

# Burney Letter

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The Burney Society

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Susanna Burney as a young woman, probably in 1781.  
Artist unknown. Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery

## Writing about Susanna Burney

By Linda Kelly

Susanna Burney, later Phillips, was Fanny Burney's best-loved sister. "There seems to be but one soul — one mind between you," the great castrato singer Pacchierotti once remarked, "you are two in one." I first became interested in her when I was writing a book about Juniper Hall, the country house near Mickleham in Surrey which in 1792 gave shelter to an illustrious group of liberal French aristocrats, freshly escaped from the horrors of revolutionary Paris. The group included Madame de Staël, her lover, Comte Louis de Narbonne, the former Minister of War, and his close friend and former ADC, General Alexandre d'Arblay. Susanna and her husband Captain Phillips, a hero of Cook's last voyage, were living in Mickleham at the time. They soon became the friends and confidantes of the new arrivals. Susanna, fluent in French, was a special favourite: "*la plus douce, la plus spirituelle*" of companions, according to Narbonne; Madame de Staël who had abandoned her husband to follow him to England, accused him of being in love with her. It was through her sister and her friends the Lockes at nearby Norbury Park that Fanny first met her future husband, Alexandre d'Arblay. The story of their courtship, beset with obstacles, was one of the themes in *Juniper Hall*; the tempestuous relationship of Madame de Staël and Narbonne, whose life she had saved after the storming of the Tuileries, was another. Susanna Phillips was a pivotal figure in both stories, and her letters to her sister, many of them still unpublished, bring their characters and conversations — Susanna, like her sister, had a brilliant memory for dialogue — vividly to life.

**See Susanna Burney on p. 2**

## Bath Conference in July

Plans for a conference and dedication of the restored Burney/d'Arblay monument at Walcot Church in Bath on July 3 and 4 2005 are proceeding on schedule, conference organizers in Britain report.

By now, all paid-up members of the society in North America, the United Kingdom and elsewhere should have received a registration packet with information about how to register for this special conference.

Restoration of the monument in Bath has been a long-term goal of the society since it was founded in 1994. The

conference organising committee includes Kate Chisholm, Bill Frasier, Davie and Janet Tregear and Karin Fernald.

Members will recall that Frances Burney d'Arblay was buried in the same grave as her son when she died in 1840. That grave was located near the mortuary chapel in the graveyard that surrounds the chapel across the road and down the hill from the main Walcot Church.

In the early 20th century, the Burney family replaced the original marker, which had virtually disintegrated, with the tabletop monument we see today. But that

monument was moved to a triangular enclosure beside the main church sometime in the early 1950s. This monument is still there, although the remains of Mme d'Arblay and her son were not removed at the same time.

The Burney Society has undertaken to restore the tabletop monument as well as erect a plaque telling visitors to the site a bit of the history of Frances Burney d'Arblay. Walcot Church authorities have graciously granted permission. They have

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## Susanna Burney

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*Juniper Hall* had not long been published when, at an evening at the opera at Covent Garden I met Professor Curtis Price, now head of the Royal Academy of Music and author, with Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*. We talked of Susanna Phillips. "You know," he told me, "she was in love with the castrato singer Pacchierotti. It's all in her diary in the British Library."

Here was another aspect of Susanna's life to explore, though I was not able to turn to it immediately. I was busy writing a life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, incidentally the proprietor of London's main opera house during the period, 1779-80 covered by Susanna's diary. It was only when I had finished it that I was able to turn to her journal, or rather letter-journals, at leisure. Written to Fanny, at a time when she was spending long periods of time away from home with Mrs Thrale, they run to some three hundred and fifty pages. I spent many hours in the British Library deciphering the faded handwriting, struck by her easy conversational style, without crossings-out or corrections, and watching her relationship with Pacchierotti unfold; her sister, for whom she was writing, is almost a second presence on the stage. Gradually I became absorbed in Susanna's eighteenth-century world, the musical evenings at her father's house, the rehearsals and performances at the opera house, her heightened perception of Pacchierotti's presence, whether seen informally at home or glimpsed across a crowded room or theatre.

It is hard to imagine the adulation given to top castrato singers in the eighteenth century. Traditionally cast as the operatic hero, they were far more important than the tenor or soprano, and correspondingly better rewarded. At the time he met Susanna, Pacchierotti was at the height of his career, an international star of the stature of Pavorotti or Domingo. Idolised by London audiences, swooned over in polite society, he found a calmer refuge in Dr Burney's drawing room, where Susanna's gentle company

and her knowledge and love of music were a special draw. Her passionate admiration for his singing is reflected in her letter journals; so too is her growing tenderness and sympathy for the singer whose conversations (in a charming mixture of French, Italian and broken English) she records in loving detail. Was she in love with him? It was certainly an absorbing relationship, overshadowing any other during the brief months of their friendship. She could not conceal her sadness as the end of his season in London drew near. "I began to grow sick, & I dare not tell you why," she wrote to Fanny, and Pacchierotti's eyes filled with tears in talking of their separation. But her journal, which might have told us more, stops two weeks before his departure for Italy in July; we know nothing of their farewells or explanations. Did Fanny destroy its closing pages? She was always keen to censor anything that might be embarrassing to the family — Susanna's romantic feelings for Pacchierotti, however innocent and tinged with hero worship, may well have come under this heading.

I was still in the midst of studying Susanna's journal when *The Voyages of Discovery* exhibition at the Natural History Museum brought the travels of her future husband, Molesworth Phillips, vividly to life. One could almost imagine the creaking of the rigging and the sound of the wind in the sails, as one looked round the section devoted to Captain Cook, marvelling at the beauty and accuracy of the drawings produced in impossibly cramped conditions on board and the awesome range of Cook's achievements. Susanna's brother, Jem, was with Cook on his last voyage, and his great friend Lieutenant, later Captain, Phillips commanded the Marines at the time of Cook's murder, distinguishing himself by his bravery on that occasion. Their story criss-crosses into Susanna's, since Phillips would marry her on his return. With their arrival in London in October, where they were greeted as returning heroes, the unspoken romance with Pacchierotti, so delicately recorded in her journal, comes to an end. So too does her journal, not to be resumed again for several years, and never again in such detail.

Pacchierotti was almost the last of the great castratos. By the end of the century, as romantic opera took the place of the *opera*

*seria*, male sopranos had been replaced by tenors, though he himself remained an operatic idol to the end. We can never recapture the transcendent beauty of the castrato's voice, or the glamour and strangeness which surrounded these vanished, almost unimaginable beings. But Susanna Burney's journal, with its vivid, heartfelt picture of one of the greatest of them all, brings us perhaps as close as we can get.

For those who wish to know more about Susanna there is good news of a long-term project by Dr. Philip Olleson of Nottingham University to publish a complete electronic edition of her letters and journals: an outline of this, together with extracts from the journals, can be found at:

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hrc/projects/burney>

*Linda Kelly has written a book about the émigré community at Juniper Hall (1991), which draws extensively on Susan Burney's journals. She has also authored The Young Romantics, Women of the French Revolution and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a trustee of the Wordsworth Trust.*

### Burney Letter

The semi-annual newsletter of the Burney Society, which includes members in Canada, Great Britain, the United States and elsewhere.

President: Paula L. Stepankowsky  
Editor: Lorna J. Clark

Address correspondence regarding newsletter articles to Dr. Lorna Clark, Burney Centre, McGill University, 853 Sherbrooke Str. W., Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 2T6 or to [lclarklj@aol.com](mailto:lclarklj@aol.com)

Membership in The Burney Society is available for \$15 (US) annually in the United States and Canada, and £12 annually in Great Britain. To request membership information, or to notify the society of a change of address, write in the United States and Canada to: Lucy Magruder, P.O. Box 1267, Tubac, AZ, USA 85646 (or [lucy@magruder.org](mailto:lucy@magruder.org)). In Great Britain, write David and Janet Tregear, 7 Market Avenue, Chichester, West Sussex, England PO19 1JU.

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## Bath Conference

### Continued from p. 1

also asked for a contribution towards a fund to restore the Georgian railing surrounding the enclosure (which is estimated at close to 2000 pounds).

While some of this money is in hand, fundraising is still ongoing, and members who have not already contributed have been asked to consider making a contribution to this special project.

The society will mark the restoration of the d'Arblay sarcophagus in the garden of St. Swithin's, Walcot, on Sunday, July 3. A plaque will be unveiled followed by a choral evensong in Bath Abbey and tea in the Abbey Church Rooms. Later that evening, a walk around Georgian Bath will be led by Maggie Lane, author of *A City of Palaces* and former vice-president of the Society.

On Monday, a day of talks celebrating "Fanny Burney and Her Circle" by leading Burney scholars and writers from Britain, Canada and the USA will be given at the Holburne Museum. On Tuesday 5 July, Mrs. Ruth Haydon, author of *Mrs. Delany*, will show her own collection of Mary Delany's flower collages.

Tickets are £55 for all events except the buffet supper (£35 concessions); £15 for tea and evensong only.

All paid-up members of the society have been mailed a registration packet. But those who have not received a packet, or who would like to join the society, should contact in the UK: David and Janet Tregear, 7 Market Avenue, Chichester, West Sussex PO 19 1JU; tregeardavid@hotmail.com.

For hotels in Bath, go to [www.ConferenceBookings.co.uk](http://www.ConferenceBookings.co.uk), when prompted for the event code, type in BTHburneysocietybath.

North American members can register for \$150 US for all events (including Sunday evensong, tea and buffet supper and the Holburne Museum conference on Monday), or \$100 without the buffet supper. Evensong and tea alone is \$25.

North American members should send their registration money to Alex Pitofsky, Burney Society Treasurer, 3621 – 9th Street Drive N.E., Hickory, NC 28601.

Donations for the restoration work at Walcot Church can be sent to the society's treasurers in the UK or North America.



Bath Abbey, courtesy of Bath Tourism Plus

## Schedule in Bath

### Sunday 3 July

#### **The garden of St Swithin's, Walcot, 2.30pm**

Unveiling of the plaque by Paula Stepankowsky with the reading of a celebratory ode and scattering of rose petals.

#### **Bath Abbey, 3.30pm**

Choral evensong, followed by tea in Abbey Church Rooms.

#### **A Walk Round Georgian Bath, 6–8pm**

Maggie Lane, author of *A City of Palaces*, will guide us through the city as known by Fanny Burney and Jane Austen.

#### **Buffet Supper, 8.30pm**

At a restaurant to be confirmed, tickets £20.

