centers on Cecilia, a witty heiress engaged to Lady Smatter's nephew Mr. Beaufort. Cecilia first appears in Act Two, entering the stage in discussion with Lady Smatter. Lady Smatter comments on how "lucky" she is "in [her] guesses" about authorship, and Cecilia wittily replies, "Your Ladyship devotes so much Time to these researches, that it would be strange if they were unsuccessful" (2.1.65). Cecilia pointedly remarks on the "Time" Lady Smatter spends studying and reading, all the while the audience knows that regardless of the time spent studying, Lady Smatter is actually quite *unlucky* in her guesses. Another critique emerges from Cecilia's wit, commenting on the public nature of Lady Smatter's studies:

LADY SMATTER. For where can be the pleasure of reading Books, and  
studying authors, if one is not to have the credit of talking of them?

CECILIA. Your Ladyship's desire of celebrity is too well known for your  
motives to be doubted. (2.1.25-6)

Proving her prowess for double-speak, Cecilia effectively criticizes Lady Smatter's desire for celebrity, which Lady Smatter accepts as a compliment. Burney allows the reader/potential viewer to witness Cecilia's intelligence; the performance given in

Burney's home must have portrayed Cecilia as witty and mocking Lady Smatter due to Dr. Burney's reactions to the play. Imagining the lines delivered in satiric fashion allows the reader/potential viewer to witness Cecilia's ability to simultaneously appease Lady Smatter's ego and entertain the audience. Cecilia's disdain of Lady Smatter's public behavior aligns with Burney's personal fear of public appearances. In her examination of Burney's journals, Emily Allen argues that "when faced with the prospect of being displayed and exposed before the public, Burney goes private; she withdraws into the interior" (434). Cecilia may speak, but she does so appropriately, not motivated by celebrity, but by her virtue.

While comfortable in her monetary and social position, Cecilia's witty responses to Lady Smatter come easily. However, as soon as Cecilia loses her fortune, she also loses her ability to speak effectively. Lady Smatter's intimations that Beaufort will not marry Cecilia without her fortune precipitates Cecilia exertion of agency, crying: "I shall leave your Ladyship's House instantly, nor, while any other will receive me, shall I re-enter it!" (2.1.700). Cecilia declares her autonomy, leaving the house, only to be scoffed at by Lady Smatter. When Cecilia is out of the room, Lady Smatter comments that "Nothing is so difficult as disposing of a poor Girl of Fashion" (2.1.606). While Lady Smatter's quip may elicit laughter from the audience, the social constructs behind her words are anything but funny. Lady Smatter discusses Cecilia's poverty in terms of "disposal," likening Cecilia's bankruptcy to a dead body. With no profitable accomplishments and no prospects for marrying Beaufort, Cecilia is rejected by Lady Smatter.

Beyond losing her ability to wittily engage Lady Smatter, Cecilia also loses her reason after the bankruptcy. Without understanding her social position, Cecilia is unable to communicate, suggesting that her security is tied to her social position. Burney employs Cecilia's movement into silence to critique social constructions of gender identity. Upon arriving at Mrs. Voluble's, Cecilia attempts to ask for lodging but is continually interrupted, finally interjecting a half-formed statement: "If it is inconvenient for me to speak to you now—" (3.2.505). Cecilia's phrase exhibits deference to Mrs. Voluble, a character far below her in the social strata. Burney presents a critique of social hierarchy by linking Cecilia's loss of effective speech to the loss of her fortune: "I know not what I say!—I can talk no longer;—pray excuse my incoherence" (3.2.590-1). No longer witty, or even particularly coherent, Cecilia asks to "recover [her] composure *in silence*" (3.2.599, emphasis mine). Cecilia's desire for silence sharply juxtaposes with Mrs. Voluble's incessant cries for silence. Forced into silence, Cecilia's inability to speak implicates social systems that place an unmarried woman's worth in her monetary value.

Cecilia's social position, tenuous at best as a young, single woman, becomes extremely unstable after her guardian loses her fortune. Painfully aware of her position, in her first moment alone, Cecilia acknowledges that marrying Beaufort is her only hope: "Oh Beaufort! 'tis thine alone to console me; thy sympathy shall soften my calamities, and thy fidelity shall instruct me to support them" (2.1.715-18). As an established young woman of fashion, Cecilia does not even have conduct books as recourse for instruction; after being exposed to ineffective male guardianship, Cecilia is bereft of not only a male guardian, but even a friend or advisor to guide her. When Censor, Beaufort's friend and

advisor, comes to inform Cecilia of Beaufort's continued desire for marriage, Cecilia refuses to listen: "At such a Time as this, a message is an Insult!" (3.2.755). By sending a messenger instead of coming himself, Cecilia believes Beaufort neglects the code of gallantry, a code instilled to protect "the vulnerable and proverbially beautiful sex" (Runge 43). Cecilia's alacrity in believing herself discarded exhibits her awareness of the ambivalence of men's proposals of marriage. While Beaufort always exists as an honest character, the potential danger posed by Cecilia's dependence upon him is that "while highly codified, the language of courtship is open-ended and indirect, and is almost always aimed at manipulating the object of flattery" (46). Even though Censor arrives with "promises" and a commission from Beaufort (Burney 3.2.748-50), Cecilia believes Beaufort's absence confirms her as lost: "To desert me at such a Time as this!...to suffer my wounded Heart, bleeding in all the anguish of recent calamity, to doubt his Faith, and suspect his tenderness!" (3.2.765-7). Cecilia believes herself manipulated by Beaufort, his interest only held by her status as heiress.

Even in her precarious situation, Cecilia adheres to social customs of courtship, refusing to hear a marriage proposal from anyone except Beaufort. Censor's response to Cecilia's rejection is the revelation that he, as a man, is confounded by the social scripts women are forced to follow while on the marriage market: "I am so totally unacquainted with the Laws and maxims necessary to be observed by fine Ladies, that it would ill become me to prescribe the limits to which their use of reason ought to be contracted" (3.2.770). Censor's comment makes the courtship rituals Cecilia adheres to *seem* unreasonable, because the "limits" of the "Laws and maxims" which dictate courtship

continually shift. The seemingly petulant resistance to reason Cecilia exhibits stems from the social maxims Censor decries, requiring her to accept Beaufort's marriage proposal in a socially approved manner. Laura Runge posits that "female writers of the eighteenth century voice considerable dissent from the general opinion on gallantry" (43). Cecilia's incoherent demands *for* gallantry suggest Burney is expressing distaste for the tradition. The same customs that demand marriage to Beaufort as Cecilia's only recourse also paradoxically prevent Cecilia from hearing the proposal which will solidify her marriage.

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Cecilia's inherent versus her inherited worth are debated between Beaufort and Lady Smatter:

BEAUFORT. Is she not the same Miss Stanley who was so lately respected,  
caressed, and admired? whose esteem you sought? Whose favour you solicited?—whose alliance you coveted?—Can a few moments have obliterated all remembrance of her merit? Shall *we* be treacherous, because *she* is unfortunate? (3.1.134-7)

Beaufort exposes the hypocrisy of Lady Smatter's intentions to dismiss Cecilia based solely upon her bankruptcy; arguing that Cecilia's inherent worth makes her more valuable than any inheritance, Beaufort proves himself virtuous and honorable. Lady Smatter's response confirms her adherence to social expectations: "Do you suppose I have laboured so long at the fine arts, and studied so deeply the intricacies of Literature, to be taught, at last, the right rule of conduct by my Nephew?" (3.1.145). Lady Smatter

lauds teachings from Literature over humanity, espousing a socially constructed approach over understanding people for their inherent value; all that matters to society, and in turn to Lady Smatter, is inherited value, not inherent worth.

The play's conclusion confirms marriage as the only method of social solidification offered women. After Cecilia becomes silent in society, even with her social inferiors, she comes to embody expectations of female silence. Only after becoming silent is Cecilia's fortune restored, mistakenly thought lost due to a clerical error. Although still single and once again wealthy, Beaufort's confirmation of the marriage is the event that allows Cecilia to reject imposed silence. In restoring the fortune after Cecilia's silence and loss of reason, Burney rewards Cecilia's adherence to social impositions of femininity. Cecilia emerges from her silence a much different character, capable of mature rather than witty language. According to Burney's development of Cecilia, female wit makes Cecilia able to attract lovers, but she must first suffer poverty and silence before she develops the language necessary to secure a marriage contract. Recognizing her agency, Cecilia interrupts Lady Smatter's renouncing of her: "Forbear, madam, these unmerited reproaches" (5.1.679-80). Marriage serves to confirm virtue, as well as provide a means of expressing mature language, implicating Cecilia's virtue and reason as more valuable than Lady Smatter's pretensions toward learning. Female reason, apparently unavailable during poverty and social trials, is restored to Cecilia. Silence then becomes a precursor to developed language; in her silence and temporary poverty, Cecilia overcomes social constructions of femininity expressed by Lady Smatter to regain her fortune and marry her love.



## Chapter Two:

### **She is Spoken For: Silence and the Marriage Market in Frances Burney's *Cecilia***

If *The Witlings* employs exaggerated examples of social decorum to explicitly critique society, Burney's second novel *Cecilia* treats the imposition of social expectations in a subtler manner. Part of the difference arises due to the shift in genre; the play functions as an inherently public performance, with audiences and actors shaping the text in unique, individual ways. Operating in a much different manner, the novel functions on an individual level; readers shape the characters of the novel, allowing the imagination and not actors to perform the text. Burney's suppressed play *The Witlings* partially appears in her novel *Cecilia*; one of the primary similarities is the heroine's name, Cecilia. Both characters are also wealthy orphans newly on the marriage market. The Cecilia's also both experience moments of madness and of poverty, linking them much more closely than the larger plots seem to indicate.

Within *Cecilia*, the heroine is both an orphan and an heiress, arguably garnering more freedom than any other female character in this study. While Cecilia holds a natural disposition towards benevolence and ingenuousness, marital expectations imposed by her uncle's will continually operate to suppress her agency. According to the will, until marriage Cecilia must reside with one of her three guardians, each as odious as the next. When she does marry, her husband must adopt her name, relinquishing his own. From the

beginning, Cecilia is witty and assertive, rejecting impositions upon her freedom. However, as she falls in love and enters the marriage market, Cecilia's agency is continually impinged upon. Her guardians compete for dominance, neglecting her in the process. Further, potential suitors, in vying to control her beauty and inheritance, subdue and silence Cecilia. Subsumed under cultural confines, Cecilia is effectively silenced and driven to a madness reminiscent of Richardson's Clarissa.

Burney examines a culture so steeped in patriarchal expectations that women are continually acted upon. Between Cecilia's guardians and the social expectations they impose upon her person, proper female behavior becomes the product of male accord. Through various methods, including social customs, conduct books, and familial ties, patriarchs impose control on otherwise independent women. The problem, as witnessed with Cecilia's guardians and suitors, is that profligate males are allowed to dominate women; silence and assumed acquiescence are expected from virtuous women. Burney's Cecilia experiences all forms of patriarchal control possible, from suitors, guardians, and even other women in her social sphere. By examining Cecilia's ability to maneuver various forms of control and manipulation, a shift from witty language to forced silence occurs. With silence imposed upon her, Cecilia learns to develop a mature language, eventually marrying the man she loves and relinquishing her inheritance. Therefore, Cecilia must throw off all forms of male control (including silence, money, and guardianship) in order to marry the man she chooses.

Opening *in medias res*, the novel begins with Cecilia removing from her childhood home for London, per her uncle's will. Although neither an official guardian nor suitor, Cecilia's childhood neighbor and friend Mr. Monckton attempts to manipulate Cecilia's departure. Unbeknownst to Cecilia, Mr. Monckton plans to marry Cecilia and her fortune once his own aged wife dies: "[he] had long looked upon [Cecilia] as his future property" (Burney 9). Examining the relationship between Monckton and Cecilia presents a linear development of her youthful wit into mature language. Attempting to control Cecilia, Monckton defames London society: "Where fortune smiles upon youth and beauty, do you think it nothing that their fair possessor should make a sudden transition of situation from the quietness of a retired life in the country, to the gaiety of a splendid town residence?" (17). Monckton conflates Cecilia with her location, suggesting that her virtue is a product of her environment, and temptation within London will precipitate her inevitable fall. Recognizing the absurdity of Monckton's conjectures, Cecilia replies, "If I felt no more sorrow in quitting my friends, than I feel terror in venturing to London, with how light a heart should I make the journey!" (19). Cecilia verbalizes the sorrow and terror she experiences at her new venture, but refuses to allow Monckton to persuade her to stay. Monckton's words assert patriarchal hegemony, trying to impose his desires on Cecilia's person; Cecilia's ability to ingenuously admit her fears in the face of Monckton's severity presents a contrast which offsets Burney's critique of male behavior under the guise of an honest and vocal young woman.

While Cecilia takes a majority of the novel to realize Monckton's true nature, Burney reveals his machinations from the outset, allowing the reader to scrutinize his

manipulations. Rather than viewing him as a caring childhood friend, the reader understands Monckton as “entirely a man of the world, shrewd, penetrating, attentive to his interest, and watchful of every advantage to improve it” (Burney 438). Monckton’s previously mentioned claim to Cecilia as “property” (9) reveals his interpretation of Cecilia as a commodity to obtain and control.

