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Joy Hudson

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"A drudge amid the smiles of Wealth and Power": the Burneys and their Montagu Patrons

JOY HUDSON

For the Burneys, the Montagu family represented an important source of influence, their support proving vital to the careers of Charles Burney and his son James. Patronage, however, comes at a cost, as is revealed in Charles's correspondence and, in particular, in the circumstances surrounding the suppression of Frances's first play. In exploring interconnections between the Burneys and their Montagu benefactors, I shall examine possible Montagu influences upon Frances's first novel *Evelina* and her comedy *The Witlings*.[1]

Charles Burney's contemporaries considered him an urbane man; he appears to have moved easily in society, cultivating a network of influential friends.[2] Hester Thrale writes glowingly about the "Suavity of his Manners," concluding that "few People possess such Talents for General Conversation" (*Thraliana* 1: 137). Yet his correspondence provides a different perspective. Writing to his son Charles, Jr. in 1781, he declares a strong sense of disillusion at his thwarted expectations and tellingly describes himself as "a drudge amid the smiles of Wealth & Power" (*Letters* 1: 318). In *Memoirs*, Frances recalls her father's "cutting disappointment" at his failure to receive the preferment of Master of the King's Band, as promised by the Earl of Hertford (1: 184). The Burneys were undoubtedly a family who depended greatly upon the favors of the rich and powerful.

Patronage bestowed by Captain (later Admiral) John Montagu (1719–95) enabled the ten-year-old James Burney to get an important first foothold on the ladder for a career in the royal navy.[3] Captain Montagu was a distant cousin of the fourth Earl of Sandwich (see Appendix). The Earl's support would later afford James the opportunity for promotion in the navy. From 1760 to 1762 James acted as Captain Montagu's "captain's

servant," a form of apprenticeship or introduction to naval life for a young boy during this period.[4] Then, in the summer of 1764, when Charles took his daughters Esther and Susan to France to improve their knowledge of the French language, his domestic arrangements involved a further Montagu connection. Charles enlisted the services of a certain Mme. Anne Saintmard, whose chief recommendation appears to be that she had previously worked for "old Lady Sandwich" (*Letters* 1: 45 n. 3).[5] Mme. Saintmard was entrusted with the delicate task of overseeing the education of Charles's daughters throughout their stay in France.

However, it was John Montagu (1718–1792), the fourth Earl of Sandwich, whose patronage was most crucial for the Burneys (see Appendix). The support of the Earl, with his role as First Lord of the Admiralty and his great love of music, boosted the careers of both Charles and his son James.[6] When Charles first met Sandwich in 1771, he was at a pivotal stage in his career. Having already visited France and Italy, he was preparing to tour Germany and poised to make the transition in status from a relatively humble professional musician and piano teacher to the more prestigious social position of musicologist and man of letters. Charles found the Earl's wide circle of acquaintances on the Continent of immense value. Sandwich supplied "recommendatory letters, in his own hand, to every nobleman and gentleman of this country who resided in a public character in the several cities through which [Charles] passed (Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany*, vii–viii). In other words, Sandwich enabled Charles to gain vital access to a large part of the research material on which he based his seminal work, *A General History of Music*. Charles's correspondence with Samuel Crisp reveals that the Earl's backing was again invaluable when he published *A General History of Music* by subscription: "Lord Sandwich sent me 18 great names from Hinchinbroke [sic]—& has since subscribed for 5 sets for himself' (*Letters* 1: 162–63). The appearance of the Earl of Sandwich on the subscription list with additional "great names" would undoubtedly have encouraged others to subscribe.

But not all his transactions with Sandwich proved so

lucrative. When Charles became involved in 1784 in the Handel Commemoration, of which Sandwich was a Director, he devoted much time and effort to writing a book entitled *An Account of the Handel Commemoration*. This amounted to an extensive period of work from which Charles could derive no financial gain, as he discovered that profits from the book, in common with all other proceeds of the commemoration, had to be donated to the Fund for Decayed Musicians (Lonsdale, 297–311, *Letters* 1: 423–31). Nevertheless, ever at pains to exploit his association with the Montagu family, Charles used the occasion of this book to draw to the Earl's attention the artistic talents of his young nephew, Edward Francisco Burney. In a letter to his friend Thomas Twinning, Charles reports that Edward "made 3 drawings for my Commemoration account, that the King & Queen have seen, & I was told, were *highly delighted* with" (*Letters* 1: 436).