### Monday 4 July, from 9am

#### **Fanny Burney and Her Circle: Holburne Museum.**

**9: 00** Introduction and Welcome

**9: 30** *United In One Performance: Fanny Burney and Samuel Johnson* Professor Peter Sabor, Director of the Burney Centre at McGill University, Montreal

**10: 30** Coffee

**11: 00** *Hidden Talents: Women Writers in the Burney Family* Lorna Clark, Carleton University, Ottawa

**Fanny Burney at the Masquerade** illustrated talk by Hester Davenport (author of *Faithful Handmaid*)

**12: 15 4 Sydney Place** Michael Davies will present plans to convert the house once lived in by Jane Austen into a museum

**12: 45 Lunch**

**1:45 'What Is a Branghton, Sir?': James Boswell and Frances Burney** Gordon Turnbull, General Editor of the Yale Boswell Editions

**2:30 Fanny Burney and the 1790s** Nancy Johnson, State University of New York  
**The Making of 'A Busy Day'** Tara Ghoshal Wallace, editor of the first modern edition of Burney's play

**3:30 Bath in the Lives of Fanny Burney and Hester Thrale** illustrated talk by Karin Fernald

**4:30 Tea**; Burney Society business meeting.

### **Tuesday 5 July, 10.30am**

Mrs Ruth Haydon will show her collection of Mary Delany's flower collages. Room for only 15 — book early!

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## Margaret Doody to speak in Milwaukee

### By Paula Stepankowsky

Dr. Margaret Anne Doody, author of the groundbreaking book *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* and author of many other books and articles on Burney, her contemporaries and the 18th-century literature, will be the speaker for the annual meeting of The Burney Society in North America on Oct. 7 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dr. Doody, who is also a founding patron of the society, delivered the formal address at the society's first regular meeting in October of 1995 in Madison, Wis., following its formation in New Orleans in November of 1994.

The Burney Society meeting in North America will be a brunch meeting this year and will be held at the Milwaukee Woman's Club (813 E. Kilbourn Ave) from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Friday, Oct.

7. More information about the club can be found at [www.wc-wi.org](http://www.wc-wi.org)

The brunch will conclude before the formal opening of the Jane Austen Society of North America conference at 1 p.m. that same day in Milwaukee so members of both societies can attend both meetings.

Since the Burney Society is sponsoring a conference in Bath this year, the next conference in North America is scheduled for late October in 2006 in Tucson, Ariz., again at the same time as the annual JASNA meeting.

Dr. Doody is the John and Barbara Glynn Family Professor of Literature at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

In addition to her book on Burney, Dr. Doody has also published *The True Story of the Novel, A Natural Passion: A Study*

*of the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, and *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered*, which won the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize awarded by the British Academy. She has also edited editions of Burney's *Evelina* and *The Wanderer*, as well as *Jane Austen's Catherine and Other Early Writers* and *Anne of Green Gables*. She has also published numerous reviews and articles.

Dr. Doody is also the author of the Aristotle Series, a collection of murder and mystery thrillers set in ancient Greece that has a growing following around the world. The fifth in the series, published this year, is *Mysteries in Eleusis*.

Additional information about the meeting, including prices and registration information, will appear in the fall edition of the *Burney Letter*.

## Lucy Magruder, Joan Drexler Step Down, Alex Pitofsky New NA Sec./Treas.

### By Paula Stepankowsky

Lucy Magruder, who co-founded The Burney Society in 1994, stepped down as North American secretary/treasurer and secretary/treasurer of the society as a whole at the annual meeting in North America held in Los Angeles in October, although she will continue to serve on the board.

At the same meeting, Joan Drexler, who has been a member-at-large on the board since it was incorporated in 1995, retired from the board after nine years of service. Lucy will take Joan's place on the board.

Discussions to expand the board to include new members, as well as to make changes to accommodate the society's growing international organization and structure, will take place at the Bath conference in July.

Society members Elaine Bander and Cathy Rodriguez were appointed to a committee to research board structure questions in North America.

Taking Lucy's place as North American secretary/treasurer and the secretary/treasurer of the society as a whole is Dr. Alex Pitofsky, assistant professor in the Department of English at

Appalachian State University in North Carolina.

Alex received his doctorate in English from the University of Virginia, where he was also a postdoctoral fellow. He did his dissertation on prison reform and the novel in eighteenth-Century England. Before earning his PhD, Alex earned a BA in English from Columbia University in New York and a law degree from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

He was the editor of the *American Criminal Law Review* at Georgetown and practiced law, including antitrust and trade regulation, at law firms in New York and Washington, D.C., before pursuing his doctorate in English.

Alex has written a number of articles and reviews focusing on the eighteenth-century novel and presented papers on Frances Burney at Burney Society conferences in London, Montreal and Los Angeles.

On behalf of all members, Burney Society President and co-founder Paula Stepankowsky thanked Lucy and Joan for their long years of service and support at the Los Angeles meeting.

## Back Issues of *The Burney Journal* Available

### By Paula Stepankowsky

A limited number of back issues of *The Burney Journal*, the annual journal of the Burney Society, are available to members and institutions for \$10 US each.

The society was founded in 1994 and has published six volumes of *The Burney Journal*, beginning in 1998. The seventh volume, which covers 2004, is forthcoming to members for the

dues year June 2004 to June 2005.

To order back issues, send a cheque for the appropriate number made out to The Burney Society to Alex Pitofsky, North American Treasurer, The Burney Society, 3621 - 9th St. Drive N.E., Hickory, N.C., 28601.

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# Report on Los Angeles Conference, Thursday, October 7, 2004

## By Elaine Bander

The Burney Society met in an auditorium at the Los Angeles Public Library, a splendid Art Deco building across the street from the equally splendid Biltmore Hotel, at 9 a.m. The indefatigable Lucy Magruder was on hand to greet us with registration packages and name tags — not to mention coffee and muffins. Members could peruse and purchase various Burney publications on display. We were welcomed by the organisers, Audrey Bilger, Marilyn Francus and Catherine Rodriguez. Our President, Paula Stepankowsky, also welcomed us. Then the first panel began at 9:30 a.m: “Burney and Other Writers.”

### Morning Program

Brian McCrea (U. of Florida) started us off with a lively paper on “Frances Burney’s Anger.” He reviewed critics’ “discovery” of Burney’s “rage” at her society as a revision of the dismissive 19<sup>th</sup>-century view of Burney as a writer of comedies of manners. McCrea suggested that she inherited the Scribblerian satirical tradition of “savage indignation.” He traced antecedents of *Cecilia* in Pope’s works, and observed that, while Burney’s heroines inevitably fall into debt, their financial miseries are not the result of their own moral imperfections. Rather, Burney heroines, in spite of their virtue, have debt inflicted on them by others who use trickery and blackmail. Each novel includes some character with a satirist role (who is sometimes the narrator) and the punishments meted out reflect Burney’s anger. Stylistically, moreover, Burney’s prose often falls into “heroic couplets.”

Kadesh Minter (U. of Florida), a graduate student of Brian McCrea, next presented “Frances Burney and her Eighteenth-Century Reviewers.” She noted the conflict in Burney’s letters and diaries between her need to publish her work (public life) and her desire to remain anonymous and genteel (privacy). In her prefatory appeal to *Evelina*, Burney anticipates receiving savage reviews and attempts to disarm her reviewers. Her anonymity — and assumed male identity — is laced with anxiety, but gives her confidence that she will be judged by “male” standards instead of patronised as a female author. Minter reads this preface as a parody. Reviewers, assuming a male author, in fact responded fairly to *Evelina*.

My own talk, “Austen, Burney, and ‘Bad Morality,’” fit in nicely here, touching on points raised earlier. I reviewed how Austen honoured Burney as her professional mentor, even though she challenged and changed the paradigmatic courtship novel that she inherited from Burney, who had in turn domesticated Richardson’s plots. Burney’s conflict between her desire for publication and for privacy, her professionalism versus her propriety, her anxiety to please her two Daddies, limited her achievement. Her heroines, paragons of beauty and virtue, suffer extraordinary, multiple catastrophes before they are restored to health, wealth and position, reaffirming conventional morality. Austen, thanks to Burney’s courageous model, was more confident, less anxious about her own status. Her plots further domesticate the courtship novel and challenge Burney’s traditional eighteenth-century expectations of “moral” endings.

### Post-Coffee, Jet-Lag Sets In

At 10:45 we took a coffee break, resuming for a session on “Burney In Theatre/Music.” [Note: Your correspondent was suffering jet-lag and regrets that her notes on afternoon sessions are skimpy. Apologies to anyone overlooked or misrepresented.]

Alex Pitofsky (Appalachian State U.) began with his talk, “‘A Black’s But a Black’: Race, Manners, and Satire in Burney’s *A Busy Day*.” He reads the play as a “sustained critical attack on racial intolerance.” In contrast to contemporary works that criticized and satirized “others,” Burney’s works satirize bigotry and xenophobia.

Gefen Bar-On ( McGill) then spoke on “The Need to Adapt: Burney’s Enactment of Shakespearean Tragedy.” She traced in some detail the many allusions to, and influences of, Shakespearean tragedies such as *Hamlet*, *Lear* and *Titus Andronicus*, in Burney’s novels, particularly *Cecilia*.

Noelle Chao (UCLA) was next, with her talk “A Fiction of Musical Letters: Burney’s *Cecilia* and the Problem of Textual Sonority.” She discussed Charles Burney’s pressure on his daughter to complete *Cecilia* in time to be co-published with his monumental *History of Music* as a basis for identifying the novel’s preoccupation with music and voice, in particular with “textual sonority.” Writing about music is problematic: CB said that the music of ancient Greece and Rome was impossible to judge because it is impossible to know “this lost music . . . like a dead language for which there are no books.” FB’s novels reflect this tension between sonority and textuality, the visual and the aural.

### Lunch

At 12:15 we broke for lunch. On our way outside, we had time to see the fine display arranged by Lucy Magruder for the Library, “Women of Words: Early Novelists, Premier Poets & Innovative Intellectuals Emerging Again in Modern Reprints.” Most of us adjourned to a seafood restaurant across the street, getting back to the Library barely in time to settle down for the next session: “Burney and *The Wanderer*.”

### Afternoon Program

Emily Hodgson Anderson (USC), who as a Yale graduate student became the first winner of the annual Joyce Hemlow Essay Prize, presented her prize-winning essay “Enacting a Strategy: ‘How a Playwright Writes Novels.’” She entertained us with accounts of self-induced swoons and insensibility.

Melissa Sodeman (UCLA), then spoke on “‘A Character Unfathomable’: Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*.” Elinor is an astute “reader” of Juliet as Incognita. The Incognita figure was a common literary feature of a female Wanderer, a role that reflects ambivalence about domestic and national allegiances. In the end, as Juliet is restored to her place in society, Elinor becomes the Wanderer.

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See LA conference on p. 6

## LA Conference

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After a coffee break, we had the final session of the day, a panel on “Collecting Burney and Her Contemporaries.” The panelists included our President, Paula Stepankowsky, who shared with us two manuscript Burney-related letters, including one from Mrs. Thrale thanking a Mr. Lyons, possibly for assuring her that her daughter Cecilia was *not* inadvertently committed to a marriage by published banns (“Oh What a blight of Agony you have relieved me from!”), and another in which Frances Burney requests permission for a place to witness the reception of Tsar Alexander I and the King of Prussia by the Royal family (she was granted the place and left a famous account of the meeting); Lucy Magruder, who recounted how she had acquired her collection of first and non-first editions (“For me, a ‘first edition’ is the first edition that I have,” she reassured those of us who have missed our chance to pick up affordable firsts), pointing out that non-firsts often reveal fascinating details about authorial second thoughts and readers’ reception; Cathy Rodriguez, who shared her knowledge, as a bibliographer, of the diversity of non-firsts, translations, and illustrated editions of Burney’s novels with an illustrated PowerPoint presentation; Bruce Whitelaw, Head Librarian, Williams Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, who talked about “Institutional Collecting”—prices for books and letters by women have risen considerably in the last twenty years, he said, putting them out of reach for many collectors; and, finally, Carol Sandberg of Michael Thomson Rare Books who discussed “Antiquarian Book Selling.”