Cecilia’s language, however effectively it conveys her position, initially fails to influence others. Without hesitation, Cecilia rejects Monckton’s attempted imposition, revealing an ability to represent personal desires with sagacity. Rather than accepting Cecilia’s desire for autonomy, Monckton determines to manipulate her, pushing Cecilia toward compliance. After Cecilia has established herself in London, Monckton moves himself into the city. Once in London, Monckton ingratiates himself with all Cecilia’s acquaintances, continually forcing himself into her society. Monckton’s inability to recognize Cecilia’s agency ultimately precipitates his downfall. Later in the novel, when Monckton realizes Cecilia intends to marry Mortimer, her guardian Mr. Delvile’s son, in secret, Monckton quickly attempts damage control to reassert himself as a suitor. When Monckton accuses her of deception and “wilful blindness” (580), Cecilia admonishes his language: ““O Monckton!’ interrupted Cecilia, ‘make not use of such expressions!’” (580). Instead of quietly acquiescing to his demands, Cecilia interrupts Monckton, decrying his language as inappropriate and harmful. Monckton’s continual imposition of his desires upon Cecilia moves her “confusion” at his behavior to “anger” (580), allowing Cecilia the distance necessary to reject Monckton as patriarch: ““I am sorry, Sir, if this is your opinion; and I am sorry, too, for the liberty I have taken in troubling you upon such

a subject”” (580). Although Cecilia does not yet suspect Monckton’s ulterior motives, she does recognize the injustice of his words and admonitions.

Throughout the novel, Cecilia becomes the benefactress of many characters; comparing Cecilia’s acceptance of Monckton’s orders concerning her marriage and her rejection of his wishes concerning charity elucidates Cecilia’s agency and the role silence plays in developing her as a character. Now in the latter half of the novel, Cecilia’s language has developed to a level wherein she can defend her actions and attempt autonomy. Cecilia accepts Monckton’s admonitions and cancels her wedding with Mortimer; interpreting her actions as evidence of his victory, Monckton begins to manipulate Cecilia’s penchant for charity. Monckton’s assumption that Cecilia relinquishes the marriage based solely on his arguments is quickly negated; Cecilia’s acquiescence to Monckton’s order that she not marry Mortimer coincides with her conscience, allowing the conclusion that his language only triumphs because Monckton tells Cecilia what she wants to hear.

However, when Monckton attempts to prevent her charity, which she believes a virtuous activity, Cecilia bluntly and effectively conveys her belief in the system, reversing gender roles and actually silencing Monckton, causing him to retrench his efforts of manipulation:

A firmness so deliberate in a system he so much dreaded, greatly shocked Monckton, though it intimidated him from opposing it; he saw she was too earnest, and too well satisfied she was right, to venture giving her disgust by controverting her arguments...the conversation, therefore, ended with

new discontent to himself, and with an impression upon the mind of Cecilia, that though he was zealous and friendly, he was somewhat too worldly and suspicious. (795)

Refusing to retard her charity, Cecilia maintains a certain amount of autonomy from patriarchal confines. Cynthia Klekar believes part of Monckton's aversion to Cecilia's charity is based in "masculine and paternal anxieties about female benevolence" (111); because Cecilia's beneficiaries know her identity, Monckton fears her fortune will disappear before he can marry her. Monckton tries to make Cecilia believe her charity will bankrupt her, proving Monckton "believes he can court Cecilia through the pressures of debt" (122). By rejecting Monckton's injunction against charity, Cecilia's ability to assert and maintain her desires ultimately instills her agency as a single woman.

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While Monckton is a conflation of suitor and guardian, the pairing of Sir Robert Floyer as potential suitor and Mr. Harrel as guardian proves doubly dangerous to Cecilia's autonomy. Both commodify Cecilia's position on the marriage market, Sir Robert fetishizing her as an object and Mr. Harrel treating her as an equal trade for his sizeable debt to Sir Robert. Cecilia's suitors continually appropriate her silence, interpreting her lack of words as acquiescence. The first time Sir Robert sees Cecilia, she became the object of his attention, though neither with the look of admiration due to her beauty, nor yet with that of curiosity excited by her novelty, but with the scrutinizing observation of a man on the point of

making a bargain, who views with fault-seeking eyes the property he means to cheapen. (34)

Apparently deeming her equitable trade, Sir Robert echoes Monkton's treatment of Cecilia as "property," making her into a commodity meant for male consumption. As the novel develops, Mr. Harrel refuses to acknowledge Cecilia's repeated rejections of Sir Robert's suits, citing society's acceptance of the marriage as a foregone conclusion. Mr. Harrel's attempts to coerce Cecilia into marriage leave her "equally surprised and provoked," (223) unable speak for herself and defend her rejection. Instead of waiting for her to speak for herself, Mr. Harrel "willfully misinterpreted her silence, [and] took her hand" (233) with the intention of giving her to Sir Robert at that very moment.

Similarly, Sir Robert also appropriates Cecilia's silence, willfully misinterpreting moments of quiet as coquettish affectation. After winning a duel against Mr. Belfield (another potential suitor), and witnessing Cecilia's agitation concerning the event, Sir Robert basks in his conquest: "Her silence he only attributed to admiration, her coldness to fear, and her reserve to shame" (150). Instead of recognizing that Cecilia "with pain kept her seat, and with vexation reflected" upon his presumptions (150), Sir Robert continues in his delusion. When simply allowing Mr. Harrel to speak for him fails to obtain Cecilia, Sir Robert confronts her with his intentions, forcing her into a silence she earlier chose: "Cecilia, almost petrified by the excess of her surprise, at an attack so violent...was for some time scarce able to speak or to defend herself; but when Sir Robert, presuming on her silence, said she had made him the happiest of men, she indignantly drew back her hand," stating "'This, indeed, is something too much'" (367).

Male appropriation of her silence and the seizure of her hand leaves Cecilia feeling transgressed and violated, finally able to break the silence imposed upon her. It is fear and surprise that push Cecilia into silence, but within her silence, Cecilia is able to discover her voice. When forcefully acted upon, Cecilia regains her voice, rejecting patriarchal hegemony and choosing agency.

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In almost all her interactions with men, male desire is forced upon Cecilia. Female relationships in Burney's work are presented much differently; Burney allows women effective non-verbal communication, a language that exists outside the realm of male language. Unlike Behn, who allowed non-verbal communication for Oroonoko and Imoinda as lovers, Burney only allows non-verbal communication for female companions. Whereas Oroonoko and Imoinda needed to communicate through glances to avoid Oroonoko's uncle, Cecilia and Lady Delvile use non-verbal communication to communicate outside the strictures placed upon them by the men in their lives.

Although both choose silence at certain moments, Cecilia and Mrs. Delvile operate outside of the "silence of affectation"<sup>ix</sup> criticized by Mr. Gosport early in the novel (42). Rather than manipulating silence for attention, Cecilia and Mrs. Delvile communicate with looks more valuable than words; upon first meeting, the two recognize their like attributes: "Their first salutations were accompanied by looks so flattering to both, that each saw in the other, an immediate prepossession in her favour" (155). The reader may be unaware of what comprises their "first salutations," but is still completely aware that even without the words, Cecilia and Mrs. Delvile are able to recognize a



positive likeness in each other's character. However, since their language exists outside of male control, because internal and therefore inaccessible by society, it also exists outside any realm of tangible power; although Cecilia and Mrs. Delvile may be able to communicate with one another, their silent language has no cultural power.

Burney quickly exposes the faults in a system that demands female silence with the character development of Mrs. Delvile. Constantly accused of sharing in her husband's inordinate sense of pride, Mrs. Delvile's true nature may have high expectations, but she serves as the sole female figure suitable for Cecilia to emulate. While Mrs. Delvile adheres to proper social decorum throughout the novel, her ability to do so is hard won:

Her [Mrs. Delvile's] strong mind disdained useless complaints, yet her discontent, however private, was deep. Ardent in her disposition, and naturally violent in her passions, her feelings were extremely acute, and to curb them by reason and principle had been the chief and hard study of her life. The effort had calmed, though it had not made her happy. (461)

The consequence of Mrs. Delvile's silence is her loss of identity. The intimation stands that in her youth, Mrs. Delvile shared the same wit and agency Cecilia displays. Also, and most importantly, Mrs. Delvile's assumption of female silence did not come naturally; clearly imposed upon her, silence was the "chief and hard study" of her *life*, making female silence an ongoing process.

After Cecilia and Mortimer's intentions to marry are made public, Mrs. Delvile attempts to prevent the marriage. Forced to assume her husband's identity, Mrs. Delvile

must act as Mr. Delvile's mouthpiece. Although she shares Mr. Delvile's beliefs, Mrs. Delvile is not allowed to act on her own volition. Because tamed and submissive in her marriage, in order to speak, Mrs. Delvile must be given permission from her husband, parroting his words and losing her identity: "I come to you, then, in the name of Mr. Delvile, and in the name of our whole family" (638). Asserting their own will, Cecilia and Mortimer both reject Mrs. Delvile's message, insisting upon the marriage; rather than express anger or contempt, Mrs. Delvile runs to the next room, where Mortimer finds her "extended on the floor, her face, hands and neck all covered with blood!" (680). The loss of female identity within *Cecilia's* patriarchal system is so complete that it consumes women, almost killing them if unable to fulfill masculine desires. The suggestion remains that patriarchy's demands do not belong within the female, and when imbibed and forced out of a female mouth, patriarchal hegemony literally makes women ill.

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The inability of Cecilia's guardians to promote proper behavior quickly becomes apparent. Rather than working together to guide the newly orphaned woman, each instead reveals a "disposition to hatred and jealousy" (161). Continually degrading and undermining one another, Cecilia's guardians embody profligate spending, miserliness, and outrageous pride. According to Kay Rogers, "Burney cannot realistically dispel their actual power, but she can relieve her own and her readers' feelings by showing how ludicrously undeserving they are" (89). Named by her uncles will, Mr. Harrel, Mr. Delvile, and Mr. Briggs serve as her guardians until Cecilia's marriage. However, rather than proffer advice and make her transition to marriage easier, all three guardians work

against Cecilia's agency, with Mr. Harrel manipulating loans, Mr. Delvile treating her as low born, and Mr. Briggs patronizing her as a child. Between the three guardians, Cecilia is frustrated, and kept from developing as an independent woman.

Cecilia spends the first two volumes of the novel living with Mr. Harrel, arguably the worst example of her three guardians. A deceitful spendthrift, Mr. Harrel objectifies and commodifies Cecilia. Harrel uses his guardianship to manipulate Cecilia's trust and inheritance. When he believes himself ruined, Mr. Harrel melodramatically offers to kill himself in front of Cecilia. The fear his threats instill in Cecilia forces her not only to offer to pay his debts, but also into silence: "'I will undertake---' she stopt; checking in the full career of her overflowing compassion, by a sense of the worthlessness of its object" (264). Cecilia initially refuses to speak and to swear payment, prevented by her sense of right. However, the moment he displays the razor blade, Cecilia can no longer speak, even to refuse Mr. Harrel's manipulations: "her terror was now inexpressible; she believed him in the very act of suicide" (265). After his display forces her acquiescence, Cecilia "quit[s] him without reply" (267), leaving Mr. Harrel with both a large portion of her inheritance, as well as her ability to speak. Klekar argues that Cecilia's "'loan' to the profligate Harrel presents itself as a paradoxical instance in which the gift is never truly a gift but instead a symbolic transaction that must take the form of the gift for it to be recognized" (114). Harrel never perceives Cecilia as an equal, capable of loaning him money; instead, Harrel treats Cecilia's money as a gift bestowed upon him, which Klekar concludes means "her charity is recast as a debt to a patriarchal ideology and is repaid only through her complicity in its networks of obligation and privilege" (115). Cecilia

does not benefit in any way from her loan to Mr. Harrel; she loses the money to a man completely unworthy of her charity, but gives him power over her by giving him over half of her father's inheritance, obligating her to continue in his home in hopes of regaining her money.

After the attempted suicide/loan fiasco, Cecilia's silence shifts from one imposed by fright to being physically imposed by Mr. Harrell. As noted in his behavior with Sir Robert, Mr. Harrell refuses to allow Cecilia to speak when he does not want to hear her words. Refusing to admit her in private, Mr. Harrell physically prevents Cecilia from inquiring about the status of her repayment. While living with the Harrell's tries Cecilia's patience and greatly depletes her fortune, it also affords her the trials necessary to develop language and activate her agency. When Harrel does actually kill himself, he confirms his negligence toward both Cecilia and his wife, leaving his bills and debts unsettled. After reading his last will, which Cecilia assumes contains an apology, or at least an explanation (431), Cecilia finds Mr. Harrel equally vapid in death as in life: "For though, with tolerable ease, he could forget accounts innumerable with his tradesmen, one neglected *debt of honor* rendered his existence insupportable!" (433). Referring to his inability to repay Sir Robert after Cecilia refuses the marriage, Mr. Harrell claims life "insupportable" without honor. Cecilia's response to the letter reveals her linguistic maturation, rejecting the idea the Harrel ever pretended toward honor. The next moments in the action reveal her ability to refuse the blame placed on her by Mr. Monckton:

‘O fie!’ cried he, ‘to suffer *your* understanding to be lulled asleep...I thought, after such cautions from me, and such experience of your own, you could not again have been thus duped.’