While there is no evidence that Sandwich ever commissioned Edward to produce any artwork, there are indications that Elizabeth Montagu (1718–92) did employ him. Elizabeth was married to Edward Montagu (1692–1776), the Earl's first cousin, twice removed (see Appendix). On a visit to Elizabeth Montagu's house in Portman Square in April 1792, Frances was delighted to observe in the Great Room "elegant paintings by our ingenious Edward" (*Journals and Letters* 1: 135).[7] These paintings, according to Kerry Bristol, are believed to have been on Shakespearean themes, but so far they remain untraced (83). Sadly, despite Charles's best efforts, Montagu patronage did not create the desired route to prosperity for Edward Burney. In a letter of 1 December 1826 to her sister Esther, Frances refers to Edward's precarious financial position, commenting: "how shamefully ill must he have been paid for his innumerable, as well as beautiful works" (*JL* 12: 677). As Patricia Crown observes, Edward was "a man of extreme diffidence and reserve," a temperament which presumably inhibited his transactions with patrons throughout his artistic career (1).

For James Burney, however, the Earl's role as First Lord of the Admiralty offered the key to naval promotion as well as the

opportunity to achieve his ambition of participating in two of the most celebrated voyages of the age. In 1772, Charles and James visited Sandwich at his estate at Hinchingbrooke, where they were introduced to Captain James Cook, the naturalist Joseph Banks, and the botanist Daniel Solander. As a result of this meeting James obtained a position on the *Resolution* to sail with Cook on his Second Voyage. During this period of Montagu patronage James's naval career flourished, and after two years at sea he had attained the rank of Second Lieutenant. Continued Montagu backing not only furthered James's career in the navy but also enabled him to join Cook's next voyage. Having already set sail in December 1774 with the *Cerberus*, a ship transporting British troops to America, he was permitted to return to England, specifically on Sandwich's authority, to accompany Cook on his third voyage to the Pacific. James was duly appointed First Lieutenant on the *Discovery*, which sailed with the *Resolution* under Cook's command in February 1775.[8]

"Oh, I shall die!—Oh, I'm bit to death!"

While Frances was not a direct recipient of the Earl's patronage, I would suggest that his influence emerges in her first novel *Evelina*. In her journal, she reveals her awareness that Sandwich is the subject of political attack in the satirical press. Frances notes "I am sorry this Nobleman [Sandwich] bears so bad a Character, for he has, ever since he knew him, endeavoured most assiduously & kindly to seek oppertunities [sic] of serving my Father (*Early Journals and Letters* 2: 46).[9] The press had, in fact, dubbed Sandwich "Jemmy Twitcher" after a character in John Gay's play, *The Beggar's Opera*, who betrays his friend Captain Macheath. The association between Sandwich and Twitcher was based on the Earl's supposedly hypocritical treatment of John Wilkes, M.P., his former friend and fellow member of a notorious society known as "The Monks of Medmenham" (Rodger, 80–83, 104). Sandwich was responsible for Wilkes being prosecuted for blasphemy, following the publication of his *Essay on Woman*, an obscene parody of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, probably

intended for distribution among a few friends. From then on, the names of Sandwich and Jemmy Twitcher became inextricably linked in the public eye.

Sandwich was widely satirized by his political opponents. In *The Candidate* (1764), for example, Thomas Gray refers to "sly Jemmy Twitcher" with his "pick-pocket air," while in *The Duellist* (1763) Charles Churchill describes him as: "Too infamous to have a friend / Too bad for bad men to commend" (Gray 1, Churchill 3: 45).

When Sandwich attended a concert in 1775 at the Burneys' home, where Frances saw him for the first time, it appears that his infamous reputation was, in fact, uppermost in her mind. She writes in a letter addressed to Crisp:

> "This Evening party was closed by the En[trance] of the Earl of Sandwich–of famous Name and C[harac]ter. I thought of *Jemmy Twitcher* immediately!" (*EJL* 2: 189)

The same letter contains her description of the Earl's physical appearance. According to Frances, he is "a Tall, stout man, and looks *weather-proof* as any sailor in the Navy. He has great good humour & joviality marked in his Countenance" (*EJL* 2: 189). Her depiction of Sandwich in the guise of a sailor is an apt one, as I would argue that his exploits have a bearing on the scene in *Evelina* in which the rumbustious Captain Mirvan releases a foppishly dressed monkey into Mrs Beaumont's drawing room (399–403). Amid the ensuing uproar the clothed monkey pounces onto the fop Mr Lovel, biting his ear. Whereas Captain Mirvan finds the incident hilarious, Lovel is reduced to wailing pathetically: "Oh, I shall die, I shall die!—Oh I'm bit to death!" (401) In contrast with Mirvan's outrageous conduct and Lovel's cowardly response, Lord Orville, the hero, behaves most properly throughout the disturbance, protecting Evelina and physically ejecting the monkey from the drawing room.

