



UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Beauty, Character and Wealth: The
Marriage Market in Frances Burney's
Camilla (1796)

Alumno/a: Inés Corral Sánchez
Tutor/a: Pedro Javier Pardo García

Salamanca, 2022



UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Beauty, Character and Wealth: The
Marriage Market in Frances Burney's
Camilla (1796)

This thesis is submitted for the degree of English Studies

Date: June 2022

Tutor/a: Pedro Javier Pardo García

Vº Bº

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the representation of the marriage market in 18th century England in the book *Camilla or A Picture of Youth* (1796), written by Frances Burney. The paper will focus on the portrayal of Eugenia Tyrold, the protagonist's younger sister. Through the character of Eugenia, the dangers that the marriage market entailed for women, and specifically for those who, like Eugenia, were out of the norm, will be investigated. Being an ugly and diminished young woman, a rich heiress and a person of extreme moral rigidity and a high level of education, Eugenia will suffer in the novel the disdain and prejudice of her peers in the marriage market. This paper will describe each of these aspects, and how they affect Eugenia's participation in the marriage market, as well as the possible social critique that Burney's novel may imply.

Key words: *Camilla*, Frances Burney, marriage market, Eugenia Tyrold, female representation.

Resumen

Este trabajo pretende explorar la representación del mercado matrimonial de la Inglaterra del siglo XVIII en el libro *Camilla o Una imagen de la juventud* (1796), escrito por Frances Burney. El trabajo se centrará en la representación de Eugenia Tyrold, la hermana menor de la protagonista, Camilla. A través del personaje de Eugenia, se indagará en los peligros que el mercado matrimonial suponía para las mujeres, y específicamente para aquellas que como Eugenia se salían de la norma. Al ser una joven fea y disminuida, una rica heredera y una persona de extrema rigidez moral y elevado nivel de educación, Eugenia sufrirá en la novela el desdén y prejuicio de sus compañeros del mercado matrimonial. Este trabajo describirá cada uno de estos aspectos y cómo estos afectan a la participación de Eugenia en el mercado matrimonial, así como la posible crítica social que puede conllevar la novela de Burney.

Palabras clave: *Camilla*, Frances Burney, mercado matrimonial, Eugenia Tyrold, representación femenina.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Beauty.....	2
3. Character	4
4. Wealth.....	7
5. Conclusion	10
Works Cited.....	11

1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 18th century, marriage in England was understood as a transaction that was arranged by parents. However, by the middle of the century, this tendency had changed altogether, and it was rare to find parents who still arranged their children's marriage. It is not clear whether the romantic and liberal novels of the time were to blame or they simply depicted a new reality, but the change took place. This new situation elicited the birth of a new and hazardous marriage market, which became one of the most fundamental meeting places for those in the upper and middle classes who wished to marry. In the marriage market women displayed their learned domestic virtues and respectability, and were expected to attract male pursuers. Their titles and money were not enough anymore; from the middle of the 18th century onwards, women had to hold many eligible qualities that could be deemed as adequate by the male suitors. It is in the context of this social change when Frances Burney publishes *Camilla or a Picture of Youth* (1796). In her work, Burney portrays the story of Camilla, a middle-class girl who wishes to marry her friend, Edgar. Because their affair takes a long time to settle, the novel becomes a detailed account of the existing marriage market and its intricacies. Apart from Camilla, the novel depicts other young women, and their first approach to the marriage market. Indiana, Camilla's cousin, is described as the most beautiful woman anyone has ever seen, and as such portrays the upsides of the market place, finding it easy to attract suitors in spite of her disagreeable personality. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the reader finds Eugenia, Camilla's sister. Eugenia's situation within the marriage market is the most precarious of the three, mainly because of her ugly and diminished state. Being as she is, highly moralistic, unknowingly ugly and a wealthy heiress, she will find herself embedded in a complex system which she does not

understand and does not fit. Eugenia's status in society endangers her within the marriage market, making her a likely victim of gold-diggers, poignant women and men, and those who wish to take advantage of her lack of social skills. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore the portrayals of the dangers that the marriage market entails for the character of Eugenia in three sections which will deal with beauty, character and wealth respectively.

