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“She knew no one with sufficient intimacy”: Female Friendship in *Camilla* and Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*

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Abstract: This article suggests that Frances Burney’s *Camilla* dramatizes and critiques the advice on female friendship given by fellow Bluestocking Hester Chapone in her conduct book *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*. Burney’s critiques affirm the importance of affective relationships between women, despite the criticisms these relationships received from contemporary male conduct book writers, such as James Fordyce and John Gregory. *Camilla*’s three main friendships with Mrs. Arlbery, Mrs. Berlinton, and Lady Isabella closely correspond to types of friends Chapone outlines in *Letters*: the older friend, the adulterous friend, and the ideal friend. *Camilla*’s complex responses to each type of friend reveal that while Burney affirmed parts of Chapone’s advice, she also weighed it against her own experience. The realist novel, rather than the conduct book, takes center stage in Burney’s work as the genre best able to depict the nuances of the human heart.

Despite her close-knit family, relatively stable upbringing, and active social life, the eponymous heroine of Frances Burney’s *Camilla* descends further and further into isolation as the novel progresses. *Camilla* spends the bulk of the novel pursuing friends who abandon her in crisis. When an unscrupulous moneylender has thrown *Camilla*’s father in prison for refusing to pay her debts, *Camilla* admits, “She knew no one with sufficient intimacy to endure presenting herself to them upon such an occasion” (827).¹ Without friends to depend on, her behavior grows increasingly desperate and erratic: she travels to visit her father in prison and returns without seeing him; she seeks her sister Eugenia but is ejected by Eugenia’s jealous and abusive husband, Bellamy; and she returns in despair to her uncle’s estate to find it abandoned. She ends up alone in a small halfway house nine miles from home, in a room she cannot afford, suffering a complete nervous breakdown. As *Camilla* learns, friends can prove false when she most needs them, and their advice can lead her dangerously astray.

Camilla’s mental breakdown underscores a young woman’s desperate need for friends and the perilous psychological and social consequences if she fails to properly select them. The cultural ramifications of female friendlessness and the “literary phenomenon of female friendship” have become an increasingly popular theme in studies of the period since Janet Todd’s *Women’s Friendship in Literature* (1980), which identifies five categories for women’s friendship in eighteenth-century fiction: sentimental, erotic, manipulative, political, and social (1, 3-4). Todd argues that these categories of friendships often threaten—but also may reinforce—patriarchal norms (4, 12). Emma Donoghue (1996) and Susan S. Lanser (2014) further extend and revise Todd’s argument, suggesting that fear of female friendship is related to its potential slippage into same-sex desire. Lanser argues

that women were warned away from friendship because a too-strong “affective” relationship could threaten patriarchal heteronormativity, and she sees Burney’s work as generally “moving toward more conservatizing and realist ends” (188). Without finding stronger evidence of same-sex desire in Burney’s work, Lanser concludes that “the tropes of the sapphic are present . . . through their absence, in a kind of epitaph” (189).

I argue that the friendships, and friendlessness, in *Camilla* are thus better understood by returning to Todd’s other categories of female friendships—particularly the manipulative, the social, and the sentimental. Todd’s social category is further developed and contextualized by Naomi Tadmor, who notes that friendships in eighteenth-century Britain not only encompassed freely chosen, affective relationships but also one’s network of protectors, patrons, allies, and guardians—the social and familial connections upon which one’s social status, economic security, and emotional well-being depended (167). For a young woman, “friendlessness” was not only a perilous emotional state but also a precarious physical and moral position that left her vulnerable to predation and prostitution: “The greatest danger is that the friendless woman might find herself—whether willingly or inadvertently—an object of improper protection” (265). Women’s friendship in eighteenth-century Britain thus sometimes served as the social—and, as Tadmor adds, economic and familial—safety net that aided a young woman’s journey toward the concluding heterosexual marriage plot (251; cf. Todd 4).

It is this view of friendship that was reinforced and encouraged by many popular conduct books of the eighteenth century that purported to guide young women safely through the dangerous and difficult process of selecting the right friends and maintaining strong relationships with their kin networks. Reading lists, letters, and quotations copied into her journals and letters indicate that Burney read many of these conduct books, including Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), and John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774). Burney not only read Chapone’s *Letters*, but the two also met and corresponded from 1782 until Chapone’s death in 1801. Both Chapone’s relationship with Burney and her conduct book advice on friendship influenced *Camilla*, which Burney began to frame when she was largely isolated from friends and kin in the court of Queen Charlotte.

Burney’s works have been tied to conduct literature since the 1950s, often in ways that reduce her novelistic aims to mere didacticism; yet critics such as Margaret Doody have rightly recognized that Burney’s novel is not a simple conservative statement that reinforces conduct literature (206). *Camilla* also offers a complex critique of the conduct book’s contemporary guidelines and expectations for female behavior. The types of socially advantageous friendships encouraged by the conduct books are not sustained or even perhaps sustainable, as Tadmor’s analysis of Richardson’s *Clarissa* suggests (261-69). Recognizing this critique offers one way to reconcile the tension Doody describes between Burney’s didactic

early draft of *Camilla* and the complex, realist novel that emerges (209). Camilla's friendships with Mrs. Arlbery, Mrs. Berlinton, and Lady Isabella allow Burney, as a realist novelist, to dramatize Chapone's wildly popular advice and allow the reader to judge its validity. While Chapone's rules may prove partially true, as in the case of Mrs. Berlinton, they may also lead one astray, as in the case of Mrs. Arlbery. Burney's novel underscores the difficulty of cementing an absolute rule for women attempting to form affective and socially advantageous relationships with other women.