This is not to suggest that Frances based the character of the "surly, vulgar, and disagreeable" Captain Mirvan on the Earl of Sandwich, a patron to whom she appears to have had

every reason to be grateful (*Evelina* 40). Mirvan is portrayed negatively throughout *Evelina*. However, the scene with Mirvan, the fop Lovel, and a monkey could have developed from Frances's knowledge of Sandwich's reputation and certain incidents with which he was known to be associated. Biographical attention has been directed at Sandwich's "shambling gait" and his "taste for boisterous horseplay" (Rodgers, 85). Joseph Cradock, a friend of the Earl and a regular participant in musical events at Hinchingbrooke, while writing favorably about Sandwich, highlights his ungainly bearing. In his account he reports:

> Lord Sandwich, when dressed, had a dignified appearance, but to see him in the street, he had an awkward, careless gait. Two gentlemen observing him … one of them remarked, "I think it is Lord Sandwich coming"; the other replied that he was mistaken. "Nay," says the gentleman, "I am sure it is Lord Sandwich; for, if you observe, he is walking down both sides of the street at once." (Cradock, 4: 165–66)

Moreover, Cradock describes an occasion when the Earl poked fun at a gentleman with foppish tendencies. While it is not clear whether Charles Burney was present at this particular incident, he certainly knew the gentleman in question; it was Dr. John Hawkesworth whom Charles first recommended to Sandwich to write the official account of Cook's voyages to the Pacific.[10] According to Cradock, Dr. Hawkesworth was considered somewhat "finical in his dress" and consequently became "subject to ridicule" (4: 185–86). He apparently declined taking a boat trip on the Thames with a group of the Earl's friends after Sandwich managed to convince Hawkesworth that he would be required to wear a "cork-wig" throughout his time on board. Furthermore, in his own correspondence, Charles Burney hints that Sandwich's lifestyle was a little too vigorous for his taste. Writing to Hester Thrale on 1 November 1777, he recounts falling ill with a fever while staying at the Earl's mansion at Hampton, which overlooked the Thames. Charles had to take refuge at the Garricks' house nearby because "his Lord$^{P's}$ is a good house for the Robust & the Jolly, but a very

bad Hospital," a sentiment he perhaps conveyed to his daughter Frances (*Letters* 1: 237).[11]

The monkey scene in Frances's first novel continues to puzzle scholars. Laura Brown examines the incident in the context of the eighteenth-century ideal of companionate marriage, concluding that it is impossible to reconcile the monkey scene "with the affirmation of marriage, manners, and patriarchy with which *Evelina* ends" (110). Patricia L. Hamilton argues that the monkey episode creates the opportunity in the novel for Frances to endorse polite gentlemanly behavior. Here, however, I want to explore two well-known anecdotes concerning the fourth Earl of Sandwich and a baboon, which, I suggest, feed into Frances's representation of the monkey's attack upon the fop in *Evelina*. In each story, as in the episode in *Evelina*, the monkey appears fully clothed. In the first incident Sandwich is the victim of a prank, which takes place in the uproarious setting of the society of the Monks of Medmenham. Here, Wilkes releases a baboon, disguised as a devil, which jumps onto Sandwich's back, causing him to cry out in great alarm. While it has been disputed whether the event actually ever happened, the story was, nevertheless, widely known at the time *Evelina* was published. Charles Johnstone recreates the scene in his novel *Chrysal: the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), which traces the life of a coin, the eponymous Chrysal, as it passes from one owner or "master" to another. In *Chrysal*, Johnstone depicts various notable characters of the age, people easily recognized by his contemporary readers. A baboon clothed as a devil leaps upon "my master's [Sandwich's] shoulders … clasping his paws around his neck, and chattering with spight [sic] at his ear" (3: 190). Sandwich is left lying prostrate, wailing "spare me, gracious devil," in much the same way that Frances has the fop call out pitifully during the monkey's attack on Lovel in *Evelina*.