Our formal sessions ended at 4:30 p.m. The very *ad hoc* Burney Players remained behind for a first — and final — rehearsal of “Love and Fashion” which Juliet McMaster adapted and directed. Juliet gave us quite a few “notes” which cast members diligently took down, but the sad truth is that our brief rehearsal was not propitious of a completely convincing performance.

### The Burney Dinner

We reassembled back at the Biltmore in the Roman Room at 6:30 p.m. for our annual Dinner and Business Meeting. We were joined at the dinner table by several members who were not able

### *Perdita at the National Gallery*

Burney Society members Hester Davenport and Karin Fernald will present “Perdita: The Prince’s Mistress” at the National Portrait Gallery in London on Sunday 26 June at 3 p.m. The show will last about an hour and a quarter. Author of a biography of “Perdita” entitled *The Prince’s Mistress: A Life of Mary Robinson* (Sutton, 2004), Hester Davenport wrote the script. Karin Fernald, an accomplished actress, will give a dramatic reading of the quotations. The performance will also feature slide

to attend the day’s sessions. Conrad Harper proposed the toast to Frances Burney. Paula Stepankowsky introduced Emily Hodgson Anderson, our first Joyce Hemlow Prize-winner. After dinner, Paula chaired a brief business meeting (the main items of which, the dues increase and the election of new officers, are reported elsewhere). Then the doors were opened to admit several members of JASNA who wished to attend the premiere performance of “Love and Fashion,” while the actors retired to whatever Green Room they could find to change into their improvised costumes.

### *Love and Fashion*

Frances Burney’s comedy *Love and Fashion* (1798) was adapted and directed by Juliet McMaster and performed before a select audience of Burney Society and JASNA members. The cast included Juliet in the duel (sic) role of narrator and the foppish Mordaunt Exbury, Conrad Harper as the wise and good Lord Exbury, myself, Elaine Bander, as his loathsome brother Lord Ardville, Stewart Cooke as the virtuous and handsome Valentine Exbury, Isobel Grundy as the fashionable Sir Archy Fineer, Paula Stepankowsky as the lovely and fashionable Hilaria, Audrey Bilger (complete with a sinister bowler and an impressive black mustache) as the Strange Man, Alex Pitofsky as the rustic Wood Cutter, and Victoria Kortes-Papp as his simple sweetheart, a Hay Maker.

The curtain was slightly delayed by the absence of Sir Archy Fineer, who, as behooves such a man of fashion, had retired to his room to prepare his toilette and was held up by the slow elevators. In the interval, the irrepressible Mordaunt Exbury entertained the house with a parlour recitation, received with thunderous applause by the audience. When Sir Archy made his belated entrance, the play began.

To the players, at least, the performance came off very well. We had certainly improved upon our ragged rehearsal of the afternoon. The audience, at least, laughed in all the right places and applauded us graciously at the end (perhaps in relief?). Congratulations were bestowed on all. Nevertheless, we hasten to reassure Karen Fernald and Ian Kelly that they need not retire from the boards.

Several members of the Burney Society then settled into the lovely Galleria Bar in the lobby of the Biltmore to savour the delights of this year’s conference and to think about future Burney events. Anyone for Bath?

portraits of Mary and the men in her life, and some contemporary music. Admission is free.

### Reading of *A Busy Day*

Tara Ghoshal Wallace of George Washington University writes that the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington D.C. did a reading performance of Frances Burney’s comedy, *A Busy Day*, on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2005 to a standing-room only crowd. The sold-out performance was followed by an informative talk given by Professor Wallace. We hope to have more details in the next issue

## Letters to the Editor

On reading Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* lately, I came across this scene in Book 1, Chapter 5.

Godfrey Percy is attracted to the lovely Maria Hauton but has misgivings about her probity. While part of a morning visit in a crowded music-room, he examines some of her books on a table.

All were novels – some French, and some German, of a sort which he did not like.

"What have you there, Mr. Percy?" said Miss Hauton. – "Nothing worth your notice, I am afraid – I dare say you do not like novels."

"Pardon me, I like some novels very much." –

"Which?" said Miss Hauton, rising and approaching the table.

"All that are just representations of life and manners, or of the human heart," said Godfrey, "provided they are . . . ."

"Ah! the human heart!" interrupted Miss Hauton – "The heart only can understand the heart – who, in modern times can describe the human heart?"

"Not to speak of foreigners – Miss Burney – Mrs. Opie – Mrs. Inchbald –" said Godfrey.

Isn't it sad, however, that neither Burney nor Edgeworth repaid Austen's compliments in *Northanger Abbey*?

**Elaine Bander**  
**Dawson College**

### ***Cecilia* illustrations at McGill University**

Just before this issue of the *Burney Letter* went to press, Dr Richard Virr, Curator of Manuscripts at McGill University's Rare Books and Special Collections Division, brought an important new find to my attention. It is a sheet of twelve fine engravings, designed in 1784 or later by the prolific German painter and book illustrator Daniel Chodowiecki (1726-1801) for editions of *Cecilia*. The engravings, which depict some memorable moments in the novel, have French and German captions and were apparently made for editions of the novel in both languages. The engravings also appear in a German Pocket Calendar for 1789, of which a copy is owned by Burney Society member Catherine Rodriguez. Much information on the Calendar, as well as on the translations of *Cecilia*, will appear in her forthcoming article, "The History of a Novel's Travels Abroad: Foreign Editions of Frances Burney's *Cecilia*" (*Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Jan. 2006), and in her forthcoming University of Virginia doctoral dissertation, "The Strange and Surprising Adventures of a Novel: Publishing Frances Burney's *Cecilia*." The sheet of illustrations makes a wonderful addition to McGill's rich holdings in early editions of *Cecilia* and other Burney novels.

**Peter Sabor**  
**Director, The Burney Centre, McGill University**

### **Burney Commemorative Items Available**

Items commemorating important dates in the Burney Society's efforts to honour Frances Burney d'Arbly are available from the society, with all funds to benefit the society and its work.

At the time of the dedication of the window honouring Burney in Westminster Abbey in June 2002, the society commissioned a hand-made, glass miniature rendering of the window to be given as a keepsake to Abbey conference speakers, donors and volunteers.

A limited number of these windows remain and are available for \$20 US or £12.

A full-colour picture of the actual window installed in the Abbey was taken by the official Abbey photographer on that dedication day. The picture has been reproduced as a postcard, and the postcards are available for 10 for \$5 US or £3.

For the Montreal conference in 2003, the society published a keepsake edition of the subscription list to Camilla, which appeared only in the first edition of the novel. The keepsake edition includes an extensive essay on the subscription list and its background by Dr. Peter Sabor, Director of the Burney Centre at McGill University.

This volume, bound to resemble novels of the day wrapped in original blue boards, is available for \$20 US or £12.

To order any of these items, please send the appropriate amount, plus \$3 US shipping and handling (£1.50 in the UK) to one of the following secretary/ treasurers:

Alex Pitofsky  
North American Secretary/ Treasurer  
The Burney Society  
3621 - 9th St. Drive, N.E.  
Hickory, NC 28601  
USA

David and Janet Tregear  
UK Secretary/Treasurer  
The Burney Society  
7 Market Avenue  
Chichester, West Sussex  
PO19 1JU

## Sumptuous Production of *The Witlings*

### By Ray Blum

Frances Burney's play, *The Witlings*, stands as mute testament to the need for a good editor. The five act play that she left to posterity is like a rich dessert, brimming with a myriad of flavors and textures. If the confection is surrounded by a thick, bland, unnecessary crust, the treat is discredited because the really good stuff is buried beneath the unneeded layer and its delight is stifled by the effort required to get past the unnecessary. Burney's play is such a dessert. The essence of the play is scrumptious, but the plot contains so much superfluous ornamentation that it resembles some of the very characters that it lampoons. Because of that, *The Witlings* (as it was written) requires a curtain-to-curtain performance time in excess of four hours.

Enter Neil Vanderpool, the head of University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Department of Performing Arts. In conjunction with the university's English Department, Vanderpool used his editorial pen like a liposuction machine and trimmed off the excess fat. The result was that he and his production cast transformed a play that could be described, at best, only as OK into a treat for the senses.

*The Witlings* was performed on UL-L's Burke Hall stage in April 2005 to coincide with the *British Women Writers Conference* that the university hosted. To enhance its performance, pre-show talks were given at the theatre by three Frances Burney experts, Drs Catherine Burroughs, Clayton Delery and John Greene.

*The Witlings*, written in 1779, never really saw the light of day. After she wrote the play, the playwright's father, Dr. Charles Burney, quashed its publication because he feared that the thinly disguised and socially powerful subjects of Fanny's comedic ridicule would take offense, especially because the author of the jibes was a woman.

The title, *The Witlings*, was part of Burney's humour. A quick wit was one of the most prized attributes of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, especially to members of the "uppah crust," also known as the "Salon Society." Much of the production's

humour stems from the fact that everyone on the stage tosses out *bon mots*, some go so far as to spout *bon discourse*. The problem stems from the fact that the characters speak much but say little — much ado about nothing. One of the most famous of the social commentators of that period, Alexander Pope coined the phrase "witling," to describe someone of little wit. He called the witlings "villains of their day."

Most of the characters in the play are stereotypical stock characters whose personalities are described by their names. They are not rounded or multi-dimensional, but most of the play's humour stems from their one-dimensional consistency. Structurally, there is no clearly defined antagonist, with an obvious agenda confronting the protagonist. Events swirl about the protagonist, Cecilia, with the characters simply responding to the situation at hand — again, much ado about nothing.



Jill Stewart as Mrs Sapiens (Joe Riehl/  
*Minute Particulars*)

In a millinery shop, the society gossip, Mrs. Voluble, played by Chava Hamlet, natters a torrent of words regarding the betrothal of heiress Cecilia (Brittan Blanchard) to the handsome and firm-of-jaw gentleman Beaufort (Darnell Benjamin). The chief recipients of

Voluble's gush are Mrs. Wheedle, the shop's owner (Lauren Anderson) and Mrs. Sapiens (Jill Stewart) who indefatigably spout out some blather of their own. Who should come waltzing in but Beaufort and his rapier-witted pal Censor (Blaine Peltier).