‘I thought so too,’ answered she, ‘but yet when the trial came on,—indeed you know not how I was persecuted.’

‘Yet you see,’ returned he, ‘the utter inutility of the attempt; you see, and I told you beforehand, that nothing could save him.’

‘True; but had I been firmer in refusal, I might not so well have known it; I might then have upbraided myself with supposing that my compliance would have rescued him.’ (434)

Cecilia refuses to accept that in acting against her charitable nature she would have saved a portion of her fortune and somehow been satiated after Harrel’s suicide. In refusing Monckton’s derision, Cecilia uses language to successfully communicate her feelings and her interpretation of the events prior to and following Harrel’s death.

Mr. Harrel’s suicide does more than give Cecilia a medium to express her mature language and developed perception of the world; Mr. Harrel’s suicide also presents a moment of agency for Cecilia. Instead of quietly crying in the corner, Cecilia has the ability not only properly dispose of Mr. Harrel’s body, but she also has the language to critique the behavior of the men around her. When Sir Robert informs her that Mr. Harrel died with no one but a waiter next to him, Cecilia “reproachfully look[s] at Sir Robert” and states her disbelief that ““there was no friend who...had the patience to support him”” (417). While Cecilia “attempted not to answer” Sir Robert’s “unfeeling speech,” she

solicits his advice about what to do, and promptly “gave orders,” successfully removing Mr. Harrel’s body from the gardens (418).

Mr. Harrell may have manipulated Cecilia out of her inheritance, but Mr. Delvile perhaps frustrates and silences her more than any other character. Emphasizing his self-interest and pride, Burney critiques a hierarchical system that applauds birth over virtue. In her first meeting with Mr. Delvile, his behavior immediately “offends” Cecilia, which he completely fails to recognize: “too much preoccupied with the care of his own importance to penetrate into the feelings of another, he attributed the uneasiness which his reception occasioned, to the over-awing predominance of superior rank and consequence” (Burney 97). Mr. Delvile almost preens himself, so inflated by his “own importance” that he completely ignores how distasteful his behavior is to Cecilia. Like Mr. Harrel and Sir Robert, Mr. Delvile presumes upon Cecilia’s silence; however, instead of placing words in her mouth, Mr. Delvile takes her silence as a tribute to his “superior rank,” even though Cecilia’s inheritance begets her far more wealth than Mr. Delvile’s genealogy. Rather than respond to and reinforce Mr. Delvile’s inflated sense of self-worth, Cecilia chooses silence: “Here he stopt, as if to receive some compliment, but Cecilia, very little disposed to pay him any, went no farther than an inclination of the head” (98). Burney imbues her protagonist with the ability to reject pretensions to authority not earned. Rogers examines how Delvile, the “representative of patriarchal aristocracy,” with almost no monetary wealth or social influence, “is accustomed to being deferred to” (89) because of his bloodline, and uses the deference he expects to inflate his

self-importance. By withholding an expected compliment, Burney deflates his “weighty social and business obligations” (89), relegating him to the role of impotent aristocrat.

Although Cecilia intends her silence to convey her anger and irritation, her silence once again fails to impress the male figure in her life. Mr. Delvile’s imposition and expectation of silence from Cecilia becomes so pervasive and so well understood by Cecilia, that, later when married to Mortimer and seeking asylum, she writes a letter, withholding signing her name until he recognizes her: “I will detain you, therefore, only to add, that the father of Mr. Mortimer Delvile, will ever meet the most profound respect from her who, without his permission, dares sign no name to the honour she now has in declaring herself his most humble, and most obedient servant” (863). Cecilia leaves a blank space where her name belongs, making herself silent, subservient, and most shockingly, *invisible* until Mr. Delvile recognizes the marriage. Mr. Delvile’s response reinforces his sense of self-worth, denying Cecilia and leaving her invisible because he believes his son “incapable of so far forgetting what his owes his family”(866-7). Later, when Cecilia actually runs to Mr. Delvile’s London home to seek refuge, crying to the doorman that she has ““no other place in the world wither [she] can go!”” (892), Mr. Delvile’s footman responds for him that Mr. Delvile has “given orders to his servants to carry him no more messages whatsoever” (892). After being silenced and discarded by Mr. Delvile, believing his home her last refuge in the city, Cecilia runs through the London streets, quickly succumbing to madness.

In her madness, Cecilia literally cannot speak for herself; however, in silence, she facilitates Mr. Delvile’s moment of anagnorisis, in which he recognizes his selfishness

and reevaluates his position of self-inflated worth. Although previously Cecilia cannot convince Mr. Delvile of her virtue and the lies Monckton tells him, in her madness-induced silence, Mr. Delvile finally seems to understand her and comes to accept her as suitable for his son: “Mr. Delvile regarded her with the utmost horror...His pride, his pomp, his ancient name, were now sunk in his estimation...Little is the boast of insolence when it is analysed by the conscience!” (912). In her passive madness, Cecilia acts as Mr. Delvile’s conscience, providing him with a reflection of the product of his pride. Burney presents a critique of aristocracy, proving the most “ancient name” also embodies the greatest degree of undeserved self-worth. That Cecilia must, in classic *Clarissa* fashion, almost die in order to convince others of her virtue, offers an explicit critique of Mr. Delvile’s social standards, namely that a title provides more inherent worth than virtue and a sense of humanity.

The third guardian, Mr. Briggs, never views anything without first measuring its worth, and Cecilia’s experience with him is no different. Living as the consummate miser, Mr. Briggs fuses burnt candles, barter for second-hand objects, and lives with almost no fire during the cold winter. Briggs’s avarice clouds his relationship with Cecilia, refusing her access to her money: “But [he] was contented with refusing her as a child might be refused, by peremptorily telling her she did not know what she wanted, and therefore should not have what she asked” (182). Briggs refuses Cecilia’s request and her voice, infantilizing and dismissing her attempt at agency. Klekar argues that “Cecilia’s guardians struggle with the burdens of masculine propriety” in light of



Cecilia's wealth and agency (122). Briggs, the only guardian worth a significant amount of money, asserts his masculine authority by denying Cecilia what is legally hers.

Between the three guardians, Cecilia experiences manipulation, degradation, and deprivation. Each guardian acts as a kind of litmus test for Cecilia's agency. Harrel, while alive, manipulates Cecilia into debt and silence, but with his suicide, Cecilia activates her agency. By successfully disposing of the body and quelling her suitor's impossible demands, Cecilia deftly handles the situation, using both her developed language and her independence. Mr. Delvile presents an entirely different set of challenges, trying Cecilia's patience and sense of decorum. Calling into question ideas of social position based upon money or heritage, Mr. Delvile continually silences Cecilia through impositions of patriarchal hegemony, meant to awe her into submission. Once Cecilia recovers from the shock of Mr. Delvile's pride, she refuses his masculinist agenda, marrying whom she chooses in direct defiance to Mr. Delvile's wishes. Mr. Briggs perhaps objectifies Cecilia most completely; when Cecilia tells him she does not want to live in his home, Briggs attempts to force money from her pocket. Briggs's only desire to act as guardian is to manage more money, even if it is not his own.

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Burney expresses her own ability to navigate impositions of silence by creating a novel character with the same name as in her suppressed play. By so drastically shifting her approach to critiquing eighteenth-century culture, Burney engenders a more developed and subtle indictment of patriarchal impositions on young women. Cecilia's continual experiences with silence cause the reader to take notice of her voice and her

agency when she chooses to activate each. Cecilia's recognition of Monckton's manipulations and her rejection of his ability to act impartially as a friendly guardian reveals her ability to refuse patriarchal impositions on her autonomy. Likewise, her rejection of both suitors and guardians as they force silence and acquiescence upon her displays a heroine capable of mature language and agency. Rather than female silence allowing her the desired marriage or the ability to maintain her inheritance, Cecilia's silence offsets the ridiculous nature of both patriarchal traditions and suitor culture.

### Chapter Three:

#### **Sweet Nothings: Silence as Destructive in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story***

Presenting a heroine known and appreciated for her accomplishments, Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* is truly anything except simple. At one point, the novel is a story of companionate love, overcoming obstacles to unite two characters. However, compounded with the love are adultery, dueling, religious conflict, and a scathing indictment of marriage culture. The novel is divided into two halves, the first focusing on Miss Milner and the second on her daughter, Lady Matilda. Although both halves are equally rich, this study examines Miss Milner and her experiences on the marriage market. As will be discussed further, Miss Milner is also the character Inchbald chooses to transpose into her drama *Wives as they Were, Maids as they Are*, making Miss Milner an appropriate subject for discussion. Miss Milner opens *A Simple Story* as a witty, attractive woman recently orphaned and sent to the city to live with her new guardian Mr. Dorriforth, a Catholic priest. While both marriage and education are examined within *A Simple Story*, it is the combination of eighteenth-century marriage culture and the accomplishments<sup>x</sup> that ultimately silences women and deprives them of agency. Miss Milner, in order to marry the man she loves, must undergo a strict character shift imposed by her male companions, removing all traces of agency and wit allowed her since birth.

Almost universally, single women of fashion are treated with ambivalence by eighteenth century society. While characters are quick to recognize these women's beauty and accomplishments, they are equally quick to declaim the difficulty with which women of fashion are handled. From the novel's outset, Miss Milner's position as an accomplished woman is made evident: "Her little heart employed in all the endless pursuits of personal accomplishments, had left her mind without one ornament, except those which nature gave, and even they were not wholly preserved from the ravages made by its rival, *Art*" (5). Miss Milner represents Inchbald's stock heroine, a sympathetic female with admitted foibles. Mr. Dorriforth quickly learns of Miss Milner's questionable position on the marriage market from his landlady, Mrs. Horton: "All I know of her, is merely, that she's a young, idle, indiscreet, giddy girl, with half a dozen loves in her suite, some coxcombs, some men of gallantry, some single, and some married" (10). Understanding her expectations of indulgence, Mr. Dorriforth expresses trepidation toward his new position as guardian: "[he] dreaded the repulses his admonitions might possibly meet from her; and feared he had undertaken a task he was too weak to execute—the protection of a young woman of fashion" (6). Rather than be understood as a young woman trying to find her footing in the marriage market, Miss Milner is treated as an object under scrutiny. While Lady Smatter saw no use for a poor woman of fashion, Mr. Dorrillon and Mrs. Horton admit no reason for her to exist at all.

Inherent in Inchbald's novel is a critique of female education. Mr. Milner's anxiety over his daughter's education<sup>xi</sup> and subsequent expectations of freedom leads him to place her under the care of Mr. Dorriforth. While "cast on a bed of sickness," Mr.

Milner's "pride, the fond enjoyment [he] had taken in beholding her open the ball, or delight her hearers with her sprightly wit, escaped his remembrance" (5). Believing her guardian will somehow redeem Miss Milner's female education, Mr. Milner names a priest known for his "prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance" (3). These qualities make Mr. Dorriforth more ideal than any guardian proffered in Burney's works, but Mr. Dorriforth's disposition also contains an intense pride, making him implacable when angered. Naming Mr. Dorriforth as Miss Milner's guardian highlights the social pressures to confine and subdue independent and witty females.

Because Inchbald creates characters as equally sympathetic as they are flawed, Mrs. Horton's gossip is quickly tempered with a positive portrayal of Miss Milner. Mrs. Hillgrave, an acquaintance whose merchant husband "had met with some severe losses" informs Mr. Dorriforth that Miss Milner's charity saved her family, remarking that "'To me she appeared beautiful as an angel, but perhaps I was deceived by the beauties of her disposition'" (12). From Mrs. Hillgrave, Miss Milner's beauty is not based solely upon her appearance, as Mrs. Horton would have it, but instead, her benevolence serves to enhance her natural appearance. Miss Milner's depressed demeanor upon meeting Mr. Dorriforth also serves to quell his fears of her coquettish nature: "But the sprightly vivacity, the natural gaiety, which report had given to Miss Milner, were softened by her recent sorrow to a meek sadness—and that haughty display of charms, imputed to her manners, was changed to a pensive demeanour" (13). Inchbald makes the coquette a rounded figure, equally capable of charity as of charm.

By the time Inchbald composes *A Simple Story*, social expectations of female silence are so pervasive that the mere hint of female wit incites worry. The narrator announces Miss Milner's character flaws early in the novel: "She had besides a quick sensibility, which too frequently discovered itself in the immediate resentment of injury or neglect—she had acquired also the dangerous character of a wit" (15). Because of her predilection for "quick" responses, Miss Milner is ascribed the "character of a wit," although the narrator immediately tempers this portrayal of her: "her replies have all the *effect* of repartee, not because she possessed those qualities which can properly be called wit, but that what she said was spoken with energy" (15, emphasis mine).

Even if Miss Milner does not possess the qualities necessary to make her a wit by masculine standards, she laughs in public; in rejecting the containment of Miss Milner's natural disposition as painful, Inchbald critiques the imposition of silence as confining and inappropriate. Almost immediately after entering residence with Mr. Dorriforth in Mrs. Horton's home, Miss Milner displays her natural humor. When discussing her beauty with Mr. Dorriforth, Miss Milner treats his comments (and his religion) with levity:

With a serious face, as if proposing a most serious question, Dorriforth continued, 'And you really believe you are not handsome?'