The second event featuring a monkey or a baboon is alleged to have occurred at Sandwich's country seat, Hinchingbrooke House in Huntingdonshire. On this occasion, the Earl is the perpetrator of the stunt when he plays a prank on a young clergyman dining there. Thrale recounts how Sandwich announces

to the assembled company that he keeps a "domestick chaplain at home here, who always officiates" [at grace]. Sandwich then arranges for his footman to lead a baboon "dress'd in a Clergyman's Habit" into the room (*Thraliana* 1: 155). *The Public Advertiser* for Wednesday, 13 February 1771, reports an incident involving "a certain Peer not unknown in Huntingdonshire" who parades in his dining room "a large Monkey, of the Baboon species, dressed in Canonicals." The fact that an account of this amusing incident actually found its way into the press suggests that the story became common knowledge.

Upon discovering that his daughter had published *Evelina* anonymously, Charles appears to have approved most enthusiastically of her novel. He did, however, express one interesting objection, complaining: "Mirvan's trick upon Lovel is I think carried too far—I don't hate that young man enough, ridiculous as he is, to be pleased or diverted at his having his ear torn by a monkey—there's a [sic] something disgusting in it" (Burney, *Early Diary* 2: 230). It seems to me significant that the monkey scene is the focus of Charles's criticism of *Evelina*. He might have taken exception to other instances of Mirvan's violent outbursts, such as his misogynistic abuse of Mme. Duval. There is, for example, the disturbing episode in which a terrified Mme. Duval, duped into believing she is the victim of a robbery, has her feet "tied together with strong rope" and finally emerges from an overturned coach "covered with dirt, weeds and filth" (*Evelina* 149–50). Nevertheless, Charles focuses his attention on the monkey scene, suggesting that his objection relates to those two famous baboon incidents with which his illustrious aristocratic patron was associated.

Charles's success as a writer, facilitated by the patronage of the Earl of Sandwich, brought him into contact with the literary hostess Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800), a relative of Sandwich by marriage.[12] Elizabeth was the wife of wealthy landowner Edward Montagu (1692–1776).[13] In July 1773, Charles writes enthusiastically to Crisp that "Mrs Montagu has desired my acquaintance," presumably delighted at the prospect of the

opportunities offered by his introduction to so prominent a figure in London literary society (*Letters* 1: 162). Thereafter Charles frequently attended the bluestocking gatherings held at Mrs. Montagu's London home, but his involvement was sometimes of a more personal nature. Relations between the Burneys, Elizabeth Montagu, and the Thrales eventually became so intertwined that on 12 July 1778 Mrs. Burney stood proxy for Montagu as godmother at the christening of the Thrales' daughter Sophie Henrietta (*Letters* 1: 252 n. 5).

According to Thrale, Elizabeth Montagu disapproved of the vulgarity of certain characters featured in Frances's first novel. Thrale recalls overhearing her complain that "her Silver-Smiths are Pewterers … & her Captains Boatswains" (Johnson 2: 259). There is no evidence that she objected specifically to the monkey incident in *Evelina*, but the novel's rich colloquial language and depiction of low life characters, which so delighted Samuel Johnson, were unlikely to have appealed to the more genteel sensibilities of Elizabeth Montagu. She told Thrale that "she was amazed that so delicate a Girl could write so *boisterous* a Book" (*EJL* 4: 293). Nor was she the only one of her contemporaries to take exception to Captain Mirvan's coarse manner. In a letter of 11 November 1779 to Queeney Thrale, Johnson writes about a discussion at the Veseys in which "the old objection to the Captain's grossness" was mentioned (Johnson 2: 62). Nevertheless, Elizabeth Montagu offered Frances encouragement in her pursuit of a literary career. We know from her journal that Frances spent time with Thrale in the company of Elizabeth Montagu at Streatham and at Bath. During Frances's five-week visit to Chessington in the autumn of 1780, Crisp reports that "Mrs Montagu … has wrote [sic] her two letters since she has been here, soliciting her Correspondence" (*Burford Papers* 46).[14] Crisp's delight in his protégée's literary acclaim suggests that Elizabeth Montagu was keen to further her acquaintance with the celebrated author of *Evelina*.