2. Beauty

When Eugenia is born, her prettiness and social class allow her very good chances of fulfilling the middle-class dream of attracting a wealthy suitor and marrying young. However, because of her uncle's, Sir Hugh, stupidity and naivety she contracts the small pox, and almost dies. Instead of dying she recovers, but is left scarred for life, limping and small. Death seems to be the worst outcome to Eugenia's illness, but her recovery does not bring joy to those around her, as Sir Hugh's utterance upon seeing her recovered expresses: "I shall never think I know her again, never as long as I live!" (*Camilla* 47). Eugenia's changed physicality has transformed her inner self in the eyes of society, and turned her into a pariah. Her family is aware of how harshly society will treat Eugenia, and their response is to alienate her and to pretend that there is nothing wrong with her appearance. This is very problematic, since "for Eugenia... one major obstacle to her maturation consists of learning how to navigate public spaces while her disfigurements are so visible to the spectating other" (Jason S. Farr 4). Kept in captivity, Eugenia does not know how striking her physical features are, especially in a society which affirms that "it's a delightful thing to think of perfection; but it's vastly more amusing to talk of errors and absurdities" (*Camilla* 340). It is not only the protection of her own household that Eugenia experiences, but everyone in the ton knows that Sir Hugh "...won't have [his] niece called ugly" (*Camilla* 274).

The fact that Eugenia is not directly insulted by the high societies does not mean that she is highly regarded; it only means that she is unaware of her position. When she finally learns the full condition of her lameness, the information comes from a group of boys from the lower classes. Upon seeing her, the group makes a number of sardonic comments on her appearance that she fails to understand initially: “What were you put up there for, Miss? to frighten the crows?” (*Camilla* 384). However, she eventually realizes the meaning of their jokes, and breaks down: “Eugenia, to whom such language was utterly new, was now in such visible consternation, that Camilla... charged Mr. Dubster to ... make them depart” (*Camilla* 385). For the first time in her life, Eugenia is aware of the fact that other people perceive her as a deformed creature. She realizes that what she thought was her status in a society in which “a girl’s beauty was intrinsic to her worth, that is, her ability to give pleasure to men... (Garden 44), is nothing of the sort. Eugenia’s newly learnt ugliness will strike her internally, but it will reflect externally as well. Because her entire purpose in the marriage market is to attract and please, being ugly is enough motive for Eugenia to state that she “will retire from all mankind” (*Camilla* 394). Eugenia’s claim may seem exaggerated, but the novel proves that it is not. At many points, the worth not only of Eugenia, but of every girl within the marriage market is regarded in consonance with their exterior appearance: “...beauty in a pretty girl is as necessary an ingredient, as honour in a soldier” (*Camilla* 104).

In this society, Eugenia is constantly objectified and vilified by others because of her physical appearance, which creates a distortion of her reality. Throughout *Camilla*, Eugenia is referred to as “that ugly little body” (105), “that little lame thing” (106), “the little lame duck” (124), and “that same lame little lady” (372). The descriptions that aim to portray her entire self always note her diminished state as an ugly and little woman.

Regardless, even if the characters in the novel objectify Eugenia, that is never the author's intention. Instead, as Fernandes explains, Burney portrays ugliness as "an element of Eugenia's physical characterisation that develops her subjectivity in ways at once interesting and disruptive" (12). The young girl is forced to face a difficult reality that makes her suffer, but she comes out of the ordeal with a newly found understanding of her place in society. Burney, probably following the notions of Steele's *The Spectator*, embraces the idea that "...we ought to be contented with our Countenance and Shape, so far, as never to give our selves an uneasie Reflection on that Subject" (Steele 125).

Once Eugenia accepts her ugliness, she achieves a new state that renders her "almost celestial" and "the pure emanation of virtue" (*Camilla* 994). With Eugenia's transformation, Burney conveys the idea that the ugly girl can not only survive, but thrive in her exit of the marriage market, as she finds her inner worth and frees herself from her own expectations. This message is, however, tainted by the fact that in the end Eugenia marries a man who overlooks her physical defects, making her just another participant of the marriage market. The strength of Burney's argument is also diminished in that Eugenia is not the protagonist of the novel, but only a marginal character. Nonetheless, it is important to consider how the protagonist, Camilla, also challenges the imposed narrative by not being the most beautiful girl in the novel. Rather, the most denigrated character, Indiana, is the most beautiful one of the three.

