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Barbara Darby, Dalhousie University

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Financial and Social "Discrimination" in Frances Burney's Comedies

BARBARA DARBY

(Dalhousie University)

Novelist Frances Burney explores the rise and fall of monetary and circumstantial fortunes when familial ties are solidified or broken, social contacts prove legitimate or deceptive, and characters' true worth is recognized, or obscured by misunderstanding, coincidence, or deliberate subterfuge. Dramatist Frances Burney also explores these concerns. Her plays depict characters—especially female characters—who are overwhelmed by political operatives who threaten, pursue, imprison, and wound them, sometimes fatally. Her tragedies deal primarily with how political (governmental, religious, familial, and monarchical) power benefits and punishes people. In Burney's comedies, it is fair to say that financial status is depicted as the force that overwhelmingly affects characters. However, Burney's consideration of the power of money is significantly inflected by her concern with money's relationship to status and the literally incalculable, because non-quantitative, markers deemed to indicate social superiority. In the worlds of Burney's comedies, nearly everyone wants money, but money alone is shown to be insufficient if one lacks the social graces and discriminating tastes that divide the merely rich from the rich and socially powerful. Burney shows the nature of making, having, and spending money and maintaining social superiority to be part of a larger process of class

solidification that creates an index of what social relationships are acceptable, and what are objectionable.

Eighteenth-century Britain witnessed considerable alterations to the manner in which members of a community related to each other, and how these relationships were influenced not only by the amount of money to which one had access, but the source of that money and the symbolism attached to different modes of acquiring money and spending money. According to Thomas William Heyck, we can best envision social connections in the early part of the century as working along a vertical rather than horizontal axis, with loyalty and affiliation expressed "to social superiors, not to fellow workers."[1] However, Heyck goes on to observe that "by 1815, Britain was well on the way to being a class society—that is, a society organized into three large, self-conscious, and hostile 'layers' of people...becoming aware that its members shared interests and experiences, as opposed to the interests and experiences of the other classes."[2] Social rank was determined by property ownership, which was at least theoretically available to anyone with ready money. The world of status, however, was never determined simply according to quantity, and anxieties about just how status and privilege were to be determined, and how money flowed between people, were important matters. Burney's comedies were written in this pre-1815 period, and they contemplate exactly these questions: what is the best type of money to have, with whom do you identify because of your money, and how much status can money buy before non-financial traits overwhelm other criteria for social acceptance?

Burney's comedies *The Witlings*, *Love and Fashion*, *A Busy Day*, and *The Woman-Hater* all feature characters, conflicts, and resolutions that can be read in this context of class solidification and wealth and status consciousness. In these plays, the horizontal affiliations that Heyck discusses are evident, and are shown actively to be replacing a vertical world of patronage and deference. Social cohesion at society's upper levels is enacted by the invocation of financial and non-monetary standards. The middling world of working people, also united by common interest, is shown to be making direct or surreptitious incursions into the world of the monied elite, only to be defeated in this attempt more often than to be successful. Burney couples the increased affiliation between characters with similar socio-financial backgrounds with an intense desire on the part of society's upper ranks that changes to

social rank be limited and that a world of old-fashioned patronage and deference be resurrected. The result is a rather conservative view of social organization: in Burney's comedies, upwards social mobility is criticized and often prevented in subtle ways by the authority and "discriminating taste" of people with inherited wealth, and downward mobility is prevented for genteel characters, but permitted for those whose "nature" rather than "nurture" fates them for a life of work rather than leisure. Of course, variations in characterization mean that this observation is general, but the same pattern recurs often enough to merit examination. In all of Burney's comedies, a burgeoning sense of class consciousness is evident to some degree, and this consciousness is demonstrated on the stage by Burney's attention the characters, dialogue, setting, and resolutions in her comedies.