Cecilia, Frances's second novel, is a much longer, more serious work than *Evelina* and explores complex issues about birth, status, and wealth. Such issues were far more likely to be of

interest to Elizabeth Montagu than the concerns of a seventeen-year-old Evelina visiting the metropolis for the first time. Cecilia, the heroine, has to make difficult decisions involving her three guardians, her inheritance, and complications arising from the necessity of retaining the family name of Beverley. In sharp contrast with *Evelina*, composed and published in secrecy, Frances wrote *Cecilia* under pressure, the novel being read by close friends and family members during its composition.[15] When *Cecilia* finally appeared in July 1782 to great critical acclaim, it was even rumored that Elizabeth Montagu wept on reaching the final page, "because it was the conclusion" (Chisholm 121).

Although Mary Delany is believed to be chiefly responsible for Queen Charlotte offering Frances the position of dresser at court, Elizabeth Montagu may also have affected the Queen's decision. In the spring before Frances was appointed, Montagu recalls a conversation with Queen Charlotte in which they discuss her prospective employment (Blunt 2: 267). If she did put in a good word on her behalf to Queen Charlotte, Frances most definitely returned the favor while employed at court. In 1786 Richard Cumberland satirized Elizabeth Montagu alias "Vanessa" in *The Observer*, whereupon Frances assured her sister Susan that she had defended Montagu to the Queen "as well as I was able, from this illiberal assault" (*Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* 1: 212). Almost a decade later, although disdainful of Frances's marriage to a penniless Frenchman, Elizabeth Montagu was still taking an interest in her literary career and contributed to the subscription for *Camilla* (Blunt 2: 320).

To return to the Earl's famous sobriquet, it appears that, in later life, the elderly Madame d'Arblay wished to disassociate herself from any suggestion that the young author of *Evelina* was familiar with the infamy surrounding Sandwich's "Jemmy Twitcher" reputation. Critical attention has already been drawn to Frances's practice of "editing or elaboration" of "private correspondence" in *Memoirs* (Harman xxiv). In fact, in her father's biography she makes some significant changes to a letter she includes there, which was originally addressed to Crisp.[16] In her version of the letter

in *Memoirs*, Frances removes the comment "I thought of *Jemmy Twitcher* immediately," asking Crisp instead to explain to her the derivation of the Earl's sobriquet. She inserts the question "I want to know why he is called Jemmy Twitcher in the newspapers? Do pray tell me that?" (*Memoirs* 2: 64). This substitution was perhaps intended to impress upon the readers of *Memoirs* her own youthful innocence by her supposed ignorance of the details of Sandwich's notoriety.[17] Even at this late stage in her literary career, the Montagu connection seems to have exerted an influence on Frances.

"Self-dependance is the first of Earthly Blessings"

By examining Frances's comments about the Earl of Sandwich we can glean some idea of her own views of patronage. Evidence of her awareness of the benefits Sandwich could bestow on the male members of her family is apparent in her journal. On Sunday, [2] May 1773, having heard about her brother's promotion while he is at sea, she confides "I wish he [Sandwich] may preserve his place of first Lord of the Admiralty, to the Time of Jem's return" (*EJL* 1: 252). Similarly, when Charles and James travel to Hinchingbrooke in 1774, she fervently hopes that the visit "prognosticates something good for Jem" (*EJL* 2: 45). Her knowledge of the networking her father is engaged in on her brother's behalf adds weight to the suspicion that *The Witlings* is informed by behavior she had herself observed at close quarters. In her first comedy she wickedly satirizes absurdities which occur in the world of patronage, though literary rather than naval.

While Frances is conscious of the potential rewards Sandwich's support offers, the Earl nevertheless arouses her disapproval. She notes in a letter to Crisp of Wednesday, 1 October 1 1771, how at his very first meeting with Sandwich her father had recommended Dr. Hawkesworth to edit and revise Cook's account of his "Voyage round the World." This provokes in her the following reaction:

> Yet I cannot but be amazed that a man of Lord Sandwich's power, &c, should be so ignorant of men of learning and merit, as to apply to an almost Stranger for

> recommendation. Pity! pity! that those only should be sensible of who cannot reward worth! (*EJL* 1: 174)

Written at the age of nineteen, Frances's stinging remark strikes at Sandwich's apparent ignorance in this particular instance. She highlights how, despite his position of great influence as a patron, Sandwich is lamentably uninformed about "men of learning and merit." Some years later Frances would take up the theme of an undiscerning patron in *The Witlings*, ridiculing outrageously Lady Smatter for her lack of true understanding of literary matters. It is, however, perhaps not surprising that she should be openly critical of patronage in her correspondence with Crisp, who we know encouraged her to reveal her innermost thoughts.[18] When writing to Frances, Crisp is similarly candid about his own views of certain patrons. In a letter dated April 1774, for example, he refers to "that scrub Lord Hertford" and on 27 March 1775 alludes to "such a jolly, clever d-g as Lord S—" (Burney, *Early Diary*, 1: 313; 2: 37). However, to criticize patrons in her correspondence is one thing, but to satirize them on stage is an altogether more risky venture, as Frances discovered.