'I should from my own opinion believe so, but in some respects I am like you Roman Catholics; I don't believe from my own understanding, but from what other people tell me.' (16)

The response, clearly evading the comment on her beauty, seems a decisive slight on Catholicism. Miss Woodley and Mrs. Horton immediately cross themselves, offended by Miss Milner's appropriation of Catholic teachings; never one to avoid laughter, Miss Milner cannot contain herself at the sight: "This, pious ceremony, Miss Milner, by chance observed, and now shewed such an evident propensity to burst into a fit of laughter, that the good lady of the house could no longer contain her resentment...and without longer suffering under the agony of restraint, she gave way to her humour" (17). Even early in the novel, Miss Milner attempts to silence herself, but she cannot long suffer the "agony" of silence. Inchbald makes female silence not only unnatural but also painful for her heroine. Miss Milner's coquettish pretensions extend beyond laughter to her speech: "besides, as a woman, she was privileged to say any thing she pleased; and as a beautiful woman, she had a right to expect whatever she pleased to say, should be admired" (39). The narrator does not confine Miss Milner's expectation to a personal whim, but instead makes the "privilege" a social construct.

Never one to allow social constructs to dictate his relationships, Mr. Sandford attempts to silence Miss Milner from the inception of their acquaintance. A Jesuit priest and Mr. Dorriforth's childhood tutor and mentor, Mr. Sandford "perfectly knew how to work upon the passions of all human nature" (39). By repeatedly ignoring her presence and pretending to not recall her identity every time they meet, Sandford seeks to "make [Miss Milner] abominate herself" (39). Sandford's machinations have their desired effect: "It humbled Miss Milner in her own opinion, more than a thousand sermons would have done...She felt an inward nothingness she never knew before" (40). However, Mr.

Sandford's attempts to silence her are ineffectual; Inchbald infuses her heroine with "a degree of spirit beyond the generality of her sex" (40). Although ineffectual, Sandford represents the attempted imposition of patriarchally defined codes of femininity where they are neither desired nor appreciated.

According to Annibel Jenkins, the reason Sandford is so threatened by Miss Milner is that "her wit and skill at repartee were quite equal to his...[Miss Milner] has been given the ability to confront Sandford with her intelligence and wit" (283). Mr. Sandford subsequently becomes the main object of Miss Milner's humor and wit; when Sandford accuses her of deceit concerning her potential suitor Lord Frederick, Miss Milner's "natural vivacity" comes to the forefront:

'Deceit,' cried Miss Milner, 'in what am I deceitful? did I ever pretend sir, I had an esteem for you?'

'That had not been deceit, madam, but merely good manners.'

'I never, Mr. Sandford, sacrificed truth to politeness' (Inchbald 43).

Doubly succeeding, Miss Milner manages to both declare her veracity and publicly slight Mr. Sandford. Arguably witty when declaring that she "never...sacrificed truth to politeness," Inchbald's heroine inserts a critique of polite culture, suggesting that society demands untruths to maintain social stability. Sandford, in attempting to control Miss Milner's language and agency, reveals an androcentric governance of femininity that requires young women to maintain "good manners."



Social stability becomes dependent upon women's ability to conform to patriarchally informed social structures. Expressing her awareness of Sandford's machinations, Miss Milner continues her derision of his attitude and social decorum:

For as she now meant to torment him by what she said, she no longer constrained herself to silence.

'No, madam, if it depended upon my permission, you should *not* know.'

'Not *any thing*, sir, I dare say;—you would keep me in utter ignorance.'

'I would.'

'From a self-interested motive, Mr. Sandford—that I might have a greater respect for you.'

Some of the persons present laughed. (49)

Miss Milner expresses an awareness of male structures, quipping that it is only through keeping people "in utter ignorance" that they "might have a greater respect" for Mr. Sandford (49). The comment causes "some of the persons present" to laugh, revealing Miss Milner's wit and social adeptness. Aware of male impositions upon her character, Miss Milner resorts to humor to present her critique of Mr. Sandford's expectations of silence. In mocking Sandford's behavior, Miss Milner refuses the silence he wishes upon her, recognizing and rejecting his attempted manipulations of her natural humor.

Mr. Sandford's continual provocations elicit humorous comments from Miss Milner, but neither comes under any actual harm from the relationship. When Miss Milner's suitors begin to infringe on her personal space, the situation undergoes a shift; while still witty and sharp with her suitors, Miss Milner begins to lose her agency when

her suitors attempt to appropriate her person as their own. Proving her awareness of gallantry's visceral nature, Miss Milner insists to Lord Frederick that it is “merely from habit” that he falls in love (20). Taking offense, Sir Frederick replies:

‘Then you believe,’ cried he, ‘love is not in my nature?’

‘No more of it, my lord, than habit could very soon extinguish’ (20-1).

Although already in love with Mr. Dorriforth, and otherwise uninterested in Sir Frederick's advances, Miss Milner's reproof asserts that Lord Frederick only claims love because social custom tells him to; when a new woman of fashion interests him, habit will move his affections elsewhere. Laura Runge recognizes the duplicitous nature of codified suitor language: “the same language, indeed the same conversation, that marks the speaker as polite might also function as a seduction” (45). Inchbald engenders her protagonist with the wherewithal to recognize how Lord Frederick's declarations of love may serve as attempted “seduction,” an effort to claim her beauty and not her affection.

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Rather than the marriage market affording Miss Milner the freedom she expects, it infringes greatly upon her agency and language. Male characters choose to misinterpret Miss Milner's blushes and refusals of potential suitors as acknowledgement of her sentiments for them. Although Miss Milner insists to Mr. Dorriforth that she does not care for Lord Frederick, he refuses to listen:

‘I shall,’ answered she, ‘...not consent to marry a man whom I could never love.’

‘Unless your heart is already given away, Miss Milner, what can make you speak with such a degree of certainty?’ (25)

Mr. Dorriforth insists upon believing her heart given away, which is true, but not to whom he believes. Several factors deny Miss Milner the agency to declare her own sentiments. Initially Miss Milner’s love silences her, but Mr. Dorriforth also imposes silence by refusing her the ability to reject suitors on her own terms.

Miss Milner’s immature view of marriage customs further convinces Dorriforth that she is unworthy of autonomy when choosing a husband. Declaring her intention to continue Lord Frederick’s courtship after acknowledging she will not marry him frustrates Dorriforth:

She replied, ‘I had rather it would continue.’

‘On what account?’ cried Dorriforth.

‘Because it entertains me.’ (57)

When Dorriforth calls shame upon Miss Milner for her assertion that “‘Lord Frederick makes part of [her] amusement, but could never constitute [her] felicity’” (57), he refuses to listen to her dismissal of Lord Frederick because Dorriforth interprets her words as illogical. As Jenkins argues, Dorriforth (and Mr. Sandford) fail to understand Miss Milner’s social position, having never been participants in the fashionable world (287). They both subsequently cannot comprehend her relationship with Lord Frederick, treating her as an ignorant child when she adheres to common social practices concerning courtship.

Both sexes are implicated in Inchbald's examination of the manipulation embedded in gentry marriages. Inchbald makes female behavior in the marriage market equally ridiculous to male attempts at courtship. Continually adhering to social codes that disrupt, rather than enhance, her participation in the marriage market, Miss Milner's insistence upon keeping multiple suitors for her enjoyment becomes both selfish and fruitless. Miss Milner's first true inclination toward love is silenced by social expectations, shading all her future participation on the marriage market. Mr. Dorriforth's occupation as a Catholic priest makes marriage a non-option; further, Miss Milner is raised Protestant, in direct conflict with Dorriforth's Catholicism. The comfort that Fordyce and Gregory promise resides in silence is not available for Miss Milner. Rather than providing her solace, Miss Milner's silence causes not only discomfort for her, but for her companions as well. After openly declaring her refusal of Lord Frederick, Dorriforth notes that

during the short ride home she appeared to have lost a great part of her wonted spirits; she was thoughtful, and once sighed heavily. Dorriforth began to fear she had not only made a sacrifice to her affections, but of her veracity; yet, why she had done so, he could not comprehend. (59)

Rather than solicit the cause of her sighs and unnatural silence, Dorriforth imposes his own conclusions on Miss Milner, assuming her untruthful about loving Lord Frederick. The only sound Miss Milner makes is a heavy sigh; she never speaks to declare her sentiments one way or another. The reader is aware of her love for Dorriforth, which explains her sighs and silence in his company. Moments later, when he sees Lord

Frederick grabbing for Miss Milner's hand, Dorriforth believes his suspicions confirmed and "with an instantaneous impulse, rushed forward, and struck him [Lord Frederick] a blow in the face" (61). The following morning a duel ensues, and although neither is seriously injured, Dorriforth must compromise his position as priest to participate in the duel (62). Miss Milner's silence then not only affects her ability to express her true feelings, but her silence also causes Dorriforth to jeopardize his life and his clerical occupation. Under Inchbald's pen, silence is misleading and consequently disruptive rather than redemptive.

When Miss Milner reveals her love for Dorriforth to Miss Woodley, the silence imposed upon Miss Milner quickly extends to her confidant. Miss Woodley's education, being "strict" and "more powerful" than Miss Milner's, teaches her that the "violation of oaths, persons, or things consecrated to Heaven" was "the most horrid among the catalogue of crimes" (73). Miss Woodley initially finds it impossible to chastise Miss Milner for her transgression, and her first verbal response to Miss Milner is "'Silence'" (73). "Struck with horror," Miss Woodley cannot comprehend Miss Milner's justifications, sitting "still pale, and still silent" (73). Miss Milner is unable to verbalize her feelings effectively, while Miss Woodley is unable to speak at all. Soon Miss Woodley recovers from her surprise, and adhering to her education and social standards, refuses to "participate in the guilt of her friend" (78). Miss Woodley declares that Miss Milner must prepare for "an entire separation from her guardian" to Bath (79).

Miss Milner's silence next extends from language to physical space. In her examination of "the characters' consistent efforts to suppress or limit their feelings," (9)

Emily Hodgen Anderson argues, “Miss Woodley’s early prohibition clings tenaciously to all interactions involving Miss Milner and her guardian” (5). Although originating from altruistic intentions, Miss Woodley’s insistence that Miss Milner become physically and vocally silent by removing to Bath soon causes severe illness in Miss Milner: “In a very short time after, her health became impaired from the indisposition of her mind; she languished, and was once in imminent danger” (96). The complete silence expected from Miss Milner manifests itself in a mental anguish so complete that her physical body cripples under the pressure. The connection between silence and madness differs between Inchbald and Burney; for Burney, a direct connection between social position and mental health exists in that the loss of money prompts silence, after which madness ensues. For Inchbald, the marriage market precipitates male impositions of silence, which in turn causes madness in women.

In the midst of Miss Milner’s fever, Mr. Dorriforth’s cousin Lord Elmwood dies. Mr. Dorriforth and Lord Elmwood are the only remaining men in the Elmwood line; confirming his familial obligation, Mr. Dorriforth receives a pardon from the Pope and assumes the Elmwood title. The tenuous position held by Catholics in England answers Dorriforth’s desire to marry, as English Catholics with titles were becoming increasingly sparse. Inchbald presents a plot twist that enables the “‘shocking hint of sacrilege’ in Miss Milner’s desire to dissipate” (Spencer vii).

Although theoretically released from the taboo of her love, Miss Milner’s silence continues after Mr. Dorriforth’s transition to Lord Elmwood. Freed from his position as a priest “with no duties to perform” (Jenkins 280), Lord Elmwood can relinquish the

chastity imposed upon him by the church. Newly free, Elmwood begins to view Miss Milner in a different manner, but still through the lens of strict virtue:

‘Perhaps I am wrong, Miss Milner, but I have observed you are lately grown more thoughtful than usual.’

[...]

‘Are you sorry for that, my lord?’

‘No, madam, I am extremely glad; and I was going to congratulate you upon the change—but give me leave to enquire, to what lucky accident we are to attribute this alteration?’

‘Your lordship then thinks all my commendable deeds, arise from accident; and that I have no virtues of my own’ (110).

Miss Milner’s virtues, then, only gain attention when she is silent. Lord Elmwood, rather than worry at her new behavior, is “extremely glad,” believing her “lucky” to undergo a shift that makes her silent. Regardless of Lord Elmwood’s interpretation of her silence, Miss Milner displays her awareness that the behavior is not inherent, and realizes that whatever “commendable deeds” she had done prior to her silence remain somehow unacknowledged.

Entrance into their marriage contract quickly reveals Miss Milner’s newly adopted silence as temporary. Miss Milner’s decision to test Elmwood’s love proves her the product of her education: “the dear-bought experiment of being beloved in spite of her faults, (a glory proud women ever aspire to) was, at present, the ambition of Miss Milner” (138). According to Jenkins, “In Inchbald’s hands her characters are realized as

belonging to their world” (281). Miss Milner’s employment of coquettish charms affirms her female education, marking her as belonging to the world, not to herself. While before Miss Milner indulged herself in parties, late nights, and superfluous expenditures, she “now again professed all her former follies...with less restraint than she had ever done” (Inchbald 139). When Miss Milner asks herself ““Why did I not keep him longer in suspense”” (138), she expresses a desire to “prolong the courtship period” (Spencer xv). Spencer suggests Miss Milner’s desire stems from the inherently disadvantaged position of women on the marriage market: “Miss Milner, as a coquette, wants to prolong the courtship period because it is the one time in a woman’s life when she is allowed power over a man” (xv).