The simplest distinction between Burney's characters is that between the non-working, genteel characters, and characters who work. Of course, one could say that most comedies of the period include "masters" and "servants." However, Burney uses both setting and dialogue to draw particular attention to different sources of money and to bring working characters to a level of conscious consideration. The contrast between working and leisured characters in *The Witlings*, written in 1778/79, allows Burney to explore how different attitudes towards money and obligation forge the horizontal affiliations of commonality that differ from the vertical affiliations of obligation and deference that for Heyck characterize the earlier part of the century. In *The Witlings*, the genteel characters are mainly portrayed in the realm of misused leisure time, while the working characters are shown coping with customers who do not pay them. The heroine Cecilia's fortune is entrusted to Stipend the banker, and procures her the favour of her beloved Beaufort's aunt and benefactor, Lady Smatter. Her banker's losses, however, separate her from Beaufort and thrust her into the world of the unemployed and socially exiled because Lady Smatter rejects her fitness as Beaufort's fiancée. Beaufort laments his own dependence on Lady Smatter, suggesting that he would prefer instead the happiness of those "who to their own industry owe their subsistence, and to their own fatigue and hardships their succeeding rest, and rewarding affluence."[3] Cecilia does take initial steps towards finding a job. However, she laments that she must "expose [herself], like a common Servant, to be Hired...submit to be examined, and hazard being rejected...should servility and dependence be [her] lot" (5.239-66). On the brink of

becoming another woman's companion, ironically because the woman who formerly held the post "of a sudden married a young Gentleman of Fortune" (5.219), Cecilia's downfall is halted—just as the coach is at the door—by a repentant Beaufort, and she remains affiliated with her leisured cohorts.

Opposed to Beaufort's romanticized versions of work and Cecilia's panic are the working peoples' horizontal affiliations. Cecilia's lost wealth damages the credit she has established with milliners who *can* and *do* take care of themselves. While the working characters express a sense of a vertically directed reliance upon their social superiors, they routinely do *not* express deference, and statements that sound deferential are proven to be either marketing schemes or self-promotion. A shopkeeper's polite direction to an apprentice to show a gentlewoman some ribbons is immediately undermined by the whispered command to pass "last year's" (1.70) off as this year's. This setting and its inhabitants, which Margaret Anne Doody has described as novel for the period's drama,[4] are shown operating according to their own rules. The milliners, with their own internal hierarchy, speak freely and critically about their clients, distribute inferior goods to self-important Citizens, and keep customers waiting for service or ignore them entirely. That such rules of business refute the traditional ability of the genteel to demand quality and promptness is certainly related to Sandra Sherman's very interesting discussion of *The Witlings*'s concern with an "emergent industrial discourse" about the use of time.[5] As she notes, the play contrasts how working people use time, as opposed to those characters for whom leisure is "parodic, drawn towards the protocols of work but negligent of its ends."[6]

The dialogue of the working characters develops a sense of a much larger social group than that onstage, a network of tradespeople who share concerns in common with each other, and distinct from those of their "betters"—in short, a working class. Thus, while we *see* Mrs. Wheedle and her employees, we also hear that because of the "Gentlefolk breaking" (5.8), Mr. Mite, the cheesemonger is "quite knocked up" (5.9); "Mr. Grease, the Tallow Chandler...is quite upon the very point of ruination" (5.126-8); and there is "nothing but ruination going forward from one end of the Town to the other" (5.17-18). Certainly, a commercial relationship is one of mutual dependence, but Burney is careful to differentiate types of dependence from each other. Her

delineation of characters' common cause is both a reflection of and contribution to the formation of the class consciousness that Heyck discusses.

