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Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

MARILYN FRANCUS

Volume 15 of *The Burney Journal* focuses on Frances Burney and her many engagements with politics: the politics of courtship, the royal court, the British empire, and the icon of Roman empire, Cicero.

In "'Tis best to build no Castles in the Air': Romantic Fantasy meets Economic Reality in Frances Burney's *Court Journals*," Lorna J. Clark analyzes Burney's narrative of her encounters with Colonel Stephen Digby in July and August 1788. In Clark's reading, Burney writes herself into a courtship narrative, in which she is "a low-born maiden wooed by an aristocratic male," namely Colonel Digby. Burney finds Colonel Digby attractive because of his good manners and his sorrow over the recent loss of his wife, but his interest in her is not amorous, even though Burney perceives it to be so. Digby was from an established, aristocratic family, and he was looking for a woman with a sizable dowry to bolster his finances and with social and political connections to enhance his status and that of his children. Burney, with her small salary and the profits from her novels and her connections among the literati, did not qualify—she did not even come under consideration. As Clark suggests, Burney was not thinking about her role (or her lack of a role) in Colonel Digby's narrative as she was writing in her journal. When Digby married an heiress—as others suggested to Burney that he would—Burney's romantic fantasy collapsed. For Clark, this interlude with Colonel Digby signals that Burney was not always a reliable narrator in *The Court Journals*, and the events of 1788 shaped not only Burney's courtship narratives in the later novels but also Burney's reading of economics.

Geoffrey Sill turns to *The Court Journals* for his analysis of Burney's responses to the French Revolution. Sill focuses on 1789, the beginning of the Revolution in France, and the many conversations that Burney recorded in England as news of the Revolution crossed the Channel. Burney was determined not to speak about politics while working as the Queen's Keeper of the Robes—lest she reveal information about the court or take a stance that might reflect ill upon

the royal family. Yet Burney is surrounded by political display, and as the court travels, the contrast between the warm reception that King George III receives and the rebellion against the French royal family is stark. Sill contextualizes Burney's political conversations during this time: from the series of letters with her father, a Tory monarchist, who rails against the French revolutionaries, to her conversations with Lord Mountmorres, who discusses the defection of the guards and the clergy from Louis XVI and the ways that their repudiation of monarchical authority leads to the revolution. As Mountmorres suggests that British game laws and tithes might lead to revolution in England, Burney begins to re-evaluate her ideas about political authority and the ways that it is wielded. According to Sill, Burney "absorbed the constitutional and economic issues that underlay the agitations in France, rather than dismissing the Revolution as the effect of the bites of mad dogs or the mindless action of the mob." As Burney veers from her father's political positions towards a more sympathetic and comprehensive understanding of the events in France, she starts, as Sill suggests, "down a path that will lead her, a few years later, to a little party of *émigrés* at Mickleham and the next chapter of her life."

Tara Ghoshal Wallace's essay centers on Burney's knowledge of India, her representation of the Hastings trial in *The Court Journals,* and her understanding of empire. As Ghoshal Wallace demonstrates, Burney's knowledge of India came from a variety of sources: her brother James's journeys there; her brother-in-law Clement Francis, who served as a surgeon under Hastings; and her half-brother Richard's sojourn in India. The Hastings trial brings to the fore Burney's multiple allegiances and associations and the delicate social and political waters that Burney must navigate: Burney is a member of the Court that staunchly supports Hastings, but she is also friends with a number of Hastings's prosecutors, including William Windham and Edmund Burke. As Ghoshal Wallace writes, "Her need to observe decorum despite her partisanship [for Hastings], her misery at having to rebuff the friendly advances of Burke and other prosecutors, her anxiety that the palace will be blamed if she exhibits hostility to those connected to the managers: these add up to an almost intolerable set of psychological pressures as Burney witnesses and records the political spectacle of the

empire under attack." That Burke wholeheartedly supported Burney's literary career despite their political disagreements indicates that Burney navigated these difficult situations successfully. But Ghoshal Wallace also suggests that Burney's experience of the Hastings trial subsequently shapes her understanding of empire in *The Wanderer*: "Burney's final, complexly historical novel, despite her support for one of the prime movers of the imperial project, reproduces the ill effects described by his primary antagonist. Burney's politics of empire defends the character and good intentions of Hastings but ultimately aligns itself with the anxieties articulated by Burke."

The masquerade scene in *Cecilia* opens Kirsten Hall's analysis of Burney's response to Cicero in "Tully's the Fashion." As a Frenchman masquerades as Ciceronian, he draws attention to the cultural fascination with the famed Roman politician, who was perceived as an icon of virtue, elegance, and enlightenment. The Frenchman fails to embody the Ciceronian ideal, however, and Hall argues that "Burney exposes her society's affectation of Ciceronian virtue—an affectation that mirrors the hypocritical self-fashioning that Cicero himself may have been guilty of" in her novel *Cecilia*. Hall lays the groundwork for her argument with a thorough excavation of Cicero's presence on the eighteenth-century cultural landscape. As Hall demonstrates, England was in the throes of Ciceromania: not only were Cicero's writings readily available, but his image appeared everywhere, including on frontispieces, shop signs, clothing, jewelry, and sculpture. Cicero's reputation for virtue fueled much of this Ciceromania, but his private correspondence suggested that his public persona was carefully crafted, and perhaps Cicero was less than upright. Burney was well aware of the Cicero fest and the questions regarding his reputation; while she admired Ciceronian virtue, she was less than enamored of his ambition, his self-fashioning, and the celebrity culture in his wake. In Hall's reading, *Cecilia* is Burney's "meditation on fame and virtue" with a heroine who, like Cicero, strives for both virtue and fame. Cecilia's ambition to live a virtuous life raises questions—not only about the nature and the practice of virtue but of the power of fame and ambition—that we still grapple with today.