3. Character

From a very young age, Eugenia's parents give her and Camilla's custody to their uncle, a sympathetic character who grants the children their every desire. In the same manner that Sir Hugh impairs Eugenia's physicality irrevocably, he will play a pivotal

role in the girl's compromised character development. Eugenia's lack of awareness begins with the already mentioned plan that her family constructs to hide her ugliness from her. Nonetheless, that is not the only circumstance that hinders her understanding of reality. With the false belief "that knowledge of Greek and Latin will replace Eugenia's beauty" (Diehl 16), Sir Hugh suggests that Eugenia begins taking lessons with a scholar, Dr. Orkborne, who is only interested in the study of the classics. As she has only been exposed to classical literature, Eugenia knows nothing of the matters of the heart, and her imagination "though highly...romantic [is] simply that of elevated sentiments, formed by animated credulity playing upon youthful inexperience" (*Camilla* 241). This means that in the novel she is easily deceived and a prey to every unwanted suitor within the marriage market. In addition to this, her naïve view of the world, which stems from Sir Hugh's innocence and lack of cunning, and her extremely moralistic view, which is the result of her classical upbringing, will be a crucial factor in her development as a marriageable woman. Both her lack of experience and moralistic view can be seen in the episodes in which Bellamy courts her. Everyone in the family tries to explain to Eugenia that Bellamy is only courting her for her money, but she refuses to believe that he would do such a thing:

'My dear Eugenia,' said Camilla, half smiling, 'this is a violent passion, indeed, for so short an acquaintance!'

'I knew you would say that,' answered she, disconcerted; 'and it was just what I observed to [Bellamy] myself: but he satisfied me that the reason of his feelings being so impetuous was, that this was the first and only time he had ever been in love. —So handsome as he is! —what a choice for him to make!' (*Camilla* 452-453).

Even when Bellamy takes Eugenia away and forces her to marry him, her rigid values will prevent her from escaping the marriage: "I am his! Solemn has been my vow! sacred I must hold it!" (*Camilla* 1060). Although Eugenia knows that she has been

coerced, she refuses to take back her vow, simply because her morality does not allow it. In this circumstance, Eugenia is restrained by her misconstrued understanding of a system in which "...abstinence before marriage and faithfulness thereafter was thought to be an essential characteristic of the ideal polite woman" (Ylivuori 240). She is willing to be faithful to her captor, and in that act she believes herself to be the epitome of womanhood.

Albeit Eugenia's innocence and morality significantly endanger her within the marriage market, they will not be her only impairments. The perception that other people have of her inner being will be as damaging to her identity as if it was her real one. In Eugenia's society it was widely accepted "that [women] were not designed for the exertion of intense thought, [as it could] be fairly inferred from the effect it produces on [their] countenance and features..." (Hawkins 118). Eugenia's education diverges from that of her peers, and is seen as manly. At the same time, it renders her ugliness as something she has inflicted on herself by choosing to be educated, as everyone knew of the "danger of injuring beauty by study" (*Camilla* 65). Nonetheless, despite the fact that the novel's society judges Eugenia's inner being in consonance with her appearance and excessive knowledge, the author demonstrates that the flawed character has an identity beyond the apparent, which Eugenia herself will have to rediscover and reclaim.

The first step towards Eugenia's revaluation of her identity is her claim that "...a little knowledge of books and languages is what alone I have been taught" (*Camilla* 404). The realization that her knowledge is deficient in a system in which social abilities are the most valued asset is what will route Eugenia to the exploration of her inner being in consonance to the new society she has entered. As opposed to the other women in the story, Eugenia's hardships are what allow her "to be more fully human..., in both the education she is given and the expectations that others have of her" (Locke 6). Because

she has to rethink everything she has learnt, she is able to reconstruct herself beyond society. Without any prospects or intention of finding a husband anymore, Eugenia retires from the marriage market: “I mean to regard myself as if already I had passed the busy period of youth and of life, and were only a spectatress of others” (*Camilla* 1191). Linked to her aforementioned temporary decision to stay away from the marriage market is Eugenia’s newly found interest in writing her memories. Her acceptance of her unmarriageability and her interest in self-realization through writing both hint at the notion that a woman can be fulfilled by her own intellectuality, and does not need a man. Burney’s grand claim on female self-assertion is once again hindered by the fact that Eugenia does marry in the end. The same as her sisters, Eugenia will be a part of the marriage system. Nonetheless, even if she does marry, it is very relevant to consider the fact that Eugenia had accepted that she would never marry, and was content with her decision.