Part of what maintains socio-financial distinctions between people in *The Witlings* is how Burney resolves the threat of downward social mobility. While Cecilia's financial losses are less dire than originally supposed, another solution to her difficulties is specific to the leisured people for whom money can be used for ends besides the subsistence levels that are connected with Mrs. Wheedle and Mrs. Voluble. The pride of Lady Smatter, who has misguided literary-critical pretensions, is played against her when the curmudgeonly Censor forces her either to acknowledge Cecilia as Beaufort's fiancée or suffer literary infamy in the press and coffeehouses. Cecilia is also presented with a monetary gift which further saves her from the position of an "unportioned" (5.899) woman. The strings attached to this gift do not tie its recipient, but Lady Smatter, for the £5000 is meant "in Spite to Lady Smatter" (5.897). More importantly, the bribing of Lady Smatter makes obvious the idea that Cecilia's restored money alone is not enough to procure acceptance and with money but no social approval, she has still lost a great deal. The resolution to the lovers' problems lies only partially in the world of finance; they are aided when a leisured gentleman comes to the rescue with money circulated outside market considerations, a gift that circumvents financial instability and the "dunning" of the workforce. The world Cecilia moves into momentarily is that identified in *Cecilia* by D. Grant Campbell, where "traditional power structures are defied by the subjection of those who govern to their creditors."[7] An anxiety about this topsy-turvy world is quietened in *The Witlings* by the combined forces of a generous gift and a leisured woman's self-importance.

The Witlings is Burney's first comedy. Despite this play's portrayal of a type of class consciousness in the working characters and a romantic idealism in the leisured characters, the play's view of finance and rank is less complex than the treatment of these same issues in her later comedies. As Heyck notes, "[u]nder pressure from below, the British landed oligarchy between 1793 and 1815 became conscious of the need to stand shoulder to shoulder and protect their power."[8] James Raven suggests that while in practice, a gentleperson could be someone from low origins who purchased rank, most writers "tried to insist upon the impossibility of a full conversion to gentility" by "highlighting

extremes of current practice and by creating outcasts to illustrate model conduct and the bounds of acceptability."[9] In the late comedies, Burney develops ideas about social distinctions introduced in *The Witlings* by showing "real" gentility to be a self-policing designation that relies on money, approval, *and* "good" qualities and a "discriminating" taste. The intensity of the insistence on "quality," it would seem, is directly proportional to the extent to which social insularity is threatened.

In *Love and Fashion*, written approximately two decades after *The Witlings*, a strong connection between financial income and expenditure and morality is made and a moral education is transmitted to both the characters and the audience. Virtue and wisdom is found in characters who spend the money they inherit for the good of others, rather than because of extravagance or pride. Much of the attention in the play is focussed on members of Lord Exbury's family, plagued as they are by the combined forces of his eldest son Mordaunt's gambling debts and his brother Ardville's pride and greed. Lord Exbury, his daughter, and his sons Mordaunt and Valentine have been ordered out of Exbury's brother Ardville's home. Lord Ardville has just been refused as a suitor by Hilaria, Exbury's ward, because she favours Valentine, but Ardville believes the Exburys are really after his estate and commanded Hilaria's refusal in order to secure it for themselves (2.2.8-10).

In the Exburys, Burney depicts a peculiar set of characters who are actually *in the process* of "downsizing." The transition in living standards is represented visually by Burney in her use of setting. The play opens in the "*Servant's Room*" (1.1) with a discussion between servants Dawson, Davis, and Innis about their employers. This initial concentration on employees serves, as does the milliner's shop setting in *The Witlings*, to emphasize sources of money: there are people who make money, and people who simply "have" money. The dialogue focuses on these different sources of money and the personalities associated with each source. Old money is connected by Lord Exbury's servant Davis to naturalness and admirability: Exbury's is the "natural Estate,...being no more than what comes to him from Father to son" (1.36). The Lord "never thwarts [his servant] in any thing" (1.1.54-55) and so Davis holds a sufficiently high regard for him that he later offers to work for him for free. The universally disliked Lord Ardville, by contrast, "got his title" after acquiring a "great fortune" by marrying well in India (1.1.32-33). Avaricious and proud, he is the only figure that

could be identified as a stereotype of a "nabob" in Burney's plays. In fact, while Ardville was "always pretty unbearable" (1.1.34), it seems that his overseas machinations and suspect origin of his wealth have actually made him twice as unpleasant as he was before.