Extending Spencer’s argument, Miss Milner acknowledges masculine attempts to dominate courtship, believing courtship the only period of negotiation where she holds any power: ““As my guardian, I certainly did obey him; and I could obey him as a husband; but as a lover, I will not...for if he will not submit to be my lover, I will not submit to be his wife—nor has he the affection I require in a husband”” (154). Thereby making it clear that only through subordination can Dorriforth prove his love, Miss Milner “repeats...old sentiments” (154). The sentiments perpetuate a culture that refuses female power in all aspects but one and refuses to educate women to appropriately navigate the marriage market. Taught to indulge all her whims by her father and her female education, Miss Milner believes it completely acceptable for her to test Dorriforth as she wishes.



Miss Milner's attempt to dominate the courtship quickly reveals Lord Elmwood's boundaries. When Miss Milner insists upon attending a masquerade dressed scandalously, Lord Elmwood's forbiddance and her flippant response compromises his professed delight in her nature: "But facts are glaring; and he at length beheld those faults in their true colours" (140). Elmwood realizes his theoretical misgivings about Miss Milner's behavior are factually based.

Instead of insisting that Miss Milner's petulant desires were a "novelty [that] pleased him" (139), Lord Elmwood confides to Sandford his misgivings: "'My eyes are now open to every failing, as well as to every accomplishment; to every vice, as well as to every virtue'" (141). Elmwood suggests that he recognizes all aspects of Miss Milner's behavior, and loves her in spite of her faults, theoretically making an egalitarian and companionate marriage feasible. However, Elmwood's succeeding statement reveals otherwise: "'and if I find her mind and heart (as my suspicions have of late whispered) too frivolous for that substantial happiness I look for with an object so beloved; depend upon my word—the marriage shall yet be broken off'" (142). Even though she is "so beloved," Miss Milner remains an "object" to Lord Elmwood. If she fails to behave how he desires, Lord Elmwood withholds the right to end the engagement to trade her for a more desirable model.

Reading Lord Elmwood as oppressive and demanding is not meant to condone Miss Milner's behavior, but rather to highlight Inchbald's critique of women's education. As Mary Wollstonecraft writes shortly after *A Simple Story's* publication in 1792:

It is acknowledged that they [women] spend many of the first years of

their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile the strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,—the only way women can rise in the world,—by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act. (9)

Wollstonecraft argues that in breeding women simply to make them eligible for a proper marriage, society only succeeds in creating over-sized children. While Spencer believes Wollstonecraft's education of women "devalues female sexuality" and that Inchbald posits "the disruptive potential of female desire" (xv), Miss Milner's beauty and sexuality are not what upend the engagement; instead her adherence to the "desire of establishing herself" as beloved in spite of her faults results in the engagement's ending. Inchbald and Wollstonecraft both argue against the harm caused by the accomplishments, Wollstonecraft by calling accomplished women animals and Inchbald by making her heroine into one.

Furthering her critique of marriage culture, Inchbald makes Miss Woodley the only character to express any logic where love and marriage are concerned. Miss Woodley analyzes Dorriforth's reasons for leaving:

'I do not think he will be easily induced to beg pardon for a fault, which he thinks you have committed.'

'Then he does not love me.'

'Pshaw! Miss Milner, this is the old argument.—He may love you too well to spoil you—consider he is your guardian as well as your love, he means

also to become your husband.’ (166)

Miss Woodley, untrained as a lady of fashion, refuses the idea that Mr. Dorriforth should apologize for the freedom that Miss Milner expects to exercise. The accomplishments have no place in Miss Woodley’s upbringing, allowing her the clarity to recognize social impositions of child-like behavior on grown women.

After the engagement ends, so too does the script directing Miss Milner’s actions. The accomplishments only educate women as far as marriage; they offer no recourse for those abandoned or widowed, depriving young women of any knowledge concerning proper behavior once left single. Mr. Dorriforth officially quits the engagement in a letter. Jenkins’ assessment that Dorriforth “abandons her for no other reason than her continued independence” (281) reflects Miss Milner’s bewilderment at the severed engagement. After reading the letter, Miss Milner immediately becomes ill: “she uttered not a word.— There was, however, a paleness in her face, a deadness in her eye, and a kind of palsy over her frame... Scarce able to crawl, she rose” (176). Without codified behavior to guide her discourse, Miss Milner “for the world... could not have spoken with a sprightly accent; she frequently began in one, but not three words could she utter” (179).

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Rather than eliciting the non-verbal communication witnessed in Behn’s *Oroonoko*, Inchbald’s appropriation of the silence trope severs the romantic tradition of lovers communicating in silence. Instead, under Inchbald’s pen, silence circumscribes the boundaries of love, marking periods of discord and misconceptions. Extending beyond the female, men too succumb to silence. Instead of silence promoting understanding,

multiple instances of silence, especially after the engagement ends, cause confusion and misunderstanding. While preparing for his departure, Dorriforth meets Miss Milner in the hallway, and rather than express their emotions to one another, each chooses silence:

She heard a footstep advancing towards the spot where she hoped to have been concealed; she lifted up her eyes, and beheld Lord Elmwood...She instantly stifled her tears, and looked at him earnestly, as if to imply, 'What now, my lord?'

He only answered with a bow, which expressed these words alone: 'I beg your pardon.' And immediately withdrew. Thus each understood the other's language, without either uttering a word. (181)

The above passage is often quoted in support of theories that insist gesture dominates speech in Inchbald's work; however, the passage makes clear that Miss Milner assumes what Dorriforth's bow means, as he interprets what her stifled tears mean. Both make erroneous assumptions, refusing to accept that the other is still in love. The reader is aware that both want nothing more than their union, as evidenced in the next scene.

Many critics conclude that within Inchbald's works, "'gestures tell more than speech'" (Kelly, quoted in Anderson 6).<sup>xii</sup> Anderson's analysis challenges Kelly's work, instead concluding that body language "progressively destabilizes the silent gesture for both sexes and indicates that all characters experience multiple emotions simultaneously" (7). Anderson's interrogation of the text incorporates Inchbald's history as an actress, arguing that "Inchbald recasts 'impediments' (such as her stutter)<sup>xiii</sup> that prevent the discrete expression and straightforward interpretation of emotion as strategies that allow

her to circumvent contemporary strictures on female emotional expression” (7). Anderson further uses Inchbald’s “presentation of emotion...to demonstrate that [Inchbald] encourages her audience to notice how and why it is impossible to interpret straightforwardly her authorial expressions” (7). Anderson’s work compliments this examination by elucidating how Inchbald layers her work. To simply read Miss Milner as a coquette does a disservice to Inchbald’s development of Miss Milner’s language and her persona; further, to simply allow silence to function as moments of understanding or effective communication belies actual character emotions or intentions. Inchbald’s ability to create layers meanings is examined by Anderson, who notes the difficulty of analyzing Inchbald’s characters: “characters and readers face the same challenges in interpreting gesture, as Inchbald’s narrator does not explicitly describe the exact emotions behind Miss Milner’s expressions” (11).

Miss Milner’s silence eventually not only affects the social climate at Mrs. Horton’s, but also her physical body for a second time. At dinner, Sandford’s “attention was caught” by Miss Milner’s “deathly countenance” and offers her food (182). Unable to eat, yet grateful for his attention, Miss Milner “smiled at the whimsicality of the circumstance” (182). The whimsicality is that only after Sandford achieves his goal, the separation of Miss Milner and Dorriforth, does he recognize the physical pain the separation causes. Miss Milner’s silence and gestures evidence her internal suffering. Sandford and Miss Woodley recognize Miss Milner’s physical deterioration, but Dorriforth seems unwilling to acknowledge her current state. Therefore, even though the narrator states that “each understood the other’s language” in silence, the opposite is true.

Miss Milner's silence fails to convey her anguish at the separation, leaving Dorriforth unaware that she wants nothing more than reconciliation. Likewise, Dorriforth's subsequent silence leads Miss Milner to believe him unshakable in his resolution to leave, making her unwilling to appeal to his love.

Throughout *A Simple Story*, Inchbald connects moments of eating with moments of imposed silence. Combined with eating and silence is the male appropriation of female intentions. In the above scene, Sandford's offering of food serves as a reconciliatory gesture. However, there is also the intimation that as a silent woman, Miss Milner is incapable of feeding herself and must rely upon her greatest antagonist for sustenance. In an earlier scene, Miss Milner's inability to feed herself again holds the forefront, only this time Dorriforth is the one who rescues her:

For the moment she carried a piece to her lips, she laid it on her plate again, and turned paler, from the vain endeavour to force her appetite. Lord Elmwood had ever been attentive to her, but now he watched her as he would a child...[he] gave her something else; and all with a care and watchfulness in his looks, as if he had been a tender-hearted boy, and she his darling bird, the loss of which, would embitter all the joy of his holidays. (134)

Both are infantilized, Elmwood made into a boy and Miss Milner into a little girl. Likened to an infant, Miss Milner is incapable of feeding herself. Beyond making both into children, the scene also implies that love, even companionate love expressed by both parties, is nevertheless transient. Elmwood's love is not suggested even to last a season,

but rather the extent of a child's holiday. Further implicated in the feeding scene is that Dorriforth is most attentive and loving when Miss Milner is silent and ill, making her physical and emotional decay her most appealing attributes.

Silence also affects Lord Elmwood, preventing him from "utter[ing] a syllable" when taking leave of Miss Milner. Likewise, Miss Milner remains silent at his parting, prompting Sandford to question her behavior:

'Why did not *you* speak to *him*?' cried Sandford... 'I don't see why one is not as much to be blamed, in that respect, as the other.'

'I was too weak to say, I wished him happy.' (185)

Sandford quickly and publically dispenses with social codes of female silence, especially concerning her once forbidden love. Both Elmwood and Miss Milner are implicated in the damage done to one another, both "blamed" by Sandford for each other's sadness. Miss Milner claims herself too "weak" to tell Elmwood her wishes, but her fortitude and strength throughout the novel suggest she is *not* a weak character. Instead, her silence stems from the end of the social script. She is not "too weak," but rather too uninformed to wish Elmwood well in his travels. Accepting that she actually wants him to stay, which compounds her inability to say goodbye, Miss Milner's vocabulary and understanding of actual companionship are so skewed by the world's perception of what these things *should be* that she cannot determine what they actually are.

Even during the wedding ceremony, Miss Milner remains silent. The morning of Elmwood's intended departure, both remain silent in each other's presence: "His lordship...now went up to Miss Milner, and taking one of her hands, again held it

between his, but still without speaking—while she, unable to suppress her tears as heretofore, suffered them to fall in torrents” (190). Again, the emotions and gestures that are thought to express internal truth fail to do so. Sandford approaches them, demanding that they ““Separate this moment...Or resolve never to be separated but by death”” (190). Although “shocked” by Sandford’s words, Elmwood speaks, declaring that he loves Miss Milner ““more than life”” (190). When Sandford asks if she can ““say the same by him,”” Miss Milner’s reply is the cry, ““Oh, heavens!”” (191). Instead of waiting for Miss Milner to speak for herself, Sandford states: ““I believe you *can* say so”” (191). The marriage ceremony ensues, without Miss Milner’s verbal consent; at the end of the ceremony, Miss Milner collapses: “Covered with shame, [she] sunk on the bosom of Miss Woodley” (192). Although the narrator acknowledges that “never was there a more rapid change from despair to happiness—to happiness most supreme—than, was that, which Miss Milner, and Lord Elmwood experienced within that one single hour” (193), the day ends in “an excruciating shock” when Miss Milner discovers she has been married with a mourning ring (193). Married with neither verbal consent nor even verbal participation in the ceremony, the unnaturalness of Miss Milner’s silence destroys not only her body, but her marriage as well.

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The second volume ends with marriage, seemingly following a coquette through her development and culminating in her desired companionate marriage. What is so important about the third volume is that Miss Milner never becomes the reformed coquette. Silence and male hegemony fail to reform the inherent desires and impulses



instilled through her education and later perpetuated by society. The subsequent volumes depict what occurs *after* the marriage, a topic largely disregarded by Inchbald's contemporaries. The third volume opens seventeen years after the marriage (Inchbald 194), confirming the second volume's portent for disaster. Rather than depicting Lord and Lady Elmwood as continually basking in the glow of their companionate marriage, the opposite occurs: "To begin with the first female object of this story.—The beautiful, the beloved Miss Milner—she is no longer beautiful—no longer beloved—no longer—tremble while you read it!—no longer—virtuous" (194). The narrator seems so disturbed in telling the reader of Miss Milner's fall that the words come haltingly, each phrase highlighted by an extended pause. The narrator also directly addresses the reader, warning of the news to follow.

Lord Elmwood travels to India for business and Miss Milner, in his extended absence, has an affair with Lord Frederick: "Lady Elmwood, at first only unhappy, became at last provoked; and giving way to that impatient, irritable disposition she had so seldom governed, resolved, in spite of his injunctions, to divert the melancholy hours his absence caused" (196). Marriage does nothing to further educate the now Lady Elmwood, with Lord Elmwood indulging all her whims (197). As Miss Woodley suggested before, Lord Elmwood comes to "hate" Lady Elmwood, making his departure "extravagant," abandoning both wife and daughter in his anger (197). Completely unreformed by silence, the now Lady Elmwood indulges whims she barely restrained before the marriage.