Elizabeth Montagu undoubtedly, if unwittingly, had a strong impact upon the trajectory of Frances's literary career; Crisp and Charles Burney persuaded Frances to abandon *The Witlings* for fear of causing Montagu offence. In *The Witlings*, a comedy satirizing the Esprit Club, a literary society founded by a certain Lady Smatter, Frances pointedly directs her satire at literary patronage. Significantly, her satire is aimed not only at its recipients but also at those with wealth and influence. As George Justice comments: "For the play to be successful, it *had* to give offense" (206). Critical attention has been directed at whether *The Witlings* would have offended Elizabeth Montagu, had it been staged, and on the likelihood of Frances becoming a successful playwright, if her comedy had not been suppressed by Crisp and Charles Burney.[19] In the context of my essay, I shall look primarily at possible connections between Elizabeth Montagu and the underlying theme of dependence/independence in *The Witlings*.

Whereas Frances's choice of subject matter for her first

comedy may, as Karen J. Ray argues, reflect her own "lack of judgement," I would suggest that it betrays her overwhelming dislike of patronage, a dislike she found impossible to conceal (70). At the time that Frances was in the process of composing her play at Streatham, Thrale describes her as "so restlessly & apparently anxious lest I should give myself Airs of Patronage, or load her with Shackles of Dependance," a remark which underlines not only her revulsion to receiving patronage but also her difficulty in hiding these feelings (*Thraliana* 1: 400). In contrast, Thrale remarks of Charles, "If he has any Fault it is too much Obsequiousness," which implies that Frances's father knew all too well the necessity of pleasing patrons to secure their favors (*Thraliana* 1: 368). Charles's reluctance to risk causing offence to so influential a figure in literary circles as Elizabeth Montagu is hardly surprising.[20] At the time that his daughter wrote *The Witlings*, he was in his early fifties and had spent a lifetime treading carefully "amid the Smiles of Wealth and Power."

Frances's claim that none of her characters were based on people she actually knew seems highly questionable as Lady Smatter's overbearing attitude towards her nephew and heir, Beaufort, would appear to point to Montagu's dictatorial treatment of her own nephew and adopted heir, Matthew Robinson.[21] When writing about the education of Montagu's nephew, Wraxall comments that "at her [Elizabeth Montagu's] feet he was brought up," implying that Matthew was required always to be submissive to the wishes of his aunt (4: 378). Although Frances does not mention Montagu's high-handed manner towards Matthew in her own journal, she was most certainly aware of it. Thrale recalls Frances contributing to a heated discussion at Streatham about Montagu's dictatorial treatment of her nephew. As Jane Spencer observes, this incident "strengthens the idea that there is some reference to Montagu in Lady Smatter" (69).

According to Thrale, rumor had it that Elizabeth Montagu reprimanded her nephew for knocking too loudly at her door, sending a servant to tell him to wait until he possessed a door of his own before knocking in such a manner. My interest in this

anecdote lies in Frances's reaction to the rumor: "If she *did* says Fanny Burney—why with *me* such a speech would cancel all Obligations" (*Thraliana* 1: 412). This response offers insight into her own aversion to patronage as well as her readiness to express her views publicly. The two other participants in the discussion were Thrale and William Seward (1747–99), both of whom were Frances's superiors in terms of wealth and position. She was at this time after all a long-term guest of Thrale, who had tirelessly publicized *Evelina* within her social circle, while William Seward was a gentleman of considerable wealth. In contrast, Frances's social position relied primarily on her talent and her acclaim as a writer. It seems remarkable that in these circumstances Frances should express her opinion about a patron so outspokenly.