Burney and Chapone: A Respectful Correspondence

Before Burney and Chapone met in 1782, they knew each other's writing by reputation. One of Burney's earliest mentions of Chapone occurs in a journal-letter to Susanna, dated April 24, 1780, and records Chapone's approval of Burney's novel *Evelina*: "In our way Home we met Miss Gregory,—who flew up to me, & taking my Hand cried 'I have received, in a Letter I had this morning, such an Eloge of Evelina!—such a Description of You!—'tis from Mrs. Chapone, too,—& I will shew it you next Time we meet.' There's for you,—who would not be a blue stockinger at this rate?" (*EJL* 4: 93). Burney's attraction to the Bluestockings—the group of female writers of which Chapone was a member—foreshadows her later involvement with the movement and its support of her writing.² *Camilla* was published in 1796 "on the basis of a subscription list gathered by members of the bluestocking circle" (Lerner 231). Additionally, Burney was likely familiar with Chapone's popular conduct book, which was re-released in four editions after 1772 and underwent sixteen printings before 1800.

After Burney and Chapone met, they developed a close relationship based on respect, gratitude, and mutual admiration. In January 1783, Burney recorded a dinner party conversation between herself, Chapone, Mary Delany, and the Duchess Dowager of Portland where Chapone extolled *Cecilia* in such glowing terms that Burney "found it not without difficulty that [she] could keep the Tears out of [her] Eyes": "let us complain how we will of the torture she has given our nerves, we must all join in saying she has *bettered* us by every line" (*EJL* 5: 294, 293). On January 9, 1794, while Burney was working on *Camilla*, she wrote to Esther that Chapone was a friend that she had "always loved as well as respected" (*JL* 3: 35). Though Burney lost many friends after her controversial 1793 marriage to penniless French expatriate Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Piochard d'Arblay, Chapone continued to send kind notes for Burney in her frequent letters to Esther, along with her best wishes and social invitations (*JL* 3: 35). In April 1799, Burney wrote a letter of condolence to Chapone when she learned of the death of Chapone's niece to whom the conduct book letters had been addressed: "Your 'darling niece' though I must now be glad I had never seen, I had always fancied I had known, from the lively idea you had enabled me in common with all others—to form of what she ought to be" (*JL* 4: 271). This letter reveals that Burney had not only read

Chapone's *Letters* by 1799 but that she considered them a common language among "all others" in her circle and her readers. Chapone's status as a friend, especially during the years Burney was conceiving and writing *Camilla*, and her enduring relationship with Burney during a time when Burney was abandoned by many other fair-weather friends suggest that her guidelines may have inspired the types of friendships that appear in *Camilla*.

Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* is a series of ten letters addressed from an aunt to her niece, covering all aspects of female conduct and education. Central to Chapone's argument is her desire to cultivate moral rectitude and place the study of the Bible at the center of a young lady's education. For the sake of this article, the most relevant section is Letter V, the second in a series of two letters entitled "On the Regulation of the Heart and Affections." In this letter, Chapone emphasizes that friendships should be chosen carefully and that her niece should only choose friends who possess religious principles, a good reputation, good sense, and a "good temper" (1: 159). As a member of the first generation of Bluestockings, Chapone "openly accepts society's norm of gendered characteristics and encourages girls to strive for the character that is fit for immortality" (Titone 70).

However, it is also important to note that Chapone quietly challenges some traditional ideas about female friendship, opening the door for relationships between women to be affective rather than merely socially or morally advantageous. John Gregory and James Fordyce, highly popular male conduct book authors, extensively discuss how jealous competition on the marriage market prevents friendship between single women. Fordyce writes in Sermon V that he is "a little doubtful" that single women can ever be friends, noting that, "so far as he has been able to observe, young men have appeared more frequently susceptible of a generous and steady friendship for each other, than females as yet unconnected; especially if the latter have had, or been supposed to have, pretensions to beauty" (1: 166). Fordyce concludes that jealousy and competition for marriageable men is a universal and "most unfavorable" attribute among single women, precluding the possibility of female community altogether except between the married and unmarried (1: 166). He imagines the single woman by turns as a rejected prude viewed by all "with a mixture of hatred and contempt"; an "almost wholly friendless" and vulnerable victim of unwanted advances; or a figure of exalted piety, who shuns human society in the pursuit of the Divine (2: 283, 2: 136, 1: 75).

Chapone's advice contrasts sharply with Fordyce's picture of the single woman living a life of jealousy, solitude, vulnerability, or desperation. Launching Letter V with a thinly-veiled critique of other popular conduct books, Chapone claims that her friendship advice will be based on "experience ... [of] real life and human nature, and not from what others have said or written, however great their authority" (1: 136). Based on her observations, Chapone mentions jealousy only three times in the entirety of *Letters*, only once in conjunction with friendship,

and does not treat it as the special vice of unmarried women competing for husbands. Jealousy, in Chapone's work, is a moral defect caused by pride, and it may occur in anyone, married or unmarried (1: 174). Moreover, jealousy does not necessarily preclude a vibrant community of single women. In fact, Chapone presents feminine community as the central support for the unmarried, vindicating singleness as a valid alternative to marriage: "But, if this happy lot [marriage] should be denied you, do not be afraid of a single life.—A worthy woman is never destitute of valuable friends, who in a great measure supply to her the want of nearer connections. . . . The calamities of an unhappy marriage are so much greater than can befall a single person" (1: 199-200). If a young woman cannot make a good marriage, she is encouraged not to settle for a bad marriage but to fall back on her friends for social, emotional, and perhaps even economic protection and support. This affective model is a counterpoint to masculine representations of female friendship in the period. Chapone offers advice for three "types" of friends a young lady might make, which I will call the older friend, the adulterous friend, and the ideal friend. These same types of friends appear in *Camilla* in the persons of Mrs. Arlbery, Mrs. Berlington, and Lady Isabella, respectively.