When we first encounter Lord Exbury himself, he is announcing that he is selling his London house, renting out his country seat and renting a cottage instead (1.2.128-47). The latter transaction is an immediate necessity, because Lord Ardville, with whom he has lodged, has ordered their departure. The family is about to enter "Three or four years of retirement and oeconomy [that] may yet retrieve [the] fortune and credit" (2.1.40-41) of his son Mordaunt and of the family, by extension. In act two Lord Exbury prepares for the actual departure itself when he announces "All is now ready for our removal" (2.1.74), and the sound of the horses (2.1.105) draws the audience's attention to the removal itself.

That the Exburys are ruined by gambling is yet another way in which Burney examines the connection between morality, money, and status. Contemporary views of gambling implied that the "extravagance of unthinking individuals could bring about not only their own ruin but that of the whole nation."[10] However, Mordaunt is surprisingly unaffected by his folly, professing an enduring interest in his own fashionability and a lethargic attitude towards his family's fate. Perhaps Burney is developing a contrast between two sets of elder and younger brothers in order to show that virtue rather than hereditary privilege must always motivate action. Lord Exbury, the elder, is plagued by his younger, greedier brother Ardville's demands, who wants to maintain his foreign-made fortune intact. Valentine, the younger, has an independent fortune, but nevertheless is on the verge of sacrificing himself to save his extravagant elder brother Mordaunt. In both cases, virtue overcomes pride and selfishness, and virtue comes from both elder and younger brother. Mordaunt seems to be depicted as rather more foolish than wicked, while Lord Ardville is never redeemed because his active greed and pomposity wholly characterize him.

Hilaria decides to accompany the Exburys to their cottage, a decision through which Burney can explore Hilaria's wavering between a rich but unpleasant suitor and a poor but romantic attachment, because Hilaria sees her changed surroundings as symbolic of the wider implications of a loss of money. Though Hilaria loves a younger, inheriting brother, his family is ruined, and he is on the path to ruin

himself. The tempting source of new money brings with it grandeur but a taint of colonial exploitation and marital unhappiness. Burney depicts these alternative preferences through setting: Hilaria is introduced in a "*magnificent Drawing Room*" (1.2), but later finds herself in "*An ordinary Parlour*" (2.3). The visual effect of these scenes, easily staged with the use of interior sets revealed by shutters, could be used to Burney's advantage in her effort to show not only the source of wealth, but the lifestyles that accompany it.

Hilaris does not waver for long, however, because she is the recipient of the primary moral lesson of *Love and Fashion,* which promotes admiration for genteel, traditional forms of alliance and expenditure. As James Raven notes, it was not so much the possession of wealth that came under fire at the end of the eighteenth century, but the "misuse of wealth" that was associated with the tag "Fashion."[11] Hilaria longs for a life of luxury; she is introduced to us heralding the next party in London, and she will never "marry, till [she] can unite Love with Fashion" (1.2.41-2). Her cousin, Sir Archy Fineer, whose name indicates his shallowness, plays on Hilaria's love of fashion and tries to lure her to make an advantageous match by mentioning items that a contemporary audience may have identified as signs of conspicuous consumption: a coronet, equipage, pin money, a Box at the Opera, a pharo table. The fashionable life that Sir Archy represents, and the repetition of the word Fashion itself, may be signals about contemporary moral attitudes because the word, as Raven observes, denoted a "social evil [that] prompted and was prompted by the association of 'Luxuries' with worthless consumer products."[12]

Hilaria moves away from the evil world overwhelmed by "the dominion of Fashion" (5.2.47) towards a moderate lifestyle accepted for the sake of love. When the Exbury family has to "downsize" to a cottage, Hilaria's initial distaste is conquered by a new attitude towards "country life" previously misjudged for