We are then introduced to the grand dame of the Salon Society, Lady Smatter (Allison Hetzel), whose home is the feeding ground of the members of the Esprit Club, her literary society. While someone in the group might have at one time actually read a book, it was not a recent activity, especially on the part of the hostess, Lady Smatter. Her flawed name-dropping and word-bumbling make her one of the most enjoyable characters in the show. Burney actually patterned her after Mrs. Malaprop, a character in the Restoration playwright's Richard Sheridan's famous play *The Rivals*.

The self-styled "grand dame" holds court with the play's courtesans: Mrs. Sapiens, the poet Mr. Dabler (Justin Bates), Beaufort, his stepfather, Codger (Keith Dorwick), and Beaufort's half-brother Jack (Brock Hoffpauir). Jack stops all conversation with the disclosure that the bank in which Cecilia's fortune was invested has gone belly up. She is flat, busted, and otherwise broke. Lady Smatter tells her nephew Beaufort that he must break his engagement. This starts the pot boiling beneath the two lovers which does not get to a simmer until the play's end.

The production is a true feast for the eyes. Almost everyone in the quality is bewigged, befeathered, bejeweled, and beclothed to the nines. Amongst all this finery is the characters' habit of conducting an ongoing, delightful joust, using their tongues as lances. One of the play's strengths is the effective use of a Kentish dialect English accent. The accents were realistic, universal, and most importantly, consistent.

*The Witlings* is a tough play to present with anything resembling quality. Even with Vanderpool's excisions, it is long — a bit less than three hours. Additionally, it is physically demanding, and the late 19<sup>th</sup>



century speech mannerisms are unfamiliar to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears. In spite of all these hurdles, Vanderpool's performers did great service to Burney and her play. The great

**See Witlings on p. 9**

## **Witlings**

**Continued from p. 8**

shame is that it took 200 years for *The Witlings* to hit the boards.

One area of disappointment was the rapid-fire delivery that some of the actresses used. While all the characters were stereotypes, this rapidity of speech added another stereotype based upon our 21<sup>st</sup> century experience. Someone who is a "fast talker" is either "New York slick" or is a game show announcer ("Tell 'em what they won"), neither of whom is trustable. If

an ingénue who is simultaneously seeking our sympathy and empathy delivers her lines with the speed of a tobacco auctioneer, the audience will tend not to trust the character, derailing the performer's attempt to portray a realistic and likeable persona. Moreover, because of the 21<sup>st</sup> century audience's unfamiliarity with the 18<sup>th</sup> century means of expression, it needs a few moments to switch gears and absorb the impact of the words. The non-stop delivery stepped on quite a few good lines that were simply not caught.

Anyone reading or seeing a play that was written in a different era or in a radically different society is well advised to remember that playwrights do not write for an audience of an indeterminate number of generations sometime in the future.

They are a practical lot, those playwrights, who primarily produce their material in order to earn money to pay this month's rent, or they at least hope to have the play performed within their lifetimes. An audience member seeing such a play must develop the ability to look at the play through eyes filtered to accommodate the time in history when the play was written. To bring in stereotypes that are alien to the time when the play was written is to weaken the stereotype's intent.

*Ray Blum a retired Army combat engineer and high school English teacher, is both a business and technical writer as well as a performing arts critic. He and his wife, Laura, live in Lafayette, LA.*

## **Creating and Playing the Role of Lady Smatter**

**By Allison Hetzel**

As actors, we rarely know what the next role we play or create will be. Over the past ten years I have played many roles, from the mischievous maid, Maria, in *Twelfth Night*, to a vengeful lover who murders her child in a contemporary *Medea*. I have been in the chorus of a musical, singing and dancing, and I have had small ensemble roles in which I added a human element to the setting of the play, such as my role as a villager in the *Scams of Scapin*. I have even, on occasion, played men. When the opportunity of playing Lady Smatter in *The Witlings* presented itself, I was delighted for many reasons. The period of the play fascinated me, and the magnitude of the role was exciting and daunting. My initial response to the character of Lady Smatter, after reading the script, was that I could not stop thinking what a babbling fool she was. She was also a shallow woman whose motives were driven by her own monetary and social gains. I began to create all the events that may have led up to her life prior to the play because knowing and creating a character's past is a crucial step in acting. An actor must know the given circumstances of the human being she is embodying. My own belief is that Lady Smatter was a social climber who married for money, as well as social status, and I also believe that she adopted Beaufort in order to gain wealth and become more prominent in her own circle of society.

The beginning phase of the rehearsal process addressed the characters and their

relationships within the play. This is a valuable time for an actor, and this "table work" serves as a period for conception and exploration of the role. This was especially exciting as I was in a cast ensemble with many of my acting students. As a teacher, I feel that the pedagogical perspective that can be gained by working with students is exciting and valuable. As the show came together in rehearsals, and as the technical/design elements of the show were layered upon the production, along with the period costumes, wigs, and props, these details of the production added life to the characters. I also feel that the demands of the period costumes forced the actors to become more focused and disciplined in their work.

I do not believe Lady Smatter was an avid reader. I feel she loathed the task because she lacked education and merely generalised upon books and authors, as well as the comments of her peers, to formulate conversation for her Esprit Society. I believe this created a sense of confusion in her character when she tried to demonstrate scholarly and critical moments. I wanted the audience to know that she did struggle with literary references and quotations, and she slaughtered them because she never took the time to study or read them. This gave her character more of a humanistic and vulnerable quality. I believe her vulnerability can be connected to her feelings toward Mr. Dabler. I also believe

her idolisation and infatuation with him were genuine, and she constantly hoped for his affection and approval. However, her realization that he was against her in the final act of the play is a painful blow to her pride.

Playing the role of Lady Smatter was exciting and unique. The opportunity to act a role in a play that has been so rarely produced is always a challenge. Also, being part of this college premiere production and having the opportunity to work with my theatre students and colleagues was enriching. Lady Smatter was a challenging role, and I enjoyed my temporary immersion into her world; the quick-witted dialogue and the standard British dialect aided me in helping to create the style and atmosphere needed for both this production and character.

*Allison Hetzel is Assistant Professor of Theatre in Acting, Voice, and Performance at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She received her M.F.A. degree in Theatre Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. She has also studied Classic Greek Theatre with the Athens Centre of Greece where she performed in a touring production of The Trojan Women. She also performed in Darkly Beautiful at the 2002 International Theatre Festival of Sibiu, Romania, where she worked with the DAH Theatre Company of Yugoslavia. Allison directed Prelude to a Kiss for UL at Lafayette this*

## Editing Frances Burney's *The Witlings*

By Clayton Delery

When I was a young boy watching too much television, I became aware of a character type that appeared on many sitcoms. He was often male, middle-aged, and single. He had a cynical wisecrack for every occasion, usually had a formidable vocabulary, and was loved, admired or feared because of his verbal skills (think, for example, of Paul Lynde playing Uncle Arthur on *Bewitched*).



Cast members gathering on stage (Joe Riehl/Minute Particulars)

As I grew older, I found that my taste in movies and television increasingly diverged from my older brother's. He retained a fascination with cowboys, pirates, and other people who got their way using guns, knives, ropes and chains. I found myself fascinated by stories of people who didn't do much of anything, except engage in rapid-fire dialogue. What I was beginning to sense is that there is a power in language every bit as formidable as the power of the weapons and restraints. Chains and guns are certainly effective in controlling people on pirate ships or in the old west, but in the middle-class world I inhabited, they just weren't appropriate. I realized that words usually worked just as well, and, in fact, they often worked better.

The realisation is undoubtedly part of what led to my high school interest in drama; Edward Albee's dialogue could invoke more real terror than the entire cast of *Bonanza* and all their revolvers combined. My fascination with language later led to two degrees in English at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, and to doctoral work at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. There, I encountered Professor David Greetham, who interested me in the processes of textual production, transmission and editing, and Professor Katharine Rogers, who introduced me to Fanny Burney and the existence of *The Witlings*.

What a find for someone interested in the relationship between language and power! That relationship, in fact, is the subject of the play, which ostensibly concerns the trials of Cecilia, a portionless heroine, and Beaufort, the man she loves. In a very real sense, they become a subplot in their own story, just as, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hero and Claudio quickly become less interesting than the merry (and linguistic) warfare between Beatrice and Benedick. *The Witlings* is about people using language to build or destroy

social credibility, and the true focal characters are Lady Smatter and her linguistic rival, Censor, a man who is witty, cynical, and possessed of a formidable knowledge of language and literature (surely a spiritual, if more erudite, ancestor of Uncle Arthur!) Whereas Lady Smatter continually attempts to cloak her intellectual and moral failings with respectability derived from the names of Shakespeare, Pope and Swift, Censor questions her every action, challenges her every assertion, and literally doubts her every word. All actions become subordinate to the language in which they are described, a point highlighted by the conclusion, in which Lady Smatter is defeated, partially through the threat of her reputation being damaged by (truthful) lampoons, and partially through the promise of the (unmerited) reputation for sagacity and liberality she will achieve if she consents to the marriage of Beaufort and Cecilia. Meanwhile, as Mr. Censor performs brilliant verbal battle on their behalves, the lovers spend so much time bemoaning their misfortunes that they never actually do anything which might alleviate them, and, among the supporting characters, words without actions, and language without content, become complementary running jokes.

Words, words, words. That's what *The Witlings* is about.

I soon decided to edit *The Witlings* for my dissertation. In doing so, I found that one of the most challenging parts of the project was accounting for the numerous topical and literary allusions in the play, especially the never-ending torrent of quotations from the mouth of Lady Smatter. Just as Mrs. Malaprop never quite chooses the right word, Lady Smatter never quite remembers the quotation, or if she is correct on the wording, she misattributes the author. I needed to account for as many of references and (mis)quotations as possible, and the research involved would serve any graduate student in good stead. By the time the edition was complete, I had not only learned a great deal about the writings of Pope, Swift Shakespeare, Spenser and Addison, but I had also researched eighteenth-century food, economic conditions, street maps, wedding customs, and myriad other subjects.

There was still, from my point of view, something missing from the experience; I had spent several years of my life thinking and writing about the play, and yet, ten years after the publication of my edition, I had never seen *The Witlings* performed.

Then, I was contacted by Shelley Martin, a graduate student from my alma mater, the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. The university was going to produce *The Witlings* as part of its sponsorship of the 2005 *British Women Writer's Conference*. I was invited to be part of the conference and to give introductory remarks before two performances.

I eagerly accepted the invitation, and was delighted by the fine production, which certainly did justice to the play's concern with the power of language. After spending over two hours laughing at the foibles of Lady Smatter and the wit of Mr. Censor, the audience began to gasp audibly during the climactic verbal battle, during which insults, threats, and coercion became the brutal weapons by which some semblance of moral order was restored to the world of the play.

*The Witlings* was my first (and, to date, only) experience with an extended editing project, and I owe a great deal to many people for its completion and success. Among those for whom I have particular gratitude are Professor David Greetham, my dissertation advisor, and Professor Lars Troide of McGill University, whose advice and support were of incalculable benefit to me at so many steps during the process. The late Dr. Lola Szladitz, curator of the New York Public Library's Berg Collection, and her successor, Dr. Francis O. Mattson, were also of great assistance.