Older, but not Wiser: Camilla and Mrs. Arlbery

Chapone recommends that a young woman's first friend be an older woman, age 23 or 24, "some person of riper years and judgment, whose good-nature and worthy principles may assure you of her readiness to do you service" (1: 139). As opposed to Gregory and Fordyce, Chapone openly encourages and values friendship between older and younger women. Gregory cautions against developing closeness and sharing secrets with a married woman because she may reveal those secrets to her husband (69). Fordyce reluctantly recommends older-younger friendships as a moral duty but does not expect that young ladies will find any joy in said friendships: "The conversation of people older than yourselves will be often accompanied with less joy at the moment; but afterwards it will make abundant compensation" (1: 177). Yet Chapone predicts both social and affective benefits from these kinds of friendships. An older friend will be able to advise a younger woman from her own experience in society: "to point out your dangers, and to guide you into the right path—or, if she finds herself incapable, she will have the prudence to direct you to some abler adviser." Though past her first flower of youth, the older friend "will have more materials for entertaining conversation" and more agreeable "liveliness" than a friend of the same age (1: 143). The chief benefit of an older friend is her usefulness as an advisor, a check to youthful inexperience and naivete. In return, the older friend receives the satisfaction of exercising "benevolence" toward the younger, and "the hope of being useful and beneficial to you will make her fond of your company" (1: 144).

In seeming adherence to Chapone's advice, *Camilla*'s first friend in society is Mrs. Arlbery, a friend who is "not young, but still handsome" (Burney 73). Mrs.

Arlbery captivates young Camilla with her “uncommonly brilliant” wit, her “raillery so arch, a spirit of satire so seasoned with a delight in coquetry” (73; 89). She understands society well enough to critique, challenge, and dominate it, appearing at Camilla’s first public ball in such a state of “complete but becoming undress” that all eyes focus on her (73). The young heroine is immediately captivated by the “novelty” of Mrs. Arlbery’s social performance, and at the breakfast, Camilla “scarce permitted herself to breathe, lest she should lose anything she said” (89).

Mrs. Arlbery, in turn, is amused and flattered by Camilla’s naivete, and she immediately positions herself as someone who will be able to point out dangers and instruct Camilla in the ways of society. Mrs. Arlbery steps in to advise Camilla when her brother Lionel fails to fulfill the duties of friendship owed by a brother to a sister.³ Lionel leaves Camilla trapped in conversation with the fortune-hunting Mr. Dubster at her first ball, and Mrs. Arlbery warns Camilla that she is interacting with someone of a much lower class:

Mrs. Arlbery, coming suddenly behind Camilla, said, in a low voice, “Do you know who you are talking with?”

“No, ma’am!”

“A young tinker, my dear! That’s all!” And with a provoking nod, she retreated. (91)

As the day continues, she later asks,

“What have you done with your friend the tinker, my dear?”

Camilla, laughing, though extremely ashamed, said she knew nothing at all about him.

“You talked with him then, by way of experiment, to see how you might like him?”

“No, indeed! I merely answered him when I could not help it; but still I thought, at a ball, gentlemen only would present themselves.”

“And how many couple,” said Mrs. Arlbery, smiling, “do you calculate would, in that case, stand up?” (93)

Without making any affirmative statements, Mrs. Arlbery empowers Camilla with knowledge of her own agency. Her questions inform Camilla of her choices: she can either choose to talk with Dubster “by way of experiment” for her own amusement, or she can ignore him completely. Just because he has approached her, she is not obligated to respond. What is important, for Mrs. Arlbery, is not that Camilla blindly follow the rules of society but that she is intentional about which rules she follows and which rules she breaks. She encourages Camilla to be an actor rather than allowing others to act upon her. It is exactly this kind of instruction that Burney’s unwitting heroine needs. Her interactions with Mrs. Arlbery early in the novel begin to suggest a positive model for an affective female bond—in Todd’s terms, a friendship that is both social and sentimental.

Just as Chapone predicts, friendship benefits both Camilla and Mrs.

Arlbery. In her first visit to Mrs. Arlbery's house, Camilla soon sheds her embarrassment at being corrected, and Mrs. Arlbery is entertained by her unaffected "natural spirits," the "mingled sweetness and intelligence of her character": "Mrs. Arlbery, charmed with all she observed, and flattered by all she inspired, felt such satisfaction in her evident conquest, that before the *tête-à-tête* was closed, their admiration was become nearly mutual" (247-48). Camilla's relationship with Mrs. Arlbery thus seems to follow the pattern laid out by Chapone's *Letters*. Mrs. Arlbery receives the satisfaction of guiding a young friend who looks up to her, and Camilla reaps the benefit of her advice. Mrs. Arlbery seems able to point out Camilla's social dangers. She has a lively nature and a character "wholly unimpeached" (194), and their friendship seems initially to be a relationship of which Chapone would approve.

Not every character in Burney's novel supports Camilla's relationship with Mrs. Arlbery. Just as Fordyce and Gregory attempt to limit and confine women's friendships to relationships that are socially and morally advantageous to the patriarchy, Camilla's scrupulous potential love interest, Edgar, seeks to control and limit her friendships—arguably to those relationships that will most benefit him and advance his marital prospects with Camilla. He particularly dislikes Mrs. Arlbery from the outset, believing that she poses a danger to Camilla. Yet after performing a careful, detective-like investigation of Mrs. Arlbery's character, Edgar fails to identify any moral reason for his dislike beyond her disregard for social convention. His source, Mrs. Needham, describes her as

a woman far more agreeable to the men, than to her own sex...full of caprice, coquetry, and singularity; yet, though she abused the gift, she possessed an excellent and uncommon understanding. She was guilty of no vices, but utterly careless of appearances, and though her character was wholly unimpeached, she had offended or frightened almost all the county around, by a wilful strangeness of behaviour, resulting from an undaunted determination to follow in every thing the bent of her own humour. (194)

Given Mrs. Arlbery's "unsullied" reputation, Edgar is unable to point to any warning signs of "the perils he feared"; however, he still "justly deemed this a dangerous acquaintance" for naturally thoughtless Camilla (194). Critics disagree about whether to take Edgar's assessment of Mrs. Arlbery at face value and how much authorial support for Edgar underlies the word "justly." Is Mrs. Arlbery, as Doody argues, a stand-in for the author herself, a delightful, playful, and good-intentioned wit who enlivens the text? Or, as George Haggerty has argued, does she take advantage of Camilla's naivete for her own entertainment, justifying Edgar's concerns?⁴ These strikingly different readings of Mrs. Arlbery indicate that the text itself presents her as a complex and conflicted figure, treating her with a mixture of sympathy and censure (Cutting 523-25).