4. Wealth

Once Sir Hugh sees how ugly Eugenia has become because of his mistake, he decides to give her all of his inheritance. His resounding act indicates that he is aware of the fact that he has deprived her niece of her chances of marrying, and therefore of economic success. If initially Eugenia’s parents may not agree completely with Sir Hugh’s intentions, the additional harms that result from Eugenia’s fall –her deformity and diminutive figure– “reconciled her parents to the partial will of her uncle, which they now, indeed, thought less wanting in equity, since no other reparation could be offered to the innocent sufferer for ills so insurmountable” (*Camilla* 47). Eugenia’s relatives realize that without anything to offer to the male eye in the marriage market, Eugenia will not be able to succeed in her task to marry. Consequently, Sir Hugh’s inheritance is the only

thing that may empower and compensate Eugenia “for loss of the physical beauty that is as necessary to women as money” (Cutting 522). However, Eugenia’s richness becomes completely useless when she enters the marriage market, since every suitor that shows interest in her is seen as a probable gold-digger. Furthermore, her aforementioned naïvetés and morality prevent her from attributing any malice to anyone’s actions, which will compromise her wellbeing. This way, Burney’s plot displays the notion that money is only useful to a woman if it goes in consonance with experience and knowledge.

Although Eugenia’s inheritance, as opposed to her sisters, prevents her from having economic problems, she does have to make financial sacrifices in the novel. Firstly, when Sir Hugh arranges for her to marry his disinherited nephew, a man she has never met; and, secondly, when Bellamy forces her to marry him for her money. Because Sir Hugh has promised all of his money to Eugenia, and therefore disinherited his nephew Clermont Lynmere, he expects Eugenia to make up for the maladjustment by marrying him. In this case, Eugenia is the compensation for Sir Hugh’s mistakes. During the first years of Eugenia’s life, Sir Hugh will try his best to make Eugenia “a wife after [Clermont’s] own heart” (*Camilla* 68). Her inheritance therefore will not allow Eugenia to construct her own identity, and it will chain her to a man she has never met. After Clermont Lynmere rejects Eugenia because of her ugliness and excessive intelligence, she falls prey to Bellamy’s monetary ambitions, and is once again incarcerated in her own richness. This way, throughout the novel Eugenia’s money will not be her property on the practical level. Instead it will be a ransom, and a prize to others. Even if she is wealthy enough to fend for herself, her participation in the marriage market does not allow her complete freedom. Her inheritance and marriageability place Eugenia in a “a unique liminal space, where she enjoys a modicum of feminine independence from the control

of the father while still negotiating the arrangements for entrance into the legal sphere of control of the husband” (Garden 27). This implies that, within the market she will just be another sellable and purchasable object, whose independence is only a feigned, temporary state.

Nonetheless, Bellamy’s death frees her, and for the first time she makes her own decision regarding her money:

I here solemnly engage myself, if Miss Indiana Lynmere accepts, with the consent of Sir Hugh Tyrold, the hand of Frederic Melmond, to share with them, so united, whatever fortune or estate I may be endowed with, to the end of my life, and to bequeath them the same equal portion by will after my death.

Signed. EUGENIA TYROLD (*Camilla* 983)

Her love for Melmond, the man who rejected her hand, will make Eugenia resign half of her inheritance. This is the first time in the novel in which she reclaims her wealth, and it comes in consonance with her withdrawal from the marriage market. Eugenia’s acceptance that she will not marry liberates her from conjugal constraints and societal expectations. Without a husband to wait for, her money will be nothing more than her own material possession, and not a moral danger holding over her head. This way, Eugenia will be free to use her wealth at her own disposal, whether that implies gifting it or not. In the end, however, the author will take a step back and marry Eugenia to the man she had longed for: Melmond. While Eugenia gets what she wanted, “she is returned to a purely domestic role, to marriage, in a novel which clearly exposes the brutality of domesticity and the bondage of marriage” (Gruner 34). Eugenia’s inheritance could have allowed her to become independent in the end of the novel, but the author chose to write her within the limits of the socially acceptable, and therefore the marriage market.