There are now several editions of *The Witlings* in print, and the number of stage productions is slowly growing. The fact that the play is still seen as culturally relevant one hundred and sixty five

years after Burney's death is a testament to the power of her own language. Here's hoping that it may still be seen as powerful one hundred and sixty-five years from now.

*Clayton Delery produced an edition of The Witlings as his doctoral dissertation for the City University of New York. Since 1989, he has been on the English Faculty of the Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, where he also currently serves as chair of the Department of Creative and Performing Arts. In addition to teaching, he is a playwright with several production credits, and he has published in a variety of scholarly and popular venues.*

## Burney Papers Given in Lafayette

**By Lorna Clark**

The Thirteenth Annual Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers Conference, recently held on 14-17 April 2005 at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette included several papers on Burney scattered throughout the sessions.

In nine sessions spread over three days, no fewer than six Burney papers were presented. Amanda E. Himes, Texas A&M University spoke of "Cultures in Conflict: Austen and Burney Defend Hartfordshire from the French." Candice Lucey, a scholar from Canada, was scheduled to discuss "Musical Reference in

the Novels of Frances Burney." (Ms. Lucey describes what first drew her to work on Burney on p. .) Society member Li-Ching Chen traveled a long way from home (the National University of Kaohsiung) to present a paper on "Broken Dialogues between the 'Beautiful Idiots' and the Outside World in Frances Burney's *Camilla*." Mary Lynn Johnson of the University of Iowa spoke of the Court years in "Miss Burney, Madame de La Fite, and Mrs. Papendiek: Cultures of Reading and Writing in Queen Charlotte's Household." Sarah D. Spence of Southeastern Louisiana

University thought of comparing "Frances Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft: Female Difficulties in Their Time." Finally, Michelle O'Connell of University College, Dublin described "Breaking the Silence: Displaced Violence in *Evelina*."

Delegates to the conference could have heard a Burney paper delivered in almost every session, which is surely a sign that Burney has "arrived."

The highlight of the conference was a production of *The Witlings* (1779) and a roundtable with *Witlings* expert Clayton Delery.

## Around the World of ASECS Conferences

**By Lorna Clark**

The East-Central American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies is known for hosting congenial conferences. Their most recent gathering was 21-24 October 2004 in Cape May, New Jersey. Frances Burney was the subject of two papers, both on the journals, one by Nora Nachumi of Yeshiva University on "Lying to Your Friends: Self-Representation in Burney's Journals," and the other by Diane Menagh of Fairfield University who spoke of "Music, sacred and profane, in the Letters of Madame de Sevigne and the Letters of Frances Burney d'Arblay." Charles Burney also made the program with Robert Frail of Centenary College discussing "Dr. Charles Burney and the Continental Tradition: Modifications, Oddifications, and Solidifications." Society member Ellen Moody (from George Mason University) was also there, but speaking on two other women writers, Anne Finch and Mary Wortley Montagu.

A colorful report of the conference is printed in the newsletter, *The East-Central Intelligencer*, which is a delightful read and worth joining the society just to receive. It serves a useful function; the editor, James May, hopes that "through this newsletter, scholars and teachers can pass along to colleagues news, opportunities, and practical tips normally not communicated in scholarly journals." The latest issue (Feb. 2005) includes a round-table discussion on "The State of Book Reviewing," a report on "Two Eighteenth-Century [Art] Shows in New York," and a review of Vol. 4 of *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny*

*Burney*, edited by Betty Rizzo. It also describes the "Manuscripts & Rare Books at Auction and in Catalogues, 2001-2004," in which several items originate from members of Burney's circle.

Under "Gossip" comes news of a project to digitize the Burney Collection of eighteenth-century newspapers at the British Library. Spearheaded at the Centre for Bibliographical Studies & Research at UC-Riverside and co-sponsored by the British Library, the project aims to replace the microfilm copies (which have deteriorated). The digitization will lead to a searchable text-base as well as an accurate index of the whole collection. Supported so far by grants totaling \$703,000, the project needs more funding for its second phase, in which it would merge with the BL's separate effort to digitize and distill nineteenth-century newspapers. (Charles Burney Jr.— who apparently began the collection by saving the newspapers from his aunts' coffee-house — would be proud.)

Books of interest listed in a select bibliography of "Recent Studies of Censorship," are Barbara M. Zaczek, *Censored Sentiments: Letters and Censorship in Epistolary Novels and Conduct Material* (Newark: U. of Delaware Press, 1997) which includes a chapter on *Evelina*, and Bradford K. Mudge, *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel, 1684-1830* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 2000) which, presumably, does not include Burney. The latter was reviewed by Peter Sabor in *Age of Johnson*, 13 (2002), 585-88.

# Frances Burney and Her Circle

## Samuel Johnson

This year marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the first of its kind. Various events will take place throughout 2005. The Royal Mint has commissioned a commemorative 50p coin. From 8<sup>th</sup> July to 4<sup>th</sup> September, a temporary exhibition on the story and the work of the Dictionary will be hosted by Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum and Lichfield Heritage Centre.

A three-day event will be hosted at Pembroke College, Oxford, 26-28 August 2005. The program of eleven speakers includes Burney Society member Kate Chisholm speaking on "Behind the Preface: The Making of a Dictionary-maker." Optional events consist of a tour of the OED and of Johnson's Oxford and a private viewing of Johnson's House in London. For further details, contact Pembroke College, Oxford OX1 1DW, UK or email: [bursar.secretary@pm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:bursar.secretary@pm.ox.ac.uk). The website can be found at: [http://new.pmb.ox.ac.uk/pembroke\\_college/johnson\\_index.html](http://new.pmb.ox.ac.uk/pembroke_college/johnson_index.html)

Incidentally, Dr. Johnson's House has recently acquired back numbers of the journal of The Johnson Society of London, *The New Rambler*, which will be sold as a benefit to Dr. Johnson's House, at £3 each. If you are interested, please contact the Curator, Dr. Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE; 020 7353 3745; [curator@drjohnsonshouse.org](mailto:curator@drjohnsonshouse.org).

## Sir Joshua Reynolds

Sir Joshua Reynolds is also being honoured this summer. Richard Aylmer writes in the *Reynolds Newsletter* about an exhibition that will be on at the Tate gallery in London this summer. Opening on 26 May 2005, *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity* will bring together some 90 works from public and private collections in the UK, North America and Europe. Curated by Martin Postle, the exhibition will display some of Reynolds's greatest portraits, those of Samuel Johnson, Sarah Siddons, Edmund Burke, David Garrick and of other famous men and women of the eighteenth-century. As well as paintings, the exhibition will include prints, caricatures, and sculpture. It consists of eight sections, each of which will cover a type of character painted by Reynolds, within the context of fame and celebrity. One room is dedicated to Reynolds' self-portraits, no less than twenty-seven works painted over a period of nearly half a century. Other sections look at his inner circle of friends, at beauties of Georgian society, and at military and naval heroes. By focusing on a key aspect of Reynolds's work, the show will reveal the artist as a driving force behind the creation of the modern cult

of celebrity.

The exhibition is on from 26 May-18 September 2005 at Tate Britain, open 10-5:40 pm; Admission £7. Tickets 020 7887 8888 or visit [www.tate.org.uk/tickets](http://www.tate.org.uk/tickets).

Mr. Aylmer notes that a highlight of the show will be the *Portrait of Omai*, on loan from a private collection. This painting features the native from the South Seas who was brought back to England in one of the ships on Cook's second expedition. Lionised by London society, he was received at court by George III and also brought to St. Martin's Street by James Burney, who had befriended him on shipboard. These memorable evenings and Omai's natural grace and poise are described vividly in the *Early Journals of Fanny Burney*.

Burney Society members in the UK will recall the controversy in 2001 over the sale of Omai's portrait. Sir Joshua Reynolds had kept it but it was sold after his death. It was in Castle Howard by 1796 and remained there until 2001 when it was sold by Sotheby's for £10.5 million. A debate then ensued in the British press about whether or not the painting should be allowed to leave the country. It was announced that an export licence would not be granted until an attempt had been made to save it for the nation. An anonymous benefactor offered the asking price of £12.5 million to prevent it from being exported. Apparently, the owner has not attempted to export the *Portrait of Omai* and has loaned it for the exhibition.

A biography of *Omai The Prince Who Never Was* by Richard Connaughton has been published just this year. Other books of interest noted in the newsletter are a biography of *Josiah Wedgwood* by Brian Dolan (Harper-Collins 2004) and *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* by Jeremy Black (Sutton Publishing, 1994) which came out in paperback in 2003.

Finally, an invitation is extended (to readers of *RNews* and members of Johnson Societies) to visit Plymouth from 9-11 September 2005. The trip aims to retrace Samuel Johnson's trip with Sir Joshua in 1762. A new booklet (a revised reprint) of *Johnson and Reynolds Their Trip to Devon* by James Clifford gives current information about the places they visited which should make it easier to follow in their footsteps.

The *Reynolds Newsletter* comes out twice a year. Subscriptions (£10 in UK; £15 overseas) can be obtained from Richard Aylmer, Cromwell's House, 17 Mill Lane, Old Marston, Oxford OX3 0PY.

## Hemlow Prize in Burney Studies

The Burney Society invites submissions for the Hemlow Prize, named in honor of the late Joyce Hemlow whose biography of Frances Burney and edition of her journals and letters are among the foundational works of eighteenth-century literary scholarship.

The Hemlow Prize will be awarded to the best essay written by a graduate student on any aspect of the life or writings of Frances Burney. The essay, which can be up to 6,000 words, should make a substantial contribution to Burney scholarship. The judges will take into consideration the essay's originality, coherence, use of source material, awareness of other work in the field, and documentation. The winning essay will be published in *The Burney Journal* and the recipient will receive an award of US \$250, as well as a year's membership in the Burney Society.

The Hemlow Prize will be awarded in October 2005. Essays should be sent, by email attachment, to the Chair of the Prize Committee, Audrey Bilger, Associate Professor of Literature, Claremont McKenna College, [abilger@claremontmckenna.edu](mailto:abilger@claremontmckenna.edu). Submissions must be received by June 1 2005.

## Chawton Centre and Graduate Programs

The **Chawton MA in Eighteenth-Century Studies** is a new multidisciplinary program offered by the School of Humanities at **Southampton University**. A key resource is the archive of early women's writing at **Chawton House Library** in the village of Chawton, Hampshire.

The MA program is taught by lecturers in the disciplines of English, History, Art History and Material Culture, enabling students to work across these disciplines and to specialise in the social and cultural history, print culture, women's writing, or the visual and material culture of the period. The MA encourages students to draw on original sources: the collection of early women's writing at Chawton, the Hampshire County Record Office which supports the study of gentry culture and consumption, local country houses belonging to the National Trust, and the easily accessible archives and museums in London, which is just over one hour away.

Three special £1000 Chawton studentships will be offered for 2005/6.