It seems likely that, this early in the novel, this passage is an example of Edgar's self-justifying free-indirect discourse, which the narrative elsewhere reveals to be desperately flawed. Camilla's friendship with Mrs. Arlbery provides many advantages that Edgar does not see. Mrs. Arlbery's caution to Camilla about the "tinker" Mr. Dubster (an interaction Edgar has not witnessed) reveals that she is trying to check Camilla's natural thoughtlessness to make her more aware of the rules of society that she is entering. Additionally, the community's first impressions prove to be somewhat misleading. Though Mrs. Needham notes that Mrs. Arlbery's odd behavior has "offended or frightened almost all the country," Camilla quickly learns that fear of Mrs. Arlbery's wit is misplaced. She finds instead that Mrs. Arlbery has "good humour" and does not aim to offend with her wit: "She found it rather playful than satirical; rather seeking to amuse than to disconcert; and though sometimes, from the resistless pleasure of uttering a *bon mot* she thought more of its brilliancy than of the pain it might inflict, this happened but rarely, and was more commonly succeeded by regret than by triumph" (247). And even Camilla's father, Mr. Tyrold—whose paternal sermon most resembles the conduct books of Gregory or Fordyce—finds "satisfaction" in their friendship because Mrs. Arlbery "was a woman of reputation as well as fashion, and . . . though her manners were lively, her heart was friendly, and her hand ever open to charity" (257). These statements all indicate that Mrs. Arlbery is a good friend for Camilla to develop and that Edgar has misjudged her.

Yet Mrs. Arlbery is also a deeply flawed character who endangers Camilla—though not primarily by turning her into a coquette, which is Edgar's main fear. The first of Mrs. Arlbery's flaws is hypocrisy. Despite her apparent "perfect indifference to what opinion she incurred" and her advice to "take your own way, follow your own humour," Mrs. Arlbery cares deeply about others' opinions of her (73). Mrs. Arlbery only critiques the fashionable *ton* after she has been rejected from their society: "no sooner found she was neglected by this set, than she raved against the prevailing ill manners of the leaders in the *ton*, with as much asperity of censure, as if never for a moment betrayed herself, by fashion, by caprice, nor by vanity, to similar foibles" (398). Though she appears to reject and critique society, she does so only when it will not interfere with her aspirations to social prominence; she is a slave to the very system that she claims to despise.

The second and more serious flaw is Mrs. Arlbery's failure to give Camilla sound advice about her relationship with Edgar, which culminates in her utter abandonment of Camilla once she has failed to advise her properly. In this way, Mrs. Arlbery fails to fulfill the duties of a socially advantageous friend and slides into Todd's category of manipulative friendship. When Edgar grows concerned about Major Cerwood's attentions to Camilla, Camilla believes he is merely acting out of friendship. It is Mrs. Arlbery who suspects the truth: "My dear, depend upon it, he loves you himself. . . . He wishes to marry you. . . . Why else should he

caution you against another?" (420). Mrs. Arlbery's open proclamation of Edgar's love excites Camilla's hopes. Yet when Camilla dances with Major Cerwood—because she misunderstands which dance she has promised to Edgar—Edgar retreats, which causes Camilla to doubt his affection. As their stay in Tunbridge progresses, Camilla grows more despondent, and Mrs. Arlbery believes it is her responsibility to "play the old friend" and attempt to solve Camilla's problems (454). She commits her first misreading: that Edgar cannot be "blind" to Camilla's attachment to him and that he is merely delaying because he is too sure of her availability and consent (455). She then advises Camilla to begin feigning indifference to manipulate the situation: "Give him cause to fear he will lose you. Animate, inspirit, inspire him with doubt" (455). This is fatal advice. Edgar is not as astute a "watcher" as Mrs. Arlbery believes; he has, in fact, just convinced himself that Camilla is in love with Major Cerwood (446). Given Edgar's prudish standards of behavior (which Mrs. Arlbery herself has noted), she should have realized "coquetry" is in fact the last thing that would attract him. Despite her age and social experience—or perhaps because of it—her plan fails miserably.

Mrs. Arlbery's next fault is assuming she knows what will make Camilla happy. This over-confidence appears when she makes her next mistake: attempting to match Camilla to Sir Sedley Clarendel. Because she is so convinced that a marriage to Sir Sedley will make Camilla happy, she refuses to give Camilla advice on how to break off her relationship with him. Camilla pleads for Mrs. Arlbery to intervene and clear up the miscommunication: "O, Mrs. Arlbery! . . . lend me, I beseech you, some aid, and spare me, in pity, your raillery! Sir Sedley, I fear, greatly mistakes me; set him right, I conjure you" (515). Mrs. Arlbery does not seem to take Camilla's distress seriously; she instead proclaims, "Do you think if some happy fatality is at work at this moment to force you to your good, I will come forth, like your evil genius, to counteract its operation?" (515). Mrs. Arlbery's established aversion to Edgar has convinced her that Camilla will not be happy with him because Mrs. Arlbery herself would not be happy in such a relationship. She asserts that she will take "the liberty of lending you my experience" and advises Camilla to "turn your mind from him [Edgar] with all the expedition in your power, or its peace may be touched for the better half of your life" (482). Mrs. Arlbery does not clarify this statement though "her experience" of a watching, unsatisfied man may be drawn from her first marriage.