5. Conclusion

As an author from the 18th century, Burney represents in *Camilla* the attitudes from her own time. Consequently, she sets out to depict the rigid marriage market in which she had taken part herself. Her writing suggests that Burney is aware of the suffering that the marriage system generated on those who participated in it, and especially on women. This is shown in the fact that every young female character undergoes in some way or another the pains of the marriage market, which arise mainly from their deficient social preparation. Nonetheless, the character that suffers the most in the novel, and that represents the most outstanding lack of preparation is Eugenia, who portrays “a triangulated gender anomaly” (Nussbaum 125). Eugenia’s triple alien state as an ugly, moral, and wealthy woman makes her difficulties within society greater than those of her relatives, even if every female character in age to marry will suffer. Hence, Eugenia becomes the radical embodiment of the sorrow that can be undergone within the marriage market if the girl does not adhere to the conventions and is not prepared to face the consequences of her strangeness.

In the second to last chapter of the novel, the resolution seems clear: Eugenia, after all the suffering endured, will remove her marriageability and create her own path in life. However, it seems as if Burney, even though she is aware up to some extent of the anguish borne by women, does not want her characters to live in the margins. Rather, all of the young female characters that are portrayed in the novel end up marrying. This way, marriage is presented as a reconciliation with the society that has created so much suffering. This reconciliation seems inevitable in Burney’s days, as it is very likely that the author did not even imagine the possibility of changing the marriage market, let alone of suppressing it. Instead, the portrayal of Eugenia’s hardships appears to be a warning to

those who were to enter the marriage market, and to those newly adhered to it. Eugenia's character is highly unaware of the difficulties she will have to face: she does not know the position that she holds in the eyes of society, how to defend herself against misers, or what to expect from her suitors.

With the portrayal of Eugenia, Burney seems to be advocating not the reevaluation of the marriage market, but rather that of the women taking part in it. *Camilla* shows that the marriage market is far from the idyllic picture that other contemporary novels painted, and that not being accurately prepared for its adversities is very dangerous for young women. Consequently, Burney's novel does not break free from the fixed pattern of the marriage market, and it is not a revolutionary feminist novel, but at least it sets out to teach young women what to expect from the society they were entering, and how to defend themselves against those who may want to take advantage of them. Regardless, and above all, *Camilla* is the feminine account of a story repeated once and again: the pain that women, especially those who do not fit the standard, experience in a completely patriarchal society.

Works Cited

Bermingham, Ann. "The Picturesque and Ready-To-Wear Femininity." *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics Since 1770*, Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 81-119.

Burney, Frances. *Camilla or a Picture of Youth*. Harper Perennial Classics, 1796.

Cutting, Rose Marie. "Defiant Women: The Growth of Feminism in Fanny Burney's Novels". *Studies in English Literature*, Rice University Press, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1977, pp. 519-530.

Diehl, Stephanie. "'Injuring Her Beauty by Study': Women and Classical Learning in Frances Burney's Novels." PhD Dissertation, Bridgewater State University, 2017.

Farr, Jason S. "Sharp Minds / Twisted Bodies: Intellect, Disability, and Female Education in Frances Burney's *Camilla*." *The Eighteenth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2014, pp. 1-17.

Fernandes, Sara. "'Grow Backward and Backward': Fissured Surfaces and Crooked Bodies in Frances Burney's *Camilla*." *Textual Practice*, Routledge, Vol. 34, No. 12, 2020.

Garden, Rebecca. "Radical Illness: Women, Affliction, and Authority in the Eighteenth-Century Novel." PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2004.

Gruner, Elisabeth R. "The Bullfinch and the Brother: Marriage and Family in Frances Burney's *Camilla*". *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, University of Illinois Press, Vol. 93, No. 1, 1994, pp. 18-34.

Hawkins, Laetitia Matilda. "Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H. M. Williams, with particular reference to Her Letters from France." *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Vivian Jones, Routledge, 1990, pp. 117-121.

Locke, Jennifer. "Reading Female Bodies: Deformity, Gender and Fortunetelling in Frances Burney's *Camilla*." University of California Press, Thinking Gender Papers, 10 May. 2022, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/83r2t6tt>.

Nussbaum, Felicity. *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Steele, Richard. *The Spectator*. Biblioteca Virtual Universal, Vol. 1, No. 17, 1710, pp. 125-129.

Ylivuori, Soile. *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power*. Routledge, 2019.