Lady Elmwood's affair confirms silence's failure to actually affect change; whereas Burney's heroines developed mature language and the ability to navigate social mores, Inchbald's fails to mature beyond the coquette. By presenting the separation between Lord and Lady Elmwood, Inchbald recognizes the ambivalence felt by eighteenth-century readers. According to Misty Anderson, "The audience's and the playwright's conflicting investments in both conservative endings and more progressive models of modern marriage animate these comedies" (2). The marriage in volume two provides the "conservative ending" typical of eighteenth-century novels. However, by continuing the story, and including Lady Elmwood's fall, Inchbald pens a "more progressive model," allowing a critique of the expected ending (both in fiction and life) and the social parameters which perpetuate the conservative standard. Although the narrator acknowledges that Lady Elmwood "gave way" to her petulant desires, the narrator also acknowledges that Lord Elmwood's absence "provoked" her behavior. Coupling Miss Milner's adherence to silence and Gregory's depiction of love, silence should provide her happy ending: "Genuine love is not founded in caprice; it is founded in nature, on honourable views, on virtue, on similarity of tastes and sympathy of souls" (126). According to Gregory's definition, Miss Milner and Lord Elmwood's union should confirm their happiness; however, because her adherence to demands of silence is adverse to her nature, the marriage is not based upon Miss Milner's genuine person, but instead on a constructed version of what women *should* become.

Inchbald's constant attention to Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood's language suggests that beyond presenting a critique of women's education, Inchbald further critiques male

impositions on women's agency. Miss Milner's acquiescence to silence does not produce the intended effect, that of the reformed coquette. Both Lord Elmwood and Sandford seem to believe that Miss Milner's reform will make her worthy of marrying Elmwood, whose religion and occupation imply his virtue. However, Elmwood's reactions to hardship, including the duel with Lord Frederick and the abandonment of his daughter Matilda, make defects in his character just as prevalent as in Miss Milner's. The insinuation then stands that hegemonic impositions of silence are not the reform needed in women's education; rather, the system in its entirety needs change. Women do not need to be changed after the accomplishments have formed them as society desires, but rather the accomplishments are the inherent problem. Combining Inchbald's critique of Miss Milner's participation in silence and her complete lack of reform and Wollstonecraft's argument against the accomplishments presents the conclusion that patriarchally defined social structures seek to elicit desired female behavior. However, instead of producing the ideal woman, silence and the accomplishments only demean and diminish women's capacity to act as rational beings.

#### Chapter Four:

### Confined Language: Silence and Space in Elizabeth Inchbald's *Wives as They Were*, *Maids as They Are*

In the play *Wives as they Were*, *Maids as they Are*, Inchbald further explores impositions of silence upon women, this time extending her examination to paternal relationships. The drama opened in spring 1797, six years after *A Simple Story*. In her prefatory remarks, Inchbald makes an explicit connection between the two works:

The character of Miss Dorrillon is by far the most prominent and interesting one in the piece; and appears to have been formed of the same matter and spirit as compose the body and mind of the heroine of the “Simple Story,” [sic]—a woman of fashion with a heart—a lively comprehension, and no reflection:—an understanding, but no thought.—Virtues abounding from disposition, education, feeling:—Vices obtruding from habit and example. (5)

Immediately, Inchbald continues her critique of women's education, citing “habit and example” as the purveyors of vice in Miss Dorrillon's life. Although formed in the “same manner and spirit” as Miss Milner, Miss Dorrillon's character and storyline contain fundamental differences; the foremost difference is that Miss Dorrillon's father lives and participates in the play's action. Rather than experience the same freedoms allowed Miss Milner in *A Simple Story*, Inchbald formulates an essentially comic piece where “the final

joke of the play is that there is no joke that can moderate the power of husbands and fathers” (Anderson, M. 192). All comic nuance disappears with the jail-plot, forcing Miss Dorrillon into confines only escapable by recognition from her father. Female agency and autonomy fail to operate successfully in a society pervaded by patriarchal norms; there is no place in Miss Dorrillon’s culture for her witty language. When impositions of patriarchal hegemony, and even prison, fail to suppress her voice, Sir Dorrillon’s verbal recognition of his daughter is what causes her silence and acquiescence to male desires. Within *Wives as they Were, Maids as they Are*, female movements toward agency are engulfed by patriarchal control from fathers and husbands. However, with her father’s recognition, Miss Dorrillon’s life ceases to be her own, quickly subsumed in marriage and filial contracts.

Inchbald makes clear that female identity is constructed through male discourse in the introductory scenes. At the play’s opening, the audience discovers that Sir Dorrillon has recently returned to London disguised as a Mr. Manfred; Sir Dorrillon claims disguise as the only means available to assure himself that his daughter does not dissemble her true character. Sir Dorrillon expresses regret at his daughter’s current behavior: “But, when I think on my disappointment...She turns me into ridicule—laughs at me” (1.1.6, 8). Sir Dorrillon blames Miss Dorrillon’s humor and penchant for gambling on her education instilling her with vice and wit. Sir Dorrillon further espouses ideals of proper femininity to his friend Mr. Norberry, Miss Dorrillon’s guardian: “What I see so near perfection as woman, I want to see perfect. We, Mr. Norberry, can never be perfect: but surely women, women might easily be made angels!” (1.1.18-19). Creating a

double standard, Sir Dorrillon expresses the expectation that women achieve a standard of perfection not even within the realm of possibility for men.

Recognizing the logical fallacy in all Sir Dorrillon's expectations, including female education, Miss Dorrillon's behavior, and the behavior of women as a whole, Mr. Norberry acts as a voice of reason against Sir Dorrillon. Recognizing that Miss Dorrillon's education is the product of women's position in society, Mr. Norberry refuses the blame Sir Dorrillon attempts to place upon him: "Why blame me?—Why blame me?—My sister has the sole management of your daughter by your own authority... Depend upon it, my dear friend, that Miss Dorrillon, your daughter, came to my house just the same heedless woman of fashion you now see her" (1.1:1-3, 5). Just like Miss Milner, Miss Dorrillon enters the play labeled a "woman of fashion," suggesting that she is practiced in the accomplishments. Mr. Norberry insists that his sister educated Miss Milner, again implicating female education and the accomplishments as engendering frivolous women, incapable of properly engaging in society. Mr. Norberry also refuses the assumed perfectability of womankind inherent in Sir Dorrillon's ideology: "And if they were [angels], we should soon be glad to make them into women again" (1.1:20).

Sir Dorrillon's delusion concerning proper female decorum echoes the 1790's expectation of sensibility examined in G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility*. Returning to Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments for the reform of female education, Barker-Benfield notes that:

Wollstonecraft's distinction was to take "Sense" further in her defense of woman's mind, and to be still more damning in her analysis of the damage an exaggerated "Sensibility" could do to women... Wollstonecraft insisted that women toughen themselves by fully entering the world and subjecting themselves individually to all of the experiences possible to men. (362)

Sir Dorrillon, in desiring angels and perfection, seeks to extend the very "exaggerated 'Sensibility'" Wollstonecraft, and Inchbald, write against. Sir Dorrillon's expectations of sensibility and perfection allude to the play's conclusion, which, according to Misty Anderson, presents a "story [which] is hardly comic" (192). Although the play is labeled a comedy, the complete suppression of female agency presents a conclusion for the heroine that is not at all funny. Throughout the play, Sir Dorrillon will impose his ideology on his daughter, pressing upon her silence and obedience, a set of behaviors alien to her disposition, removing her wit.

Sir Dorrillon, in his disguise, still expects deference from his daughter, suggesting that the deference due a father must be extended to all men:

MR. NOR: Stay, and for once behave with politeness and good humour to your daughter—do—and I dare venture my life she will neither insult nor treat you with disrespect. You know you always begin first.

SIR W: Have not I a right to begin first?

MR. NOR: But that is a right of which she is ignorant. (1.1.106-109)

Again, Sir Dorrillon expresses unrealistic expectations for women, arguing that simply because she does not know his identity, Miss Dorrillon is still expected to defer to Sir

Dorrillon/Manfred. Mr. Norberry recognizes the absurdity of Sir Dorrillon's demand, stating that while Sir Dorrillon has the right to expect deference as a father, he holds no claims to deference as an unknown acquaintance.

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Unknowingly mirroring her father's irritation, Miss Dorrillon expresses distaste with Manfred/Dorrillon's behavior: "Why, I am vexed; and I don't like to be found fault with in my best humour, much less when I have so many things to tease me" (1.1.121). Broke from her gambling habit and refused money by Manfred/Dorrillon, Miss Dorrillon refuses to accept Manfred/Dorrillon's behavior due to the deference *she* expects as a woman of fashion. Miss Dorrillon echoes the same expectations as Miss Milner, namely that because she is a woman, she expects respect.

For all her father's sentiments and cultural expectations, Miss Dorrillon seems perfectly unaware that her voice and agency defy codified behavior. The issue of female power in courtship once again figures into Inchbald's writing with Miss Dorrillon's refusal of Sir George Evelyn's marriage proposal. In a conversation with her friend Lady Mary Raffle, also a single woman of fashion, Miss Dorrillon reveals her antagonism toward marriage:

LADY R. Why don't you marry, and throw all your misfortunes upon  
your husband?

MISS DOR. Why don't you marry? for you have as many to throw.

(1.1.136-7)



Miss Dorrillon's rhetoric immediately returns Lady Raffle's question, refusing to answer. Lady Raffle claims she does not have a Sir George Evelyn "with ten thousand pounds a year" (1.1.140) to take upon her debts as Miss Dorrillon does. Rather than admit she could marry Sir George and relieve both her debt and the societal pressure to marry, Miss Dorrillon silences Lady Raffle: "Silence.—Reserve your anger to defend and not to attack me. We should be allies by the common ties of poverty" (1.1.145). Miss Dorrillon does not express a desire to marry, but to continue her friendship with Lady Raffle; in claiming their friendship is based upon poverty vis-a-vi their gambling habit, Miss Dorrillon argues to remain poor and single rather than married and wealthy.

Miss Dorrillon's refusal of marriage to Sir George is not based upon animosity toward him as a person, but to marriage as an institution. When Sir George first enters the action of the play, Miss Dorrillon is debating with Mr. Norberry about her relationship with Sir George:

MR. NOR. And pray, my dear, whose friend have you ever been? Not Sir George Evelyn's, I am sure; and yet he, of all others, deserves your friendship most.

MISS DOR. But friendship will not content him: as soon as he thought he has gained that---. (1.1.168-9)

Miss Dorrillon is not adverse to friendship with Sir George, but she is adverse to the marriage she knows he will expect. In a later conversation, Sir George offers to pay her debts and secure her reputation from "further embarrassment" and her father's "reproaches" upon his return (1.1.247). However, rather than accept Sir George's

financial security and marriage proposal, Miss Dorrillon is offended at the implication that her vices extend beyond gambling:

Sir George, I have listened to your detail of the vices, which I acknowledge, with patience, with humility—but your suspicion of those which I have *not*, I treat with pride, with indignation... What part of my conduct, sir, has made you dare to suppose I would extricate myself from the difficulties that surround me, by the influence I hold over the weakness of a lover? (1.1.248, 250).

While the marriage to Sir George would effectively solve her financial worries, Miss Dorrillon exerts her virtue and her agency in rejecting the suit. Virtue is called upon by her rejection of the implication that she is guilty of more vice than gambling; agency gives her the ability to reject the suit on her own terms, asserting herself as able to rectify the debt without marrying a wealthy suitor.

Miss Dorrillon further suggests that a marriage to Sir George would be for convenience, rather than companionship. In his examination of eighteenth-century culture after the Marriage Act of 1753, Daniel O'Quinn argues that Miss Dorrillon's "economic reflections on her precarious position in the realm of sexual exchange" (107) allow Inchbald to critique the "commodification of women on the marriage market" (107). Although not explicitly traded, as Mr. Harrell attempts with Cecilia, Miss Dorrillon recognizes the implicit commodification of her person if she agreed to the marriage—rather than entering into a symbiotic marriage, Miss Dorrillon would trade her monetary debt for a sexual one. Miss Dorrillon's earlier assertion that accepting Sir George means

more than extending friendship reveals her awareness that a sexual relationship is required when entering marriage. In rejecting Sir George's offer, Miss Dorrillon also refuses to place a monetary value on her virginity.

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Miss Dorrillon realizes her ability to act with agency in more instances than refusing Sir George's marriage proposal. Taking advantage of the potential marriage to verbally spar with Manfred/Dorrillon, Miss Dorrillon quips: "Ah! Mr. Manfred, are you there? [*Playfully.*] And have you undertaken to be Sir George's counsel? If you have, I believe he must lose his cause" (Inchbald 2.1.75-8). By using humor rather than showing indignity, Miss Dorrillon utilizes her wit to diffuse the situation, simultaneously rejecting both a potential suitor and an imposing patriarchal figure. In an earlier scene, Miss Dorrillon explicitly rejects Manfred/Dorrillon's attempts at imposition regarding her attending a play with Sir George without expressed permission:

SIR W. [*With violence.*] Would you dare?