Mrs. Arlbery's experience, however, is not Camilla's experience. Her over-confidence that she can make Camilla happy causes Camilla even greater distress and places her in a vulnerable position. Sir Sedley finds Camilla alone in Mrs. Arlbery's garden and proceeds to take her hand "almost by force." Against Camilla's protests, he "incessantly devoured it with kisses" (559). No means yes for Sedley, and if Edgar had not appeared to fulfill Mrs. Arlbery's abdicated duty as friend and protector, Camilla may have become a victim of Sedley's rapacious sexual desire. Mrs. Arlbery is nowhere in sight during this crisis. Even if she

were present, it seems unlikely that she would have helped Camilla or stood up to Sir Sedley because her experience blinds her to Camilla's needs. Her absence foreshadows her abandonment of Camilla during Mr. Tyrold's imprisonment for debt. In fact, Mrs. Arlbery's affluent lifestyle encourages Camilla to take on the debts that lead to her family's ruin.

Burney thus critiques Chaponé's recommendation that a young woman should seek out an older friend. Though Mrs. Arlbery may be able to guide Camilla in difficult social situations, her readings are not always accurate, and her resulting advice is not always sound. An older friend's experience is not always a benefit; in fact, it may lead her to make faulty assumptions about the younger friend's happiness. Camilla's interactions with Mrs. Arlbery thus complicate views of female friendship during the period. Mrs. Arlbery neither provides the obligatory, didactic moral instruction that Fordyce praises, nor does she irreversibly corrupt Camilla in the ways that Edgar or Gregory fear, nor does she break free of sexual and social mores in the ways Donoghue or Lanser describe. Rather, she purports to provide Camilla with both the benefits of sentimental, affective friendship and the framework of social support, protection, and guidance that should have been fulfilled by Camilla's kin network—a role in line with what Tadmor identifies (253-54). Yet Mrs. Arlbery's friendship, despite its positive beginnings, is ultimately tainted by manipulation, negligence, absence, and abandonment.

Burney's critique of the older friend could be a direct result of her own experience under the guidance of two older women: Hester Thrale and Mary Delany. Thrale—not unlike Mrs. Arlbery—took up Burney as her young protégée, seeking to benefit from her companionship and provide her with an advantageous marriage. The demands of the social life Thrale provided for Burney at Streatham severely taxed Burney's limited financial resources, just as Mrs. Arlbery's social demands stretch Camilla's small pecuniary means. Burney complains in a letter from January 22, 1780, that her dress at Streatham required “perpetual replenishment . . . & those who can niether [*sic*] pay *milliners*, nor keep *servants* must either toil for themselves or go *Capless* and *Dinnerless*” (*EJL* 4: 314). Thrale's proffered gifts threatened to make Burney dependent on her financially and perhaps also emotionally, a threat to her autonomy that Burney firmly resisted. Her attempt to set Burney up in an advantageous marriage likewise failed, and their friendship fell apart after Thrale's own second marriage to Gabriel Piozzi (*Rizzo* 92, 94).

Mary Delany, an eighty-five-year-old, well-meaning upper-class woman, undertook a similar mentorship role and instigated Burney's appointment to Queen Charlotte's court. She believed this privileged and coveted royal appointment would bring Burney nothing but benefit and social recognition. Although Delany taught Burney how to navigate court rules, she failed to sympathize with the deep emotional trauma that Burney experienced as a “sacrifice” to court life (*Doody* 168, 172). Delany herself had suffered through an arranged marriage, but she did

not realize that Burney's "marriage" to the court caused a similar suffering: "Mrs. Delany, who had once suffered so unforgivably, was now assisting at a parallel sacrifice, no intuition telling her that Frances Burney ought not to be 'thrown away' for apparent advantages" (Doody 172). She "meant well," but she "did not want to understand Frances Burney's troubles . . . At the end of her long life, Mary Delany wanted to tell Burney about her own experiences, not hear about her young friend's feelings" (Doody 177). In one example from December 14, 1785, Burney describes how Mrs. Delany pressured her to stay with her during a private visit from Queen Charlotte, even though Burney had not been explicitly summoned. Though this request caused Burney "infinite pain," Delany would not give it up, and Burney was forced to submit to a situation that caused her extreme discomfort: "There was no withstanding the word *request* from Mrs. Delany,—& little as I liked the business, I could not but comply" (*AJL* 321-22). Just as Mrs. Arlbery left Camilla to suffer the effects of her well-meaning advice, Delany allowed Burney to suffer the miseries of court life, which ended in Burney's unhappiness and severe illness. Burney's own experiences may have led her to highlight the dangers in an older friend's good intentions.

Although Camilla's relationship with Mrs. Arlbery cools significantly after the incident with Sir Sedley, Mrs. Arlbery reaches out to her in the last chapter. If she does not fully admit her wrong, she indicates at least that she means to bury the past and continue their friendship: "With too much understanding to betray her pique upon the error of her judgment, as to the means of attaching Mandleburt, she had too much goodness of heart not to rejoice in the happiness of her young friend" (910). By halfway acknowledging her faulty judgment, Mrs. Arlbery grows in ways that Mrs. Delany did not: Delany died in 1788, seemingly without realizing the suffering she had caused.

The Adulterous Friend: Mrs. Berlinton

After presenting the older friend as a desirable option, Chapone cautions her niece to avoid the second type of friend: the adulteress. Chapone writes that "too many instances of it [adultery] have of late been exposed to public animadversion" and warns her niece, "if ever one, whom, when innocent, you had loved, should fall into so fatal an error, I can only say that, after proper remonstrances, you must immediately withdraw from all intimacy and confidence with her" (1: 184). Neither an unhappy marriage nor innocent intentions offer a sufficient excuse for a woman to commit such a grievous sin; Chapone strongly argues that the virtuous wife must "instantly stifle" the temptation of adultery: "Not to the most intimate friend—hardly to her own soul—would she venture to confess a weakness she would so sincerely abhor." An unfaithful wife makes an unfaithful friend as well, and Chapone argues that her niece should "Enter not into her counsels:—Shew her the danger she is in, and then, withdraw yourself from it, whilst you are yet unsullied by contagion" (1: 186). Chapone here joins with

Fordyce and Gregory in condemning friendships with adulterous women on moral grounds. Perhaps this is also because Chapone recognizes that the world will judge guilt by association and that the reputation of one's friend becomes one's own reputation.