In *The Witlings* it is Beaufort, the dependent nephew, who gives voice to Frances's contempt for those in the literary world who are powerful but undiscerning: "To a very little reading, they join less Understanding, and no Judgment, yet they decide upon Books & Authors with the most confirmed confidence in their abilities for the Task" (1: 233–36). While much of the humour of *The Witlings* derives from Frances poking fun at the absurdities of members of the Esprit Club, the serious issue of dependence recurs throughout the play. Through Beaufort, Frances emphasizes the indignities suffered by the dependent relative when he describes his own "corroding servility of discontented Dependance" (2.249–50). In a most chilling and threatening way, Lady Smatter spells out to Cecilia the absolute necessity of Beaufort obeying her wishes: "young men … when they have no independance, & are of no profession, they should be very cautious how they disoblige their Friends" (2.712–15). Significantly, in her comedy Frances allows Beaufort to triumph over his domineering aunt, allotting to him the final speech of the play. Beaufort's words represent far more than a mere conventional happy ending; they provide a means of enabling the hero and heroine finally to marry. They express a heartfelt rejection of patronage and an assertion of the extreme value of independence.

The association between Elizabeth Montagu and *The Witlings*

through her relationship with Dorothea Gregory should also be considered. Frances first became acquainted with Elizabeth Montagu and Dorothea Gregory, her young companion, at the Thrales' in Streatham while in the process of composing her play.[22] Frances and Gregory understandably became friends; they were of a similar age and background with fathers who had successful professional careers but lacked the necessary resources to provide for their daughters financially. While there is no suggestion that Frances considered Gregory's position with Elizabeth Montagu to be especially servile, she must nevertheless have been acutely aware of her limited choices for an independent life. This theme permeates *The Witlings* through the experience of the heroine Cecilia, who loses her fortune and is consequently forced to contemplate a future of "abject dependance" as a companion (5.295).

Indeed, the plight of the humble companion prompts some of the most biting satire in Frances's comedy. There is Lady Smatter's bitterly comic assessment of Cecilia's future after losing her fortune: "Nothing is so difficult as disposing of a poor Girl of Fashion … She has been brought up to nothing,—if she can make a Cap, 'tis as much as she can do" (3.202–03, 2.623–27). The revealing name of "Mrs Simper, my lady's Woman" speaks volumes about the deferential manner some companions are forced to assume. At the beginning of *The Witlings* Frances stresses her heroine's independence as a wealthy heiress when she introduces Cecilia to the audience as "a young Lady with a Fortune all in her own Hands" (1.82–83). However, by Act 5, having lost her wealth, Cecilia is left with no alternative but to become resigned to a fate of "servility and dependance" as the prospective companion of Mrs Hollis, a lady about to travel abroad. At the end of her comedy Frances leaves the audience in no doubt about the desirability of being able to choose one's own destiny; it is the last thought she conveys before the curtain falls. Beaufort addresses the final words of the play directly to the audience. His speech represents a total rejection of the "shackles" of patronage, extolling instead the value of an independent life: "Self-dependance is the first of Earthly

Blessings" (5.1082–83). There is a certain irony in that, to allow for the play's happy ending, Beaufort delivers this speech shortly after he has discovered that he will retain both his inheritance and his fiancée. Nevertheless, by placing his words at the very end of *The Witlings*, Frances emphasizes the seriousness of the message.

Frances and Gregory both managed with great difficulty to extricate themselves from a fate of being "disposed of" by those in authority. Gregory narrowly avoided a loveless marriage to Elizabeth Montagu's nephew, while Frances, after being conveniently "disposed of" at court by her father, eventually escaped after five unhappy years in possession of an all-important pension. Ironically, then, despite the strength of her aversion, patronage eventually provided Frances with her longed-for independence.

APPENDIX

Edward Montagu (1532–1602)

Henry Montagu, 1st E. of Manchester (1563–1642)	brothers	Sir Sidney Montagu (1581–1644)
Hon. James Montagu (1608–65)	1st cousins	Edward Montagu (1670–1729), 1st E. of Sandwich
James Montagu (1639–76)	2nd cousins	Edward Montagu (1648–88), 2nd E. of Sandwich
James Montagu (1673–1747)	3rd cousins	Edward Montagu (1670–1729), 3rd E. of Sandwich
Capt. John Montagu (1719–95)	4th cousins	Edward R. Montagu (1692–1722), Visc. Hinchingbrooke
	4th cousins, once removed	John Montagu (1718–92), 4th E. of Sandwich

Edward Montagu (1670–1729), 1st E. of Sandwich

Hon. Charles Montagu (1658–1721)	brothers	Edward Montagu (1648–88), 2nd E. of Sandwich
Edward Montagu (1692–1776)	1st cousins	Edward Montagu (1670–1729), 3rd E. of Sandwich
	1st cousins, once removed	Edward R. Montagu (1692–1722), Visc. Hinchingbrooke
	1st cousins, twice removed	John Montagu (1718–92), 4th E. of Sandwich

NOTES

[1] Hereafter referred to as *Memoirs*.