The University of Southampton also has a Chawton Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, a three-year post in Women's Writing in English in the Long Eighteenth Century, funded by Chawton House Library. The Fellowship would suit a recent PhD with ongoing research in the field, and preferably with some teaching experience. The successful applicant will help develop and promote the profiles of the University and Chawton House Library through teaching, personal and collaborative research, and the organization of events that will link the two institutions and attract a growing scholarly community to their resources. (Although it is too late for the current competition, it is something for students to keep in mind for the future.)

**Chawton House Library** opened as a Centre for the Study of Early English Women's Writing in July 2003 in the recently restored Elizabethan manor house that once belonged to Jane Austen's brother. English women's writing from 1600–1830 forms the major part of its special collection of 9,000 volumes, which includes rare and unique works as well as some manuscripts. The centre runs an events program of seminars and lectures throughout the year, and hosts an international conference co-organised with the University every summer.

More information on **Chawton House Library** can be found at [www.chawton.org](http://www.chawton.org) and on the English department at Southampton at [www.soton.ac.uk/~english](http://www.soton.ac.uk/~english), or contact the convenors, Dr. Stephen Bending, [S.D.Bending@soton.ac.uk](mailto:S.D.Bending@soton.ac.uk) and Annie Richardson, [A.E.Richarson@soton.ac.uk](mailto:A.E.Richarson@soton.ac.uk)

## *Burney Society Granted Affiliate Status at ASECS*

**By Lorna Clark**

The Burney Society has been granted affiliate status to the American Society of Eighteenth Century Studies. ASECS is an interdisciplinary academic society dedicated to the study of all aspects of this period, from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. As an ASECS affiliate, the Burney Society may host a session and a reception or luncheon at the ASECS annual meetings. In addition, the Burney Society will receive space for announcements in the ASECS newsletter and website, <http://asecs.press.jhu.edu/>.

Catherine Rodriguez of the University of Virginia has been working on this project for some time. In requesting affiliate status, she laid out the history of the Society since its founding in 1993. She described its purpose, that of encouraging the study and appreciation of Frances Burney, her family, and her contemporaries. She indicated the diverse membership (academics, bibliophiles and Burney enthusiasts). She noted the interdisciplinary character of Burney studies, which offer a window into nearly every aspect of eighteenth-century art and culture.

Since the establishment of the Burney Society, Catherine wrote, it has actively pursued its goals. It arranged for the installation of a commemorative window in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey in honour of Frances Burney (in July 2002). The Society has also led the effort to restore Burney's sarcophagus to its original position over her grave at St. Swithin's Church, Walcot, Bath. This project will be completed in the summer of 2005 when it will be celebrated with a day long conference in Bath. In addition, the Society has established the Joyce Hemlow Prize which is awarded to the best paper given by a graduate student at its annual meeting. The award commemorates Joyce Hemlow's achievements in Burney studies and also fosters the development of young scholars. The Society publishes a newsletter biannually and a journal annually.

In March 2005, the ASECS board voted unanimously to grant this petition. As an ASECS affiliate, The Burney Society joins other noteworthy organisations such as the Mozart Society, Aphra Behn Society, L'Association Rousseau, and the Voltaire Foundation.

## Call for Papers

### Midlands Romantic Seminar One-Day Conference

#### The Romantic Novel 1790-1840

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2005  
Birmingham and Midland Institute,  
Birmingham B3, UK

Keynote speaker: Professor Kathryn Sutherland  
(St Anne's College, Oxford)

Submissions are invited for papers on any aspect of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century novel. Possible topics might include: the novel of sensibility, the Jacobin novel, Godwin, Mary Shelley, children's fiction, counter-revolutionary tracts, the Gothic novel, Scott, Charlotte Smith, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Ferrier, Burney, Austen, Elizabeth Hamilton, Harriet Martineau, Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, William Ainsworth, the Newgate Novel, the Silver-Fork Novel, the historical novel, popular fiction, early Dickens etc.

Submissions from postgraduates welcomed.  
Please send a 300 word abstract by 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005 to Dr. Gavin Budge,  
[gavin.budge@uce.ac.uk](mailto:gavin.budge@uce.ac.uk)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The next ASECS conference will be held in Montreal 30 March – April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006. In keeping with the cultural heritage of the venue, the Burney Society Session will focus on Burney and Her French Connections. The panel invites papers on France and all things French in Frances Burney d'Arblay's life and works. Possible topics include, but are not limited to representations of France and French citizens in Burney's works; stereotypes of the French; Burney's sojourn in France; Burney and the French Revolution, the publication, reception and circulation of Burney's works in France, and/or Burney and the Emigrant French Clergy. Anyone interested in participating may submit a one-page abstract to Dr. Lorna J. Clark, lclarklj@aol.com by 15 September 2005.

## Meeting Frances Burney

### By Candice Lucey

Ian Watt introduced me to Frances Burney, and in such a way that made me want to know more. I was studying the eighteenth-century novel at university and found Ian Watt to be a helpful guide when considering many issues. With regard to Frances Burney, or "Fanny" as he called her, little was written by this learned man except several indications that she was the precursor to Jane Austen. Keen to play devil's advocate in asserting a place for Burney quite apart from Austen, and despite its being nearly the last novel on the prospectus of the course, I eagerly read *Evelina* first. Echoes of Jane Austen certainly rang in my ears as I read, but I also realised that *Evelina* stands apart from the tradition which Jane Austen represents. Early on I wanted to concentrate on Frances Burney's novels when I came to write the dissertation I have now completed.

I was surprised that *Evelina* had been buried for so long, virtually unheard of when I was in high-school. While studying Austen's fiction and that of the Brontës, Burney's name never came up, not even in the late eighties. Her name rang some bells when I first picked up the novel, but she had only been mentioned in passing as one of a number of writers on the fringes of famous, critically acclaimed and enduring works of fiction. This was a lamentable case, for successful comedy seems one of the hardest feats

to pull off. Because comedy is instilled in the novel in so many ways, even a serious moment hardly interferes with the novel's pace. That Burney meant to make serious comment on certain aspects of her society was not lost on me. What I realised as I read on was that the novel's morality was deeply embedded in the letters, yet not condescending in its expression, nor able to overshadow the author's genius for dialogue. I was laughing out loud, something which very little prose literature can make me do. I was grateful to Burney for this.

One thing that stands out about *Evelina*, for me, are the textures of comedy. Burney confidently deploys irony, anarchy, gentle humour, and scenes of hilarious embarrassment. I love the scene where the prostitutes hold Evelina and Mr. Brown, and Evelina does not at first know that they are women of the night. Mrs. Selwyn is essential to the comedy of the last section of the book. I enjoyed her immensely, despite the fact that as a woman she was not supposed to be so satirical and masculine, duelling with the intellects of the male characters and usually winning.

While many readers have considered Lord Orville cold, I felt a strong undercurrent of desire which made me root for him and Evelina to marry in the end. In much the same way that gratuitous and excessive violence

in the media de-sensitises the viewer while more subtle representations of violence can have a tremendous impact, Lord Orville's subtle masculinity appealed to me. I eagerly read the rest of Burney's novels to discover more characters like him, over-satiated as I am by the over-sexed heroes and heroines of modern novels. Of course, these are very different times and what we can write now, Burney most definitely could not. The point, for me, is that reading *Evelina* was less a task than a welcome break from modern story-telling.

*Candice Lucey is a full-time mother who lives in Salmon Arm, B.C., Canada with her husband and two daughters. She has just completed her Master's in Literature with a dissertation on the influence of music on Frances Burney's novels. She just had a paper accepted on that topic at the recent Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers Conference in Lafayette, Louisiana.*

***Do you remember your first encounter with Frances Burney? When did you read her, how did you come to discover her, what were your "first impressions"? If you would like to share your story (in 800 words or less) please send it to the Editor.***

## Nigel Nicolson, 1917—2004

Nigel Nicolson, a founding member and patron of the Burney Society, died on 23 September 2004, aged 87. Members fortunate enough to have met him at the celebrations at Westminster Abbey marking the 250th anniversary of the birth of Fanny Burney will remember a tall, courtly gentleman who took a keen interest in the activities of the society that he helped to establish. In 2002 he published a biography of Fanny Burney, complementing an earlier book that he had written on his other great heroine of English literature, Jane Austen.

Nigel Nicolson was the son of the poet Vita Sackville-West and the diplomat Harold Nicolson, and could be regarded as “the last survivor of the Bloomsbury Group.” His mother was for a time the lover of Virginia Woolf, and Nigel used to go on butterfly-collecting trips with the novelist while she was writing *Orlando*, the fantasy inspired by her relationship with his mother.

Nigel's life spanned a varied career, from soldier to politician to publisher, writer and editor. In the foreword to his memoirs, he described himself as someone who had “changed occupations several times,” as if he had never mastered any profession. In truth, he was an astute publisher and a gifted writer and editor. His account of his parents' marriage, *Portrait of a Marriage*, caused a furore when it was published in 1973, because of the way in which he detailed their infidelities and homosexual affair. But it was written with great empathy and went on to become a bestseller and an acclaimed television adaptation. His critics accused him of betraying his family and his “class;” his admirers welcomed his “uncompromising integrity.”

Nigel Nicolson was born in London on 19 January 1917 and grew up in Kent, spending most of his time either with his nanny and governesses or with his maternal grandmother Lady Sackville; his mother devoted herself to her writing, her love affairs and her garden while his father concentrated on his diplomatic career (Harold Nicolson was involved with the negotiations at the Versailles peace conference in 1919). After Eton and Oxford (and holidays in Germany to learn the language) Nigel applied for a commission to the Grenadier Guards, serving with honours in the Second World War.

At the end of the war his brigade was involved with the hand-over to the Red Army of about 40,000 anti-Soviet Cossack prisoners — men, women and children — and to Tito of some 30,000 of his Yugoslav opponents. The majority of these people were either murdered or died in captivity. Nicolson kept a careful record of events, from which it was clear that the British soldiers had lied to their captives about their destination when corralling them into the trains that would take them to their deaths. “It was the most horrible

experience of my life,” he recalled later. And yet, decades later, in 1989 he agreed to give testimony in the libel trial that was provoked by Count Nikolai Tolstoy when he accused Lord Aldington, staff officer of Nicolson's brigade, of organising the betrayal of the Cossacks. Nigel appeared as a defence witness for Tolstoy but made it clear that although he supported everything that Tolstoy said about the enormity of what had been done, he could not accept Tolstoy's allegation that Aldington had arranged every detail of the hand-over or was mainly responsible for the decision. Aldington eventually won the case.

After the war was over, Nigel briefly entered politics as a Conservative MP before, in 1949, establishing with George Weidenfeld the publishing house of Weidenfeld and Nicolson. The book that made the firm famous was Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, the controversial tale of a 12-year-old girl with whom a middle-aged man falls in love, which was threatened with prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act. The book survived and went on to sell 100,000 copies in its first fortnight.

Nigel Nicolson's greatest achievement is reckoned to be his edition of his father's *Diaries and Letters*, which appeared in three volumes, and his six-volume edition of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Immaculately edited, this edition is still the cornerstone of any study of the “Bloomsberry” phenomenon. In 2000 he published a life of Woolf, largely inspired by his childhood memories of her.