Burney presents this exact dilemma in Camilla's sentimental friendship with Mrs. Berlington. Camilla believes Mrs. Berlington to be innocent when she discovers her on a moonlit walk, reading a letter from her "fair correspondent" (388). Mrs. Berlington is assaulted by Lord Newford, who kneels before her in the position of a lover and then casually claims, when confronted, "O hang it! . . . I only meant to frighten you about the letter" (389). Camilla immediately takes the part of the persecuted "fair Incognita," and she is enchanted by the "heart-felt delight of having, though but accidentally, proved of service to her" (390). Camilla is entranced by the Gothic fascination of the scene, her role as a heroine to Mrs. Berlington, and Mrs. Berlington's own beauty and romantic dialogue (389). In fact, we later learn that Mrs. Berlington's education has been left to "common and ill-selected novels and romances" (487). Her romantic personality proves enchanting and mysterious to Camilla, and both receive pleasure from the acquaintance undertaken "involuntarily, rather than rationally" (389). Mrs. Berlington's overflow of warm sentiment immediately attracts Camilla: "the fair stranger besought her friendship as solace to her existence, and hung upon her as upon a treasure long lost" (400).

Just as with Mrs. Arlbery, there are those in Camilla's circle that do not approve of the "fair unknown" (392). When Camilla returns from their first encounter, Mrs. Arlbery and Mr. Denzel both point out the ways that Mrs. Berlington's story seems suspect, especially because she does not reveal her name. Mrs. Arlbery advises Camilla to take care of her reputation through her characteristic power of suggestion, rather than issuing commands to Camilla, in the vein of the conduct books: "Follow, however, your own humour . . . Only take care not to be seen with her" (394). Camilla is pleased by Mrs. Arlbery's refusal to dictate her behavior: she "rejoiced she did not exact any further restriction, and hoped all raillery would soon be set aside, by an honorable explanation" of Mrs. Berlington's behavior (394).

Unfortunately for Camilla, this honorable explanation does not soon appear, and she grows more and more uneasy with her new acquaintance. She discovers that the letter Mrs. Berlington was reading was not from "some sage and ancient personage" but, rather, from "a male friend so beloved, who seemed to be neither father, brother, nor husband" (392). This kind of close sentimental friendship with a man who is neither a relative nor a protector poses exactly the kind of transgressive danger that Chapone, Gregory, and Fordyce warn against. Camilla is also shocked to learn, first from Sir Sedley, and then from Miss Dennell, that Mrs. Berlington had married at the young age of eighteen (402; 418). Because she knows about Mrs. Berlington's correspondent, Camilla hears this news "with less of pleasure than astonishment" and blushes "from internal surprise at the

conversations she had held with her” (418). But Mrs. Berlington wins back her affections by narrating the sympathetic story of her terrible marriage, which “sensibly touched” the young heroine and cast her into a moral dilemma: “though strangely at a loss what to judge, [Camilla] felt her affections deeply interested” (424-25). Her moral standards tell her that Mrs. Berlington’s conduct is wrong, but her sympathies tell her otherwise. By the end of this chapter, without any proof that the correspondence is impure, Camilla’s conscience rules in favor of Mrs. Berlington and sees her “with more of interest than blame” (426-27). By excusing Mrs. Berlington’s behavior as “glaring eccentricity,” Camilla attempts to frame their friendship in the same terms as her friendship with Mrs. Arlbery (427). However, the narrator disapproves of Mrs. Berlington’s behavior much more overtly than of Mrs. Arlbery’s. Earlier, the narrator has taken care to show us that Mrs. Arlbery’s character is unimpeached, and the comments condemning her behavior come from Edgar’s lips rather than the narrative voice. But in Mrs. Berlington’s case, the narrator unambiguously highlights Camilla’s danger.

Camilla’s own moral character is never in jeopardy, as she is never seriously tempted to sexual transgression (though she is threatened by Sir Sedley’s unwanted sexual advances). Her danger in this sentimental friendship seems, instead, to be misdirected sympathy, which is rooted in her naive assumption that she and Mrs. Berlington share the same standards of right and wrong. The narrative clarifies that Mrs. Berlington’s description of her own sad situation is not to be trusted because she does not have a fixed moral compass to guide her. The problem is not her nature but her education: “Brought up with religious terrors, yet ill instructed in religious principles, the dread of future punishment nearly demolished her, though no regular creed of right kept her consistently or systematically in any uniform exercise of good” (835). Chaponne herself cautions against friends who lack steady religious principles because they will not have the same ideas and expectations of behavior as those who do (1: 150). Camilla mistakenly assumes that Mrs. Berlington’s moral principles are the same as her own. She assumes that “the openness with which all had originally and voluntarily been avowed” is proof that Mrs. Berlington’s friendship with her lover is pure, even against Edgar’s remonstrances (487). The consequences of misdirected sympathy, then, do not seem to be Camilla’s genuine moral corruption but, rather, her supposed guilt by association. Because Mrs. Berlington is prominent in society, Camilla’s friendship with her quickly becomes a matter of public comment: “Wherever she appeared, she was sure of distinction: ‘Tis Miss Tyrold, the friend of Mrs. Berlington,’ was buzzed round the moment she was seen” (485). Edgar’s concern is that the scandalous fall of Mrs. Berlington from society will drag her young, innocent friend down as well and taint her character with the associations of guilt (486-87). For Edgar, it is not enough to trust to Camilla’s inner virtue alone; she must also cultivate the appearance of virtue.