MISS DOR. [*Looking with surprise.*] 'Would I dare,' Mr. Manfred!—and  
what have *you* to say if I do?

SIR W. [*Recollecting himself.*] I was only going to say, that if you did, and  
I were Mr. Norberry— (1.3.170-73)

Sir Dorrillon has a moment of clarity, perhaps realizing that he oversteps traditional boundaries in expecting filial piety without revealing his identity. Likewise, Miss Dorrillon expresses her refusal to adhere to patriarchal constructions of femininity without a valid reason. However much she rails against Manfred/Dorrillon's

chastisements, Miss Dorrillon still offers friendship to Manfred/Dorrillon later in the same scene: “If Mr. Manfred likes, I’ll shake hands with him—and we’ll be good friends for the future. But then, don’t find fault with me—I can’t bear it. *You* don’t like to be found fault with yourself—You look cross as any thing every time I say the least word against you” (1.3.189-90). Miss Dorrillon’s pauses expose Dorrillon/Manfred’s reaction to her offer of peace; that she must ask him not to find fault with her suggests his refusal of the proffered hand. Moreover, Miss Dorrillon reveals her awareness of the ability of her words to affect Dorrillon/Manfred; in critiquing male hegemony and the double standard implicit in masculine judgments, Miss Dorrillon retains the ability to acknowledge and refuse men who find fault with her but will not recognize their own shortcomings.

Gambling paradoxically affords Miss Dorrillon more agency than any other activity, but gambling is what causes her financial ruin and subsequent imprisonment. Upon returning from India, Sir Dorrillon is not nearly so horrified by Miss Dorrillon’s debt as by her participation in vice. The autonomy suggested by her gambling, and Miss Dorrillon’s profession that “I protest I love to part with my money” (1.2.129), suggests that her desire to gamble is not for financial independence, but instead a different form of independence, particularly on the marriage market. In the 1790’s, a proliferation of female gaming tables arose; Gillian Russell’s article “‘Faro’s Daughters’: Female Gamesters, Politics, and the Discourse of Finance in 1790s Britain,” explains that “‘Faro ladies’” were “prominent women of fashion” who organized their own gambling tables; although they do not organize the tables, Miss Dorrillon and Lady Raffle both participate at every

occasion afforded them. Historically, the Faro ladies used ““womanpower”” to exert the “sexual, financial, and class power of the aristocracy,” and in “early 1797 they were eventually brought before the magistrate and fined for illegal gambling” (482). Published the same year, *Wives* presents a heroine deeply involved in gambling, implying Inchbald’s awareness of the events. Russell argues that the independent income arising from their gambling gave the Faro ladies “entrepreneurial insight,” furthering their threat to an androcentric economy (482). According to Russell, “high-stakes gambling” represented actions such as “the brokering of marriage” (483), thus the threat implicated in female gambling goes beyond financial independence to encompass the marriage market. Evidenced by her earlier rejections of a marriage suit, Miss Dorrillon may implement techniques learned while gambling to negotiate her marriage contract. However, as the ending of the play evinces, Miss Dorrillon’s success at brokering her marriage contract is no more successful than her gambling.

Cast in its cultural context, Sir Dorillon’s rejection of Miss Dorrillon as a virtuous woman is not justified, but better understood. In a time period marked by war and deep cultural unrest, gambling in the aristocracy was interpreted as a “sign of the moral degeneracy and irresponsibility of the fashionable classes,” and it threatened to “endanger the moral and political survival of the nation...[while] rendering the entire ruling class vulnerable” (Russell 481-2). Regardless of Dorrillon/Manfred’s opinion of her behavior, Miss Dorrillon refuses to apologize for her gambling: “For my part, had I not sometimes felt what it was to want a friend, I might never have had humanity to be the friend of another” (Inchbald 1.1.165). Miss Dorrillon posits her gambling habit and subsequent

debt as engendering her with humanity. Rather than recognize her behavior as somehow aberrant, as Sir Dorillon insists it is, Miss Dorrillon interprets her vice as contributing to her overall virtue. The play's conclusion further upholds Miss Dorrillon's virtue as motivating reconciliation with her father; suggesting that whatever liberties are taken by Miss Dorrillon lie secondary to her inherent virtue, Inchbald creates a heroine capable of freedom, wit, and virtue, which is discussed in the following section.

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While Miss Dorrillon's agency never directly threatens her well-being, the freedom she assumes as a gambler strips her physical freedom. In a literal run from the law, Miss Dorrillon locks herself in a room (unbeknownst to her) occupied by Dorrillon/Manfred. When she refuses him the key, their conversation shifts to a battle of wills, each expecting deference from the other:

SIR W. 'Will not'—Will not, when I desire you?

MISS DOR. No—since you refuse me protection, I'll protect myself.

(4.2.136-8)

Even with her debtors knocking at the proverbial door, Miss Dorrillon will not admit the cause of her distress, expecting Dorrillon/Mandred's censure rather than protection. As in *A Simple Story*, each character's refusal to verbalize truths (Sir Dorrillon that he is the father, Miss Dorrillon her gambling debt) causes disagreement and confusion. Sir Dorrillon/Manfred expects deference as her father, whereas Miss Dorrillon expects protection as a single woman. Neither can achieve their desire, because neither attempts to verbalize the truth.

The arrest scene further reveals cultural expectations of virtue, when Sir Dorrillon refuses protection based upon his assumption of Miss Dorrillon's virtue: "I scorn to defend a worthless woman as much as I should glory in preserving a good one" (4.2.174). Again, an echo from *A Simple Story* arises—just as Miss Milner's wit overshadowed her inherent virtue, so too does Miss Dorrillon's. Although she is a virtuous woman, Sir Dorrillon deems her unworthy because of her debts and her witty language. The standard of "a good one" is almost impossible for any woman to achieve, as evidenced at the play's opening.

As much as she desires her father's recognition, it is Sir Dorrillon's revelation of his identity that ultimately silences Miss Dorrillon. After the arrest, Miss Dorrillon maintains awareness of her agency in prison. Sir Dorrillon/Manfred offers to pay her debts if she agrees to certain changes in her behavior, specifically her autonomy:

SIR W. You must promise, solemnly promise, never to return to your  
former follies and extravagancies. [*She looks down.*] Do you hesitate?  
Do you refuse?—Won't you promise?

MISS DOR. I would, willingly—but for one reason.

SIR W. And what is that?

MISS DOR. The fear I should not keep my word...indeed, I cannot make  
a promise, unless I were to feel my heart wholly subdued, and my  
mind  
entirely convinced that I should never break it. (5.1.35-45)

Much like her refusal to marry Sir George simply to pay her debts, Miss Dorrillon reveals her strong character and exerts her agency in refusing to take money if she cannot imagine keeping her promise. Sir Dorrillon attempts to exert his patriarchal ideas of proper femininity by making Miss Dorrillon's autonomy the price of her freedom from prison. Miss Dorrillon's value as a daughter is directly tied to her position as a commodity; only through adhering to Sir Dorrillon's model of behavior can Miss Dorrillon be recognized as his child.

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Returning to an Early Modern tradition, Inchbald employs the subplot to enhance the critique presented in the high plot. The relationship between Lord and Lady Priory, friends staying with Mr. Norbery, provides a foil for the relationship between Sir Dorrillon and Miss Dorrillon. Both Lady Priory and Miss Dorrillon are subsumed in a patriarchal frame, with males dominating their behavior as much as possible. Both Lord Priory and Sir Dorrillon express the highest standard of perfection for women, and both seek to experience that perfection through the intimidation and control of the women in their lives. When the audience first meets Lord Priory, he seeks a room in Mr. Norberry's house while his own is renovated. One of Lord Priory's stipulations for seeking Mr. Norberry's house is Norberry's bachelor status:

LORD P. I have been married eleven years, and during all that time I have made it a rule never to go on a visit, so as to domesticate, in the house of a married man.

SIR W. May I inquire the reason of that?



LORD P. It is because I am married myself; and having always treated my wife according to the ancient mode of treating wives, I would rather she should never be an eye-witness to modern household management...The ancients seldom gave them the liberty to do wrong: but modern wives do as they like. (1.1.46-50)

In refusing to allow her “an eye-witness” experience of the “modern household,” Lord Priory insures obedience through deprivation. Lord Priory insists upon manipulating his wife, making her rise at five in the morning and retire at ten, never allowing visitors so that “she is rejoiced” to see him when he returns in the evening (1.1.60-70). Upon learning of Lady Priory and her complete acquiescence, Sir Dorrillon colludes with Lord Priory, stating, “I have long conceived indulgence to be the bane of female happiness” (1.1.65). Deprivation becomes the key to eliciting desired female behavior. Dorrillon and Priory express their beliefs in not only their expectations of female behavior, but Priory also prescribes the best manner of achieving it.

Rather than confirm her as virtuous and securing her safety from rakes, Lord Priory actually places his wife in a precarious situation. In an early scene, Mr. Bronzely, the drama’s professed rake, purposefully seizes Lady Priory in a darkened hallway and kisses her. While initially claiming he believed her a servant (and himself therefore privy to her person), Bronzely later admits knowing her identity. In admitting so, Mr. Bronzely reveals that as a man, even one of lower rank, he assumes himself authorized to her body. Daniel O’Quinn recognizes the potential for disaster in Lady Priory’s situation, paralleling her subjugation with Miss Dorrillon’s objectification: “The victim of rape and

the commodified woman are different manifestations of a pervasive masculinist violence aimed at allaying the threat of female sexuality and sexual difference to male subjectivity and homosociality” (107). Physical violence and demanding female silence are then conflated as “masculinist violence” which severs “female sexuality.” In demanding his wife’s complete physical subjugation, Lord Priory renders her vulnerable to physical attacks. Similarly, by demanding mental and verbal subservience from his daughter, Sir Dorrillon ensures her subjection in a patriarchal system equally as oppressive as Lord Priory’s marital deprivations. Lady Priory’s marital confinement parallels Miss Dorrillon’s confinement first in debtor’s prison and then her subsequent confinement as a daughter and wife.

What is so problematic about Inchbald’s depiction of Lady Priory is that Lady Priory is arguably the only character both completely subsumed beneath patriarchal constructions of femininity *and* paradoxically the only woman capable of reason and complete virtue. When Bronzely believes he has secured a private audience with Lady Priory to confess his love, she prevents his speaking to wait for her husband to enter the room:

MR BRON. I entreated your ladyship not to mention to my lord that I have any thing to communicate, and you gave me a solemn promise you would not.

LADY P. Upon my honour, during our whole conversation upon that subject, you never named my Lord Priory’s name.

MR. BRON. I charged you to keep what I had to tell you a profound

secret.

LADY P. Yes; but I thought you understood I could have no secrets from my husband...*He* is myself. (4.2.43-48).

Not only does Lady Priory relinquish her identity for her husband's, she also proves her awareness of Bronzely's machinations. Although her comments may be read as naïve because she is kept from society, Lady Priory's later explicit rejections of Mr. Bronzely for her current marriage make her manipulations of Bronzely apparent. Lady Priory reveals that she is aware of her ability to cuckold her husband if she desires; she did not have to tell Lord Priory of the meeting. Simultaneously refusing the affair and exposing Bronzely's intentions to Lord Priory, Lady Priory manipulates the situation and revealing her virtue and wisdom. Lauded by all the male characters, including her husband, Sir Dorrillon, Mr. Bronzely, and Mr. Norberry, Lady Priory is the apex of feminine standards. Lady Priory is as sequestered and privated away as a woman can be. Inchbald's ultimate critique is that the only way women have access to wisdom and virtue is within hyperbolic confines implemented by patriarchally structured marriage.

The play's closing lines reveal Miss Dorrillon's awareness of Lady Priory's situation. In the previous scene, Miss Dorrillon is given to Sir George in marriage by her father:

SIR G. And may I hope, Maria—

MISS DOR. No—I will instantly put an end to all your hopes.

SIR G. How?

SIR W. By raising you to the summit of your wishes. Alarmed at my

severity, she has owned her readiness to become the subject of a milder government. (5.4.203-6)

Much like Miss Milner, there is no verbal consent to marriage; a patriarch speaks for Miss Dorrillon. Her father answers that rather than submit to his particular form of tyranny, Miss Dorrillon chooses to submit to “a milder government.” When asked by Sir George her opinion of the previous moments, she replies: “Simply one sentence—A maid of the present day, shall become a wife like those—of former times” (5.4.214). Lady Priory is literally a wife of “former times,” with Lord Priory’s earlier comment that he treats her like an “ancient” wife. Miss Dorrillon’s language, able to summarize her entire future in one sentence, reveals that her language has developed to maturity. However, even with her mature language, Miss Dorrillon cannot negotiate the terms of her marriage; rather, Miss Dorrillon becomes silent and is spoken for. Miss Dorrillon recognizes that her agency and her voice will fade and be subsumed under her husband’s control, much like Lady Priory. Inchbald’s conclusion offers almost no hope to the coquette or to the female gambler beyond an undesired marriage. In order to achieve mature language and the ability to reason, Miss Dorrillon must submit to a marriage that confines her and removes her agency and wit.