His other books include *The Himalayas*, *Mary Curzon* (which won the Whitbread Prize in 1977), *Napoleon: 1812*, *The World of Jane Austen*, *The Queen and Us*, and his autobiography *Long Life*. In his last years he wrote an “amiably reflective” column in *The Spectator* magazine and later in *The Sunday Telegraph*. In 1986 with his son Adam he published *Two Roads to Dodge City*, the account of their diverging itineraries as they crossed America, meeting in the middle.

In his final years he became something of an institution at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, which his parents had bought in 1932 and restored from a crumbling ruin. His mother created from the muddy wilderness surrounding the castle a magnificent garden, now open to visitors. Nigel gave the property to the National Trust in 1967, but continued to live there, managing the property on the Trust's behalf. Visiting parties of Americans would be hailed by him from his study window and invited in for tea.

**Compiled by Kate Chisholm from obituaries in *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian*.**

## A Vegas Title-Fight: The Burney Society vs. the Austen Society

A review of a session at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Annual Meeting, April 2005, Las Vegas

### Presenters:

James P. Carson, Kenyon College, "Nationalism by Default: From Burney's Cosmopolitan Satire to Austen's Mature Patriotism"

Heather King, University of Redlands, "'Run Mad as Often as You Chuse; but do not Faint': Emotional Extremes and Virtuous Self-Control in Burney and Austen"

Christopher Nagle, Western Michigan University, "Stone Cold Jane Austen; or, Burney, Austen and the Limits of Feeling"

Respondent: Vivien Jones, University of Leeds

### By Gefen Bar-on

Unlike its combative title, the Burney-Austen session in the 2005 meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies was not a fight, but a productive discussion of the novelists' mutual interests and respective processes of artistic and intellectual development. Speaking in a city that can be overwhelming to the senses, two of the panelists focused on sensibility. Heather King's paper described a move from the spectacular excessive sensibility of the "beauty-in-distress" model, to a more reflective model. The former exhibits "women as objects whose physical manifestations of distress have a moral influence on men who observe them." King depicted Burney's novelistic progress as a rejection of this objectifying aesthetic spectacle and a move towards reflection. In *Cecilia*, Burney makes the heroine's suffering unsettling for the readers by ensuring that her tears signify pain and not an embellishment of her beauty. When Dr. Lyster at the end of the novel "discounts the efficacy of Cecilia's suffering, and instead posits balance as the key to establishing virtue," he "effectively undercuts," King argued, "the narrative of virtue in distress."

By contrast, the "reflective" paradigm "emphasizes an androgynous act of looking, either at the self . . . or at others" as the catalyst of moral instruction. Rather than being objects on display, reflective women are individuals who observe and judge themselves and others. The focus in the resolution of *Camilla* is not on spectacle, but "on the heroine's own vision, and her moral understanding." The scene in which Mr. Tyrold uses the beautiful idiot pedagogically for his daughters, King argued, "almost parodies the standard elements of displayed virtue in distress by exaggerating them." The moral lesson that

Eugenia learns from this scene derives not from her emotional response per se, but from her ability to reflect on the event, thus separating virtue from emotion. Burney further parodies the beauty-in-distress paradigm by "having the vain and vapid Indiana put on a ridiculous display of fear over the incident with the bull that is attractive to none except the duped Melmond." Camilla's final moment of crisis, crucially, depicts her as "trapped in her own feverish subjectivity," not as an aesthetic spectacle. Austen, King argues, continues "Burney's progress" by portraying "young ladies capable of rational self-control who do not make spectacles of themselves in any sense of the word."

Christopher Nagle, arguing against the misleading narrative of rupture versus continuity, also stressed the importance of the tradition of sensibility for both Burney and Austen. His paper focused on the novelists' last novels: *Persuasion* and *The Wanderer*. He argued that while Austen embraces sensibility "more fully than ever in her late work," Burney, on the other hand, "incorporates a more traditional Romantic context, replete with heroic individual isolation." For Austen's Anne Elliot, sensibility provides a way beyond the self and into other people. In *The Wanderer*, on the other hand, this feeling community cannot be fruitfully realized in a world of isolation. Thus Nagle defined the distinction between Austen and Burney with respect to the "forms of feeling" on which they draw as follows: "for Austen, Sensibility provides the ties that bind truly feeling characters together, even in the face of war and class degeneration; for Burney, feeling connections possess a seductive character that ultimately proves to be compromised or attenuated by social forces beyond the reach of human feelings." Nevertheless,

*The Wanderer* keeps sensibility alive within a new Romantic framework.

The focus of James Carson's paper was not Burney, but Austen and patriotism. He suggested that Austen "did not arrive at a nationalist consciousness naturally or even willingly" and that "she found a parochial, local, or provincial consciousness more congenial. At the same time, given her Augustan sensibility, Austen felt an attraction to cosmopolitan satire." It is here that Carson made a connection to Burney, by suggesting that "Austen had to abandon the kind of cosmopolitan satire that appears in Burney's *Evelina*, as well as her own attraction to local consciousness, in favour of the patriotic evangelical imperialism of her mature work," in response to political and economic developments which made nationalism obligatory. Austen's "Steventon novels (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*) show that local parochial consciousness and modes of social organization are no longer viable." Nevertheless, through female characters such as Isabelle Thorpe and Mary Crawford, who are "indifferent to time and measurement" and resort to the "measurement of time by feeling," Austen gives voice to these disappearing modes to which she is attracted.

Thus all three papers addressed female feeling as a site of concern for the novelists. Nagle's discussion of the importance of touch in Austen, together with King's emphasis on sight, led to a lively discussion among the members of the audience about what generates feeling and how feeling is transmitted: through touch, sight, sound? The respondent, Vivien Jones, posed stimulating questions that encouraged discussion. The papers, Jones noted, have all stressed "continuity rather than confrontation, alliances rather



than aggression.” Nevertheless, they also invite an examination of distinctions between Burney’s and Austen’s aesthetics and politics. Jones recalled Bill Galperin’s argument in his recent book *Historical Austen* that while in Austen’s “‘female difficulties’ are symptomatic of human and social difficulties’,” Burney represents a more restricted view in which “change is something to be feared and contained” and in which “women’s issues” remain separate from “people’s issues.” To what extent, Jones asked, “do Burney and Austen offer critiques rather

than simply endorsements of orthodox femininities and domestic ideology, and to what extent does their concern with what Galperin calls ‘women’s issues’ subvert or modify what has often been identified as their fundamental conservatism?”

No winner was crowned at the end of this congenial “title fight.” Nobody won a lucrative prize at the city of gambling, but the audience’s understanding of the creative mentalities and social concerns of Austen and Burney was greatly enriched.

*Gefen Bar-On is a doctoral student at*

*McGill University. Her dissertation investigates the influence of science on the editing of Shakespeare in eighteenth-century England. She is also a research assistant for Peter Sabor, assisting him with the forthcoming edition of the letters of Samuel Richardson. Her paper at the 2005 ASECS meeting was titled "General Truths or Material Construction? Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare and Recent Theories of Shakespeare's Canonicity." She also won the ASECS graduate student research paper award for 2005.*

## BOOK REVIEW

**La messinscena dell'identità: teatro e teatralità nel romanzo inglese del settecento.** By *Francesca Saggini*. Viterbo: Sette Città, 2003. Pp. 326. ISBN 88-86091-70-2.

### **By Laura Kopp**

Frances Burney's interest in the theatre is no secret. In recent years, her plays, and the dramatic aspects of her novels and journals, have been drawing increasing attention, as was abundantly clear from the 2003 Burney Society conference in Montreal which focused on Burney as dramatist. The conference ended with a standing-room-only world premiere performance of her play, *The Woman-Hater*. That it took over two hundred years for this play to be performed shows how wide a gap there can be between writing a play and producing it for the stage. Francesca Saggini's book, whose Italian title loosely translates as *Staging Identity: Theatre and Spectacle in the eighteenth-century English Novel*, explains how this gap first opened in Burney's life, with the suppression of her play, *The Witlings*. Saggini argues that its suppression only served to deepen Burney's understanding of the public nature of identity in a culture saturated in theatre.

Saggini's opening chapter is a fascinating study of how social, cultural and economic transformations in eighteenth-century Britain were played out simultaneously in the theatre and in the novel. Instead of competing with the theatre, she argues, the novel drew on changes already occurring on the stage: heroic drama was giving way to the more domestic affective tragedy, while comedy was incorporating moral and sentimental elements into social satire. In the later eighteenth century, both genres increasingly sought to represent an intimate, private, middle-class order.

This is a useful reminder, and Saggini's concrete examples of the interplay between theatre and novel consumption illustrate how the theatre-going and novel-reading publics were one and the same, consuming, criticising, and identifying with characters on stage or page. Plays were published and read as texts, while novels were read aloud — acted — in family or social gatherings, provoking laughter, tears, and commentary, much as occurred in the theatre.

Saggini embeds Burney in this context, arguing that the fluid boundaries between theatre and novel reflect an intense moment of negotiation between public and private spheres. Women's identities were at the centre of this negotiation, and that of women writers particularly so. Even before she wrote her first play, Burney was working with

theatrical elements in *Evelina*, but the suppression of *The Witlings* implicated her personally in the complex dangers of public authorship. The story of this suppression due to paternal intervention is familiar. Like other scholars, Saggini places Burney's relation with her father at the heart of her work, stressing how Charles embodied public constraints on women writing that Frances at once accepted and resisted. His approval or disapproval was central to her expressing, repressing, and then camouflaging her voice with respect to the theatre. Stymied in her theatrical aspirations after writing *The Witlings*, Burney theatricalised her next novel and fully achieved an intersection of drama and novel.

For Saggini, that *The Witlings* ever came to be written is due to the incipient theatricality of *Evelina*: episodes in the novel are patterned after comedies of manners, sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy and farce. Saggini reads Burney's epistolary narrative technique as theatrical, where writing to the moment has all the immediacy of action on the stage, and where dialogue is accompanied by descriptions of physical gestures in line with the innovations Garrick introduced to naturalise the gestural language of the stage. The important scene where *Evelina* is recognised by her father Belmont, in particular, is indebted to Garrick's interpretation of King Lear, and the scene's significance for Burney's

## BOOK REVIEW

relationship with her father is fully drawn out by Saggini.

It is no wonder, then, that Mrs. Thrale, Johnson, Sheridan and others should have encouraged Burney to write a play. *Evelina* bore all the marks of a theatre-goers' novel, so why not take it a step further? But *Evelina* was written in the "snug" privacy of anonymity, whereas theatrical production is an intensely social, negotiated, and above all, public affair. As Burney prepared to step out of the private sphere into the public, assuming the playwright's identity, she treaded dangerous ground. Not only might the characters in the play be recognised as the circle gathered around Elizabeth Montagu. More importantly for Saggini, female playwrights were too easily associated with the dubious morals of actresses. Some questions remain unanswered here, and perhaps cannot be answered: did Mrs. Thrale and her friends perceive Frances as above or immune from the negative sexual and social implications of writing plays? Why did these so trouble Charles Burney? How to account for the different perceptions of publicity that appear to have collided here?