Camilla refuses to break off this friendship based on Edgar’s advice; she

confronts Mrs. Berlington only after she has proof of her impending danger. When she discovers that Mrs. Berlington's mysterious correspondent is the villainous Bellamy, who is at that time married to Camilla's sister Eugenia, Camilla recognizes that his intentions cannot be pure or honorable. Now that Mrs. Berlington has no excuse, Camilla follows Mrs. Chapone's advice, confronting Mrs. Berlington and then withdrawing her friendship. In this encounter, Camilla appeals to the innate wrongness of Mrs. Berlington's situation, to the consequences of her actions for Eugenia, to her reputation in society, and to her eternal soul (834-35). Even though Camilla behaves "faithfully" and "courageously" as a friend before she cuts off the connection, Mrs. Berlington still sends her fatal letter: "I yield, at length, O Bellamy, to the eloquence of your friendship" (833-34; 856). Camilla warns Mrs. Berlington's brother, Melmond, and then effectively severs her friendship with Mrs. Berlington.

Chapone asserts that, when confronted, the adulterous friend has the choice to either repent or persist in wrong. Although Mrs. Berlington does initially continue her faulty behavior, Burney depicts her repentance in the final chapters. Mrs. Berlington apologizes to Eugenia and withdraws from society in shame, no longer eligible to be Camilla's close friend (912). This repentance, of course, comes too late: Mrs. Berlington's adulterous relationship with Bellamy and her gambling addiction prevent her from helping Camilla when she is most desperately in need.

Even though Burney mostly follows Chapone's description of the adulterous friend, the narrative provides one interesting critique. Though Mrs. Berlington is initially described as a dangerous friend for Camilla, she is only a danger when Camilla misunderstands or attempts to justify her friend's adulterous intentions. Edgar is not correct that "her dangers may be yours" (476). Once Camilla knows clearly that Mrs. Berlington is about to clandestinely meet Bellamy, her sympathy does not deceive her. Rather, "her understanding and sense of right stood here in place of experience" (834). Mrs. Berlington does not corrupt Camilla. Rather, it is Mrs. Arlbery, the more innocent and well-meaning of the two, who causes Camilla more harm by leaving her vulnerable to Sir Sedley's assault.

This critique, and the relationship between Camilla and Mrs. Berlington, could perhaps reflect Burney's own attempt to befriend French exile Germaine de Staël against her father's wishes. The two writers met in 1793 at the home of some mutual friends and expressed admiration for each other. Burney called Madame de Staël "the woman of the first abilities, I think, I have ever seen" (qtd. in Goodden 50), and de Staël suggested that they study French and English together (Goodden 48). Though their friendship grew quickly, Burney received a startling letter from her father, who had heard the scandalous accusation that Madame de Staël was engaging in an adulterous affair with Louis-Marie de Narbonne. Burney was initially persuaded that the rumors were false, based on "their apparently un-lover like behaviour towards each other" in her company (Goodden 45). However, her father advised her to immediately break off the relationship with de Staël for both political and moral motives because de Staël "has been accused of partiality to the

Monsieur de Narbonne and her house was the center of Revolutionists before the 10th of August” (qtd. in Goodden 47). Burney obeyed reluctantly but, nevertheless, staunchly defended her friend. Her father replied with a much softer tone but advised her to stay away from de Staël’s house to avoid feeding public rumor (48).

Burney’s sympathy for Madame de Staël reflects her narrator’s sympathy for Mrs. Berlinton. Like Mrs. Berlinton, Madame de Staël suffered in an arranged marriage. Burney’s soon-to-be husband, Alexandre d’Arblay, saw Madame de Staël as a “victim” of this marriage and vehemently defended her: “I swear, finally, that I would recommend Madame de Staël’s company to my wife, my sister, as useful in terms of decency as in all those of pleasingness” (qtd. in Goodden 51). Without Burney’s knowledge, d’Arblay was entrusted with the explicit letters Madame de Staël sent to Narbonne (Goodden 47). Unlike Camilla, Burney did not have absolute proof of her friend’s guilt, but under pressure from her father and others, she decided to cut all ties. In another departure from the novel, no record remains to indicate whether Burney ever confronted her friend about the affair; rather, afraid to be seen with her, she avoided all contact and refused to return her letters.

Burney’s main reasons for terminating the friendship seem to be social and financial rather than moral. After her marriage to the penniless d’Arblay, Burney was the sole breadwinner for their family, and her £100-per-annum pension from Queen Charlotte could be terminated if she did anything less-than-respectable (Goodden 47, 49). Though she sought to justify her decision in 1802 by describing her relationship with de Staël as “an intimacy too hastily and unhappily formed,” she revealed in 1813 that she regretted this decision: “None of my friends at the time would suffer me to keep up the intercourse. . . . I could resist no longer, though I had found her so charming that I fought the hardest battle I dared fight against almost ALL my best connections” (qtd. Goodden 53). Because she had no proof of her friend’s guilt, Burney’s decision to terminate her friendship with de Staël was much less clear-cut than Camilla’s decision to end her relationship with Mrs. Berlinton.

Both Chapone’s *Letters* and *Camilla* present severing ties with an adulterous friend as the obvious moral solution. Why did Burney choose in *Camilla* to follow the moral straightforwardness of Chapone’s model rather than introducing the moral complexity that went into her own decision to break off her friendship with Madame de Staël? Perhaps, in 1796, Burney wished to justify the decision she had already made; perhaps she believed that Mrs. Berlinton’s repentance would be instructive to her friend; or perhaps she wished to display her own moral values to the public and clear her name from any guilt by association with de Staël. Despite Burney’s refusal to provide Camilla with a decision as morally complex as her own, Burney does present Mrs. Berlinton with sympathetic and redeeming qualities that she also saw in de Staël. It is telling that even Edgar has compassion for her: “He knew not how to blame her fondness; nor where so much was amiable in its object, could he cease to wish that more were right” (488). Burney uses this tone of regret

and sympathy to add nuance to her ultimate rejection of Mrs. Berlington's behavior and to provide the sympathy that Chaponé's advice lacks.