[2] For more on Charles' social graces, see his brother-in-law, Arthur Young (23).

[3] Captain John Montagu (1719–95) was the fourth son of James Montagu (1673–1747) of Lackham, Wiltshire, cousin of the 4th Earl of Sandwich, and Elizabeth Eyles (1671–1741). For details of Montagu's naval career, see *Commissioned Sea Officers*, ii. 635, and Charnock, v. 480. For correspondence between Captain John Montagu and the 4th Earl of Sandwich, see Barnes and Owen, vol. 1.

[4] See *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney, 1726–1769* 139 and n. 1.

[5] "Old Lady Sandwich" is a reference to the grandmother of the 4th Earl of Sandwich. Elizabeth Wilmot (1669–1757), daughter of John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, was married to Edward Montagu (1670–1729), 3rd Earl of Sandwich. After her husband's death, she moved to Paris where she lived for the remainder of her life.

[6] John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, was the son of Edward Richard Montagu (1692–1722), Viscount Hinchingbrooke, and Elizabeth Popham (1693–1761). He succeeded his grandfather, Edward Montagu (1670–1729), 3rd Earl of Sandwich, at the age of 10.

[7] Hereafter referred to as *JL*.

[8] See G. E. Manwaring for a full account of James' naval career.

[9] Hereafter referred to as *EJL*.

[10] On Cradock's friendship with Charles Burney, see Cradock, 4: 168.

[11] Hampton, a mansion on the edge of Hampton Green, near the Thames, was occupied by Sandwich from 1775 to 1780. See Cradock, 1: 153.

[12] Elizabeth Montagu, née Robinson, married Edward Montagu in 1742. Her correspondence indicates that she and her husband were on good terms with Sandwich. Elizabeth knew Dorothy, Lady Sandwich, née Vane (1717–97), before her marriage;

they exchanged visits at Hinchingbrooke and Sandleford. Elizabeth became godmother to Sandwich's second son. On Edward Montagu's admiration of Sandwich's "great talents" and "amiable qualities," see Climenson 1: 240. After her husband's death Elizabeth continued to have a high regard for the Earl (see Blunt, 2: 281).

[13] Edward Montagu was a grandson of Sir Edward Montagu (1625–72), 1st Earl of Sandwich. His father, a fifth son, was the Hon. Charles Montagu (1658–1721) of Belford, Northumberland. Edward's mother, Sarah Rogers, inherited the valuable coalmines of the Denton Hall estate from her nephew John Rogers (1685–1758), which, on her death, passed to Edward.

[14] On Crisp's dislike of Elizabeth Montagu, see *EJL* 4: 75.

[15] On *Cecilia's* lengthy composition process, see Parisian, 2–10.

[16] For Frances's original letter without the question about Jemmy Twitcher, see *EJL* 2: 179–92. See Harman's "My Immense Mass of Manuscripts" for an analysis of Frances's treatment of her father's papers.

[17] On Frances's use of *Memoirs* to present herself as she wishes to be remembered, see Hudson, 220–52.

[18] Crisp writes "Dash away, whatever comes uppermost—the sudden sallies of imagination, clap'd down on paper, just as they arise" (*EJL* 1: 320).

[19] Margaret Anne Doody concludes that "if *The Witlings* had been staged we would now remember Frances Burney as a predecessor of Pinero or Ayckbourn" (98).

[20] On the respective roles of Charles and Crisp in suppressing *The Witlings*, see Skinner 198–201. Francesca Saggini's interesting discussion of the comedy's suppression highlights Charles's anti-theatrical prejudice, based on his own humble origins (131).

[21] Frances's reference to Beaufort's "unlucky resemblance" to Elizabeth Montagu's nephew suggests she regards it as an unfortunate coincidence (*EJL* 4: 9).

[22] See Rizzo for more on the relationship between Elizabeth Montagu and Gregory.

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