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Editor's Note

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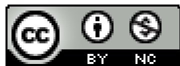

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Editor's Note

MARILYN FRANCUS

This volume of *The Burney Journal* focuses on issues of nation, community, commerce, and identity. The Warren Hastings trial (1788-1795) generated endless discussions of national identity as people scrambled to get tickets to attend the trial that served as a referendum on Britain's imperial ambitions. Lorna J. Clark's essay, "A Study in Dialogue: Frances Burney Attends Warren Hastings's Trial," analyzes Burney's journals not as eyewitness documents of the trial, but in light of Burney's literary practice. Clark argues that Burney reads this very public, national event in light of her understanding of character and in terms of discourses of private, interpersonal relations. Burney asserted Hastings's innocence largely based on meeting him socially, and while she analyzed the trial in light of her experience with the participants and spectators, she also experimented with ways to represent the dynamics of those personal encounters—the hesitations, the silences, the strategies of influence. As Clark demonstrates, Burney's discussions with William Windham in the spectators gallery read like courtship banter, and as the public and private intersect, Burney advances female intuition and experience as sources of judgment that are more accurate than the masculine logic of the court.

The intersections of nation and identity are central concerns of Andrew Dicus's essay, "*Evelina*, *The Wanderer*, and Gothic Spatiality: Frances Burney and a Problem of Imagined Community." Dicus argues that Burney uses the spatial conventions of Gothic literature—unknowable spaces, spaces in which the boundaries are permeable and insecure—in order to raise questions in her fiction about nationalism, definitions of community, and individual identity. The opening of *The Wanderer* locates Burney's characters in the Channel between England and France, in a liminal space not unlike the indeterminate identity of Juliet, the protagonist, who embodies the constructed community onboard the ship even as she challenges its status. Juliet is inscribed upon throughout *The Wanderer*; she is tolerated but not accepted within the communities she encounters, and her presence elicits anxiety and attempts to stabilize community that never fully succeed. Similarly, Evelina's unknown identity also puts pressure on the existing social order, and like Juliet, Evelina fails to fit in the communities she encounters: London society and

her biological family. Evelina's experiences in disorienting spaces (the walks at Vauxhall and the excursion to see the fireworks) evoke Gothic anxieties of identity as well. For Dicus, Burney's use of the Gothic presents a political counter-narrative in which the form of nation and community—as a function of permeable boundaries and customs—supersedes the content, the vision of nation and community as rational, stable, and legitimate.

While Andrew Dicus's essay locates Burney's work in terms of Gothic space, community, and identity, Kate Hamilton focuses on urban space and the development of the individual in "London and the Female *Bildungsroman*: Frances Burney's *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *The Witlings*," the Hemlow Prize winner for 2009. Hamilton argues that London is the crucial factor that shapes Burney's female protagonists. As Evelina Anville, Cecilia Stanley, and Cecilia Beverley desire to experience the city, they struggle to maintain a sense of privacy and a sense of self. Their narratives are shaped by the social challenges that they grapple with: understanding urban behaviors; responding appropriately to urban characters (including fops, cits, and fashionable women); managing the male gaze, public attention, and their reputations; and negotiating the worlds of fashion and leisure. These social challenges reveal the class tensions in the city, the feminization of consumer excess, and the vulnerability of women. Yet as Hamilton argues, confronting these challenges forces Evelina Anville, Cecilia Stanley, and Cecilia Beverley to grow up, and amidst the chaos of the city, Burney's protagonists learn to maintain their sense of propriety as they forge new, urban identities of their own.

Alicia Kerfoot turns to a particular fashion item, footwear, to work through political, social, and personal identity in "Declining Buckles and Movable Shoes in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*." For Kerfoot, fashion has a political valence as the decline of the shoe buckle in the late 1780s corresponds to the rise of Revolutionary principles and changing class relations in England. Aristocratic privilege and luxury in *Cecilia*—like the display of ostentatious shoes and buckles—leads to personal ruin and violence. Yet shoes and buckles also serve as metaphors in Burney's novel, for Cecilia is characterized as an ornament of fashionable society. Cecilia is caught between her economic identity as an heiress and her moral identity, at once sought after (ostensibly to adorn someone) and subject to the vicissitudes of fashion. As Cecilia is susceptible to the workings of moral sympathy, for she often puts herself in someone else's shoes, she must learn to balance her declining economic position with her moral identity. Kerfoot argues that Cecilia acquires that balance and that Burney's novel indicates that Cecilia achieves a type of happiness that will make her more resilient in the face of violence or revolution.

Fashion, fashionable society, and the French Revolution also shape

Stephanie Russo's essay, "Would it be pleasing to me?: Surveillance and Sexuality in Frances Burney's *Camilla*." While Evelina could commit social gaffes with minimal consequences, Camilla cannot, and Russo argues that the French Revolution is a key factor for this shift in Burney's work. The French Revolution generated anxieties about the possibility of an English revolution—anxieties that were manifest in England in the characterization of women as deviant, dangerous, and requiring ongoing control. (The figure of Marianne as a symbol of the French Revolution and the history of Marie Antoinette were not lost upon the British.) Burney's Camilla often exacerbates such anxieties through her clothing, both in its style and expense and in her desire to participate in fashionable society—which leads to reactionary responses from male characters, relentless surveillance, and further repression of female behavior. Rather than claiming that Burney advocates a liberal, feminist position or a counter-revolutionary conservative stance in *Camilla*, Russo contends that for Burney, the French Revolution highlights existing tensions in British society and heightens the recognition of existing injustice, but it does not justify patriarchal power nor lead to lasting social change.

As these essays demonstrate, Frances Burney was preoccupied with the effects of national politics, economics, and society on the individual. Through literary experimentation, Gothic convention, and metaphors of space, place, and fashion, Burney documents the individual's struggle for agency and autonomy in her time.

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