A Quest for the Ideal

By the end of the novel, Camilla has no friends left. Though well-intentioned, Mrs. Arlbery's advice alienates Camilla from Edgar and causes her deep emotional distress. Mrs. Berlington is too absorbed in guilt over the affair with Bellamy and her gambling addiction to provide Camilla with financial or emotional support. But does Camilla ever have the chance to develop an ideal friendship in the novel? Chaponé's ideal friend—religious, respectable, amiable, and sensible—not only feels compassion but acts upon it and would never abandon a friend in distress (1: 129-30). When Camilla is in her "house of mourning," the only friend to provide comfort is Lady Isabella Irby, the sole character in the novel who meets all Chaponé's criteria for a good friend. Lady Isabella is religious, has a spotless reputation, acts out of good sense, and views Camilla with kindness and sympathy.

Edgar has recommended Lady Isabella to Camilla from the novel's beginning. As he advises Camilla, he contrasts Lady Isabella with Mrs. Berlington and twice expresses regret that Camilla has not had the opportunity to befriend her: "O, that some happier chance had brought about such a peculiar intercourse for you with Lady Isabella Irby! There, to the pleasure of friendship, might be added the modesty of retired elegance, and the security of established respectability" (475). Edgar's praises seem warranted, for Lady Isabella is the only person who possesses the attributes of an ideal friend. When Camilla faints, Lady Isabella takes care of her (822). She does not spread the news of Camilla's debts abroad because "she was too delicate and too good to seize such a moment for surprising confidence" (827). She is the voice of reason when Camilla is too disoriented to face her mother (829). There is only one problem with these interactions: they all occur in the final hundred pages of the novel, and there is not enough time for Camilla and Lady Isabella to develop a truly mutual affective friendship.

Rank and class inequality between the two women would not necessarily pose an insurmountable barrier to friendship; however, unequal social and financial obligations could hinder the development of their affective relationship (Tadmor 244; 266-67). Burney herself attempted to eschew such inequalities, particularly to avoid being reduced to the subservient role of companion to a wealthier woman (Rizzo 89-90). Camilla does not have enough of a relationship with Lady Isabella to prevent this kind of inequality and is reluctant to incur obligations to her at the outset of their relationship. In fact, when Camilla is most in distress, it is Lady Isabella to whom she confesses: "She knew no one with sufficient intimacy to endure presenting herself to them upon such an occasion" (827). Lady Isabella herself will not venture to give Camilla the financial support she needs "upon so short an acquaintance" (824). Because Camilla's needs come up so early in their relationship, they cannot form a reciprocal bond. Camilla will forever owe a debt of

gratitude to Lady Isabella that she can never repay. By the story's end, Edgar "had the infinite happiness to see Camilla a selected friend of Lady Isabella Irby, whose benevolent care of her in the season of her utter distress, had softly enchained her tenderest gratitude" (911). Though Camilla is grateful to Lady Isabella, there is no time for the novel to develop the benefit Lady Isabella could receive from friendship with Camilla.

Even though Lady Isabella possesses many qualities of an ideal friend, Burney's *Camilla* presents no truly unproblematic friendship. A profound isolation infects the novel, indicating that developing good friendships is never easy. Even as Camilla attempts to follow Chapone's more optimistic advice in contrast to that of Fordyce and Gregory, she is ultimately circumscribed by patriarchal expectations that "limited a woman's ability to express her strengths and powers, to make choices, to define goals and pursue them aggressively, to be creative" and ultimately to form mutual and equal friendships (Rizzo 14). These relationships are so difficult for Camilla in part because her society, and Edgar himself, is always watching and judging friendships between women to be unnatural, potentially corrupting, and even impossible.

Indeed, *Camilla's* main critique of Chapone's conduct book is that its advice is too simple for a complex world. From Mrs. Arlbery's well-meaning guidance, Camilla learns that one person's experience, no matter how wide-ranging, can never quite map onto another's. From Mrs. Berlinton, Camilla learns that nothing can ever be "just between friends": friendships invite public commentary and judgment. How could one book of advice, no matter how well-intentioned, prepare a young woman to navigate a world this complex and perilous? *Camilla's* concluding lines, which refer to the complexity of the human heart, question the premise of the conduct books themselves: "What, at last, so diversified as man? What so little to be judged by his fellow?" (913) Though conduct books claim to present advice grounded in general human experience, only the novel can present such a varied picture of the human experience of friendship and develop it with a nuance that most closely resembles life.

NOTES

¹This, and all subsequent references, are drawn from Frances Burney, *Camilla, or A Picture of Youth*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford UP), 1983.

²Despite the Bluestockings' support of Burney, her relationship with the group was conflicted. Goodden notes that "Burney hated to be thought clever, because it could be (and often was) conceived as a social and sexual handicap, and because her father thought it unfeminine and therefore improper" (49). Goodden points out that Burney mercilessly satirized one of the key Bluestockings, Elizabeth Montagu, in *The Witlings*. However, Burney also found herself attracted to the

Bluestockings' ability to write and publish while maintaining spotless public reputations (Goodden 49).

³Describing the broad scope of eighteenth-century friendship, Tadmor notes that brothers, as close kin, could be described as "friends," a descriptor that implied a protective social role and active involvement in the heroine's moral cultivation (246). Lionel not only conspicuously fails at these duties but also frequently places Camilla in embarrassing and vulnerable social situations through his disregard and financial irresponsibility.

⁴See Doody 250 and Haggerty 253.

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