The play itself examines the fragility of the heroine's social identity, which is placed in relation to a cast of characters representing a cross-section of society. Thus the negotiation of boundaries between public and private is thematised in the play, and publicity itself becomes a weapon, enabling the happy resolution through the threat of posting lampoons of Lady Smatter all over London.

Saggini's chapter on *Cecilia* is her most fully realised. She convincingly argues that *Cecilia* incorporates the suppression of the *Witlings* (from which it borrows many elements, including the female protagonist), by dramatising precisely those dangers that caused its suppression. In this novel, Burney's awareness of public and paternal pressures is translated into an analysis and critique of a spectacular society where all is public and there are no safe harbors the heroine can retire to.

A telling instance of what Saggini calls the "pervasive spectacularity" of *Cecilia* occurs during Cecilia's and Mrs. Harrel's first visit to the Opera House. They take a stage box in a privileged position of proximity to the action on stage, but which is also in full view of the audience. Saggini remarks how often the novel replicates this confusion of boundaries between audience and actors, and she links it to the dangerous fluidity of socio-economic life in Georgian England. In the theatre of society that Burney is portraying, the subject and the object of the spectatorial gaze are indistinguishable, and the heroine's progress through this hall of mirrors where all is illusion and artifice is constantly impeded.

Saggini invokes the figure of "inversion" to describe the play of illusions in the novel, where nothing is as it seems, and behind all appearances lurk dangers for the heroine. The Harrels' house, for example, instead of affording Cecilia protection in a domestic space, turns out to be a proto-gothic asylum where she is preyed upon both sexually and financially. It is a miniature version of the theatrical space at Vauxhall gardens (which in turn are less natural gardens than carefully staged artifice). This is a society where bankrupts' auctions are attended by ticket-holders, and visiting cards are "tickets" giving access to assemblies at private houses, while pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall are stages where aesthetic fictions (landscaping, topiaries, architectural detail) mirror the dominant fiction and artifice of society. Harrel's Vauxhall suicide therefore can be said to occur on stage, and Saggini analyses this scene closely, paying attention to its dramatic momentum, and reading Harrel's corpse as a theatrical "machine" whose effect is fully realised (as attested by the excited letters Burney received from friends describing their reactions).

It is revealing that the novel's compromised ending left many readers dissatisfied. Cecilia's loss of her inheritance and the break-up of the

Delville family nucleus are not remedied by fortuitous accidents leading to a happy ending. Nor are there any happy reunions with fathers. Burney is coherent here: a novel that exposed the artifice of a theatrical society could hardly employ theatrical artifice to revert to a comforting patriarchal order.

Saggini's book uses Burney to provide a richly documented and beautifully executed analysis of the close relations between novel and the theatre in the eighteenth century. A revision of the book for translation might, however, benefit from some softening of the often technical language, and perhaps the tables marshalling data for her argument could be replaced by illustrations showing how the avid consumption of all things theatrical extended to the prints displaying scenes from Burney's novels, from theatrical performances, and from Vauxhall entertainments.

*Laura Kopp is a Research Associate at the Burney Centre, where she works on establishing the text and researching annotations for Frances Burney's Court Journals. Her primary area of interest as a graduate student at Rutgers University was the relation between American literary and historical writing in the nineteenth-century.*

### Contributions Welcome

The *Burney Letter* welcomes input from members. Please send any notes, news, letters, essays, book reviews, accounts of travel, announcements of concerts, plays, exhibitions or conferences, notices, queries, photos or suggestions to the Editor, Dr. Lorna Clark, The Burney Centre, McGill University, 853 Sherbrooke Str. W., Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 2T6 or by e-mail to [lclarklj@aol.com](mailto:lclarklj@aol.com)

**Susanna, the Captain & the Castrato:**

**Scenes from the Burney Salon 1779-80.** By *Linda Kelly*. London: Starhaven, 2004. Pp. 134 ISBN 0-936315-21-0.

### **By Maggie Lane**

Those of us who find in the whole Burney tribe, and their remarkable variety of doings, a source of endless fascination, will welcome a book which sheds light on the life of Fanny's favourite sister Susan, whose early death and earlier removal to Ireland have kept her too often a shadowy figure in accounts of the family. The central part of this book tells the story, mainly through Susanna Burney's journal letters, of her friendship with and admiration for the singer Gasparo Pacchierotti, an Italian castrato visiting London and frequenting her father's house in 1779-80.

Linda Kelly, whose interest in music led her to this subject, writes knowledgeable on the phenomenon of castrati, the hows, whys and when of what seems to us such a cruel practice. If I had thought about it before at all, I would have assumed the operation was performed on babies, like circumcision, but no, a boy had to be between about seven and twelve when the quality of his voice would be proven. Imagine what he went through, not only physically but mentally. I was astonished to read how very many parents, mostly Italian, subjected their sons to this outrage in the hope they would make their fortune: most, of course, did not.

It does not seem to have embittered Pacchierotti, who at the time of his visit to London was about forty years old, with a pleasant, friendly demeanour, a huge talent, and an attractiveness to ladies notwithstanding his lack of manhood; indeed, as the author asserts, many women preferred the company of these safe, unthreatening men. Susanna's own words suggest to me that she felt no more than friendship and admiration for

Pacchierotti — she has the same slightly gushing style as her more famous sister and I question whether we are really justified in reading an “unspoken romance” into the relationship as Kelly would like:

We have no further record of his last days in London, of his final performances or his farewells to Susanna. Did Fanny destroy the remaining pages of her sister's journal when she came to edit her family's papers? She always took care to censor anything that might bring discredit or embarrassment on the Burneys. It has long been suggested that Susanna was in love with Pacchierotti; certainly her feeling for him and her passionate admiration for his artistry provide the emotional undercurrent which carries her narrative along. It would of course have been an unfulfilled and hopeless love, but none the less real for that; it may well be that Dr Burney, sensing the growing intimacy between them, was secretly relieved that Pacchierotti would not be coming back to London the following year.

The third personage in the book is “The Captain” of the title, Molesworth Phillips. In the early chapters he is unknown to Susanna, being a sailor colleague of her brother James Burney on the fated last voyage of Captain Cook; this story, though familiar, is well told here, and forms a dramatic contrast to the London scenes of musical parties. He reappears in the book after Pacchierotti's departure when Susanna, according to Kelly, was “perhaps on the rebound from her emotional involvement” with the singer and ready to be swept off her feet by the handsome young Captain. From this point in Susan's life story there is no need to speculate on the nature of her emotions for of course the young couple *did* fall in love and enter into an engagement in the autumn of 1780; and

they *did* marry in January 1782 after a £400 loan from the groom's sister persuaded the doubtful Dr Burney to give his consent.

The tragic story of Susanna's marriage, starting in happiness and hope, ending in misery, cruelty and death eighteen years later, largely falls outside the scope of this book, despite its title. The taste we have here makes me long for a fuller biography of Susan, or perhaps of all the sisters. Nonetheless it is good to see the world through Susanna's eyes even for a couple of years, and to have, for example, her experiences of the Gordon Riots in London to put alongside those of Fanny in Bath, which are so much more familiar. It is also interesting to glimpse Gabriel Piozzi prowling about on the periphery of the main action, bad-tempered and jealous of his countryman's musical popularity.

The publisher would have done better to provide an index and notes than to indulge in an irritating typographical tic whereby the letter t, when preceded by c or s, acquires a strange curlicue — if there's a more technical term I don't know it — but only when an eighteenth century manuscript is being quoted. I have never seen this done before, and I would like to know the justification for something so visually off-putting and so unnecessary. Having said all this, both author and publisher have done us a service in bringing this passage in the life of Susanna Burney before the public. I am certainly glad to have read the book, as will be anyone whose interest in “all the dear Burneys, little and great” is insatiable.

*Maggie Lane is a founding member and Patron of the Burney Society. In addition to many books about Jane Austen, she is the author of A City of Palaces: Bath through the eyes of Fanny Burney (1999) and Literary Daughters, which includes a chapter on Burney (1988).*

## **North American members approve dues increase**

### **By Paula Stepankowsky**

Dues for Burney Society membership in North America have been \$15 (US) a year for the past seven years. But they are

scheduled to increase to \$30 (US) a year for regular members, although a new dues level was established for students that will

maintain the existing dues rate at \$15 a year for them.

The vote to increase dues came at the

North American annual meeting in Los Angeles in October and was prompted by a report by outgoing Secretary/ Treasurer Lucy Magruder,

The report showed that the society's annual costs have outstripped dues revenue for some time. Most of the society's dues are spent publishing *The Burney Journal* and two editions of the *Burney Letter*, the society's newsletter. Since the dues were set at \$15 per year, both publications have expanded the number of pages in each issue, and postage costs have increased substantially.

For the past several years, the shortfall between dues and publication expenses

has been made up by donations, but Lucy said that situation can no longer continue if the society is to remain on solid financial footing.

The society's annual meetings are priced so they pay for themselves, and separate fund-raising drives are used to pay for special projects such as the memorial window in Westminster Abbey and the restoration work on the Burney/d'Arblay monument at Walcot Church in Bath.

Since the society is planning to seek refereed status for its journal, continued enhancements of the *Journal* will take place — something all members will benefit from.

There was discussion about raising dues by a smaller amount, but members at the meeting felt it was better to increase the dues enough to cover current costs as well as some future costs so the dues issue doesn't have to be addressed every year or every other year. It was decided, however, that a student membership rate be added to encourage student memberships and participation.

The question of a dues increase for British and International members will be discussed at the upcoming meeting in Bath in July. British members currently pay £9 a year.

**MEMBERSHIP DUES REMINDER**

To join the Burney Society, or to renew your membership for the 2005-2006 dues year starting from 13 June 2005, please fill out the form below and return it with your cheque (payable to the Burney Society). Those who live in the US or Canada should send a cheque for \$30 to Alex Pitofsky, Secretary/Treasurer, 3621 – 9<sup>th</sup> St. Drive, N.E., Hickory NC 28601, USA. Those living in the UK, Europe or elsewhere should send a cheque for £9 to David and Janet Tregear, Secretaries/Treasurers UK, 7 Market Avenue, Chichester, West Sussex, PO 19 1JU, UK.

Tax-deductible donations, to help the fund-raising effort are also welcome. Thank you for your support.

Name.....

Address.....

City:..... State/Province/County.....

Country ..... Postal Code:.....

e-mail address..... Wish to receive newsletter only in an electronic version:.....

Membership Dues..... Donation:..... Total Amount:.....

**IN GREAT BRITAIN:**  
THE BURNEY SOCIETY  
7 MARKET AVENUE  
CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX  
UK PO19 1JU

**Return address:**

**IN NORTH AMERICA:**  
THE BURNEY SOCIETY  
3621 – 9<sup>TH</sup> ST. DRIVE N.E.  
HICKORY NC 28601  
USA