There is no place for female agency or humor after Miss Dorrillon is legitimated by her father and betrothed to Sir George. Inchbald closes *Wives* with a condemnation of arranged marriage and patriarchal structures which demand female acquiescence to achieve maturity and legitimation. Unlike the ending of *A Simple Story*, which comments on silence’s inability to reform the coquette by revealing her affair and the crumbling of

Miss Milner's marriage, *Wives as they Were* presents its critique in the form of complete subjection to patriarchy. Anderson argues that "Inchbald confines her [Miss Dorrillon's] agency as a comic heroine to a few comic events, in which she negotiates in the language of the law. Inchbald replaces generic tricks, happy accidents, and bumbling guardians with a tough-minded realism about domestic authority and the limits of female agency" (192). Recognizing the limitations placed upon Miss Dorrillon, Anderson's argument that *Wives* is "hardly comic" is solidified with the play's conclusion and Miss Dorrillon's decision of a marriage she does not desire over the patriarchal confines imposed by her father. Even while in prison, Miss Dorrillon possessed the agency to negotiate her release; however, once recognized by her father and pressed into a marriage contract, Miss Dorrillon is left with no voice, no recourse for change, and no agency.

## Conclusion

Both Burney and Inchbald present heroines who are at some point silenced. *The Witlings* uses silence to comment upon Cecilia's need for money to successfully operate in society. Further, Burney ironically satirizes female education to critique the frivolity of both the system and its affects on young women. Burney insists that female subjugation, both in learning and in marriage, is a direct result of women's inability to navigate society; Lady Smatter is unable to discourse with her male counterparts because her education prevents it, and Cecilia cannot negotiate a marriage contract without her inheritance. Women become inept with either too little education or too little money. Lady Smatter always has too much money and not enough formal education; Cecilia has neither the money nor the education for most of the play, making her doubly unable to solidify her intended marriage.

Burney's deft handling of female subjection to male desires partially explains *The Witlings*'s suppression by her two daddies. Burney's second novel *Cecilia* presents many of the same critiques as *The Witlings*, although the presentation of critiques is done on a subtler level. Because on such a larger scale than *The Witlings*, at nearly 1,000 pages, *Cecilia* has more time to critique women's educations and the imposition of silence upon women. Female inheritance serves as a major plot device in both texts; both Cecilia's lose their inheritance at one point, the dramatic Cecilia due to her guardian's ineptness

and novel Cecilia due to her marriage. The loss of inheritance coincides with moments of madness, suggesting that beyond an education, women also need fortunes to maintain their sanity. Neither Cecilia can find refuge when penniless, allowing Burney to comment on the vapid nature of society. Completely dependent upon their monetary worth, women struggle to maintain social positions without their inheritance.

A certain degree of madness infiltrates both Burney's works, striking both Cecilia's in times of financial crisis and signifying a culture dependent upon money for status. Further, the loss of inheritance occurs for both characters *after* asserting their agency and speaking publically against patriarchal attempts at control. Dramatic Cecilia is unable to confirm her marriage because of her inability to reject social mores regarding courtship; her silence is witnessed in her inability to verbally spar with Lady Smatter. Novel Cecilia, after marrying Mortimer and relinquishing her uncle's inheritance, is forced out of her country home for the next heir. Unable to find Mortimer and silenced at Mr. Delvile's, Cecilia runs into the street, where madness overtakes her:

This moment, for the unhappy Cecilia, teemed with calamity; she was wholly overpowered; terror for Delvile, horror for herself, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, all assailing her at once, while all means of repelling them were denied her...and her reason suddenly, yet totally failing her, she madly called out, "He will be gone! he will be gone!"  
(896)

Like the dramatic Cecilia, novel Cecilia cannot function without her inheritance or her husband. A direct connection is made between a woman's inheritance, her marriagibility,

and her ability to reason. Although both Cecilia's recover from their temporary madness, both are silenced before made legitimate on society's terms.

Operating in a far different manner, *Inchbald* is the reverse of Rosenthal's examination of drama as more explicitly critiquing cultural practices. Although through the Priory's *Wives* openly critiques the deprivation of wives as somehow eliciting their virtue, direct critiques only occur in the subplot. With Miss Dorrillon, *Inchbald* includes an almost-*Evelina* plot, but the marriage is not wished for by the female lead. Rather than directly critiquing male impositions upon women, *Inchbald* uses witty lines to imply her distaste with hegemonic impositions upon Miss Dorrillon. *Wives* offers hope to women by making marriage an option for a disgraced female gambler; however, that marriage is only accessible through the father and is stated as undesirable by Miss Dorrillon. Using humor and hyperbolic situations (the almost-kidnapping of Lady Priory, the jailing of Miss Dorrillon), *Inchbald* succeeds in critiquing the occasions that engender moments of danger for women. Feminine decorum becomes impossible to enact with male inflations of femininity reaching hyperbolic standards.

Presenting a much more explicit critique of marriage culture and female education, *A Simple Story* follows a heroine incapable of adhering to normative codes of femininity. Not only is Miss Milner incapable of incorporating silence into her repertoire of charms, she displays no desire to willfully become silent. Rather, Mr. Dorriforth and Mr. Sandford impose silence upon her, each man incapable of understanding her position on the marriage market. Silence depletes Miss Milner of not only her voice, but also her ability to fulfill basic needs. Unable to eat or communicate, Miss Milner literally wastes



away in front of her betrothed and her companions. After Miss Milner's affair in the third volume, silence's inability to affect social change or elicit the desired behavior becomes evident. There is no mystical transformation in female behavior once women become silent; as an unnatural affectation, silence harms more than it helps.

With their comments on refining female education, both Burney and Inchbald ultimately condemn women's learning simply to become objects upon the marriage market. Both recognize marriage as an inherently patriarchal institution that confines and deflates female arguments for agency. Patriarchs continually insist upon their wards marrying, often long before they are ready. Each character marries only after first succumbing to silence, making silence a prerequisite to marriage in the eighteenth-century. Women are forced to learn the accomplishments, which are determined as necessary by society to make women desirable on the marriage market. However, men later claim the accomplishments as engendering incompetent women, imposing a paradox. To marry, women must learn and practice the accomplishments, however, men continually cite the consequences of the accomplishments as making women undesirable.

Comparing the conclusions in Burney's and Inchbald's works, the consequences for confronting social expectations of silence differ depending on both the author and the genre. For Burney, each heroine loses her fortune. Within the play, losing one's fortune is tantamount to relinquishing both language and marriage. In the novel, however, Cecilia chooses to forego her uncle's inheritance for a companionate marriage. The consequence for transgressing social codes of silence for both Burney's heroines is the loss of monetary and social stability; however, the redemption of the fortune in the play suggests

that society only allows women to participate if they are wealthy. Lady Smatter, although mocked and derided by her companions, is allowed to speak whenever she chooses because of her financial position. Comparatively, Burney's novel never restores Cecilia's money, making her companionate marriage ultimately adverse to accepted social mores. If the marriage between Cecilia and Mortimer Delvile were socially approved, a mystical restoration of Cecilia's fortune would occur; because her inheritance passes to another heir, Cecilia is left without the money. In choosing marriage over her inheritance, Cecilia is made marginal. She becomes conflated with Lady Delvile, welcome in society for her name and not her fortune. Like the Delvile's, the reader can conjecture that the same gossip that circulates about his parents and their pretensions will quickly extend to Cecilia and Mortimer Delvile. Cecilia's activation of her agency allows her marital happiness, but prevents her ability to operate as a woman of fashion in society.

However, although Burney's heroines succumb to silence and moments of poverty, each ultimately realizes her ability to speak effectively in a male-dominated society. Through the trials of silence, both Cecilia's develop their own voice, casting off hegemonic impositions of silence to assert their own desires. This is not to suggest that each woman becomes completely autonomous and begins life anew, able to act and exist on her own terms. Both women marry the men they love, but both still enter a fundamentally patriarchal system with almost no acknowledgement of female rights.<sup>xiv</sup> However, each Cecilia enters marriage with mature language, able to navigate social customs. Ultimately, rather than a complete suppression, there is a recognition of female agency and language, suggesting a more hopeful future.

Burney completes her texts in the 1780's, a decade prior to Inchbald. Perhaps because of her dramatic experience, Inchbald presents a much less optimistic portrayal of patriarchal practices of suppression. Cultural expectations of silence are much more heavy-handed in Inchbald's texts, with clear patriarchs continually working to subjugate their female wards. Within *A Simple Story*, Inchbald integrates religion with her critique; by making Sandford and Dorriforth priests, there lies a suggestion of virtue and rightness in their demands for female silence and acquiescence. By creating a heroine so likeable as Miss Milner, Inchbald makes Sandford and Dorriforth decidedly *unlikeable*. Their hegemonic impositions become overbearing and ridiculous to the reader, whose sympathies lie with Miss Milner. Inchbald's ability to confront social conflicts is deftly handled by setting female desires for agency as diametrically opposed to male desires for suppression.

Examining Burney and Inchbald across differing genres and time periods suggests there is not one, simple formula for proper female behavior. Rather, because of the dramatically different representations of women and the outcomes of their language, the works imply that socially expected codes of behavior are ridiculous and detrimental to female development. Each character, the two Cecilia's, Miss Milner, and Miss Dorillon, becomes silent at some point, but each also expresses her agency through mature language at another. Each woman approaches her language differently, with different outcomes. Female agency does not come across as malignant; hegemonic attempts at control are what become alien and unnatural. Nor does romance have one, simple formula to follow once Burney and Inchbald begin to change it. For Behn, romance

tropes still served to unite her two lovers, allowing communication outside strictures created by patriarchal forces. Even in Burney's works, love still operates as a hoped for outcome. *Cecilia* portrays a heroine willing to forgo her inheritance for her true love. However, love operates much differently in the 1790's for Inchbald. In *A Simple Story*, love definitely exists, but it moves to a taboo and sexually charged relationship; there is a desire between Miss Milner and Mr. Dorriforth not witnessed in Burney's works. But by the time Inchbald composes *Wives as They Were*, love ceases to operate as a plot device. Sir George may love Miss Dorrillon, but she certainly avoids expressing any true sentiment for him. Romance becomes unnecessary on the marriage market, with Sir Dorrillon marrying his daughter to the suitor most present. Silence within the romance tradition not only causes moments of non-communication, but female silence becomes a necessary quality for women to marry.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For this study, agency is understood as the ability to act of one's own volition. It is understood as an intangible concept, but an enactable concept nonetheless.

<sup>2</sup> Burney specifically references Fordyce's *Sermons* in her journal on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1773: "Exceptions, Fordyce says, do only *confirm* a General Rule. For my own part, how well should I think of myself, if my Deserts equaled my Happiness!" (*Early Journals* 229).

<sup>3</sup> Here, "patriarchy" relies upon Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's definition proffered in their book *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*: "The Old Order is *patriarchal*: authority over the female is vested in the elder males, or male. He, the father, makes the decisions which control the family's work, purchases, marriages. Under the rule of the father, women have no complex choices to make, no questions as to their nature or destiny: the rule is simply obedience" (9).

<sup>4</sup> The definition of wit provided is my own, tailored for my examination of humor in the texts.

<sup>5</sup> These texts include, but are not limited to: Regina Barreca's *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, Misty G. Anderson's *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage*, Ellen Donkin's *Getting Into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829*, and Laura Runge's "Beauty and Gallantry: A Model of Polite Conversation Revisited." These works are cited throughout to elucidate how author's use humor to make social critiques.

<sup>6</sup>When discussing gender roles as socially constructed, I refer to Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*: "As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (6).

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Heller explains that the Bluestocking Group was "an instance where women appear to be full and active participants in the public sphere: the Bluestocking salons of later eighteenth-century London" (59). Led by Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, and others, the Bluestockings presented a vehicle for female discussion in public venues.

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<sup>8</sup> Conduct literature also applied to men, vis-à-vis *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son: On the Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman* and Rousseau's *Emile: A Treatise on Education*.

<sup>9</sup> According to Mr. Gosport, "silence of affectation" is: "presently discernable by the roving of the eye round the room to see if it is heeded, by the sedulous care to avoid an accidental smile, and by the variety of disconsolate attitudes exhibited to the beholders. This species of silence has almost without exception its origin in that babyish vanity which is always gratified by exciting attention" (Burney 42).

<sup>10</sup> The "accomplishments" are alluded to by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: "Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed on the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire" (61). Wollstonecraft further argues against the accomplishments: "The passions thus pampered, while the judgment is left unformed, what can be expected to ensue?—Undoubtedly, a mixture of madness and folly!" (61). As is evidenced in both Inchbald and Burney's works, either madness and folly occur in all four texts examined, indicating arguments against teaching women sensibility and frivolous activities.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Spencer's introduction to *A Simple Story* examines the difference between male and female educations: "The point about 'serious' study was the self-control and rational behaviour it was supposed to encourage, while accomplishments, a means of young women's self-display on the marriage market, were associated with feminine irrationality" (xii-xiii).

<sup>12</sup> See Anderson's article "Revising Theatrical Conventions in *A Simple Story*: Elizabeth Inchbald's Ambiguous Performance," specifically page 6, for a summary of critics holding the view that silence operates successfully in lieu of words

<sup>13</sup> Most biographies of Inchbald comment upon her stutter as hindering her work as an actress; most accounts also recognize how hard Inchbald worked to overcome her stutter on the stage.

<sup>14</sup> See Skinner, Gillian. "Women's status as legal and civil subjects: 'A worse condition than slavery itself?'" for a discussion of women's subjectivity pre- and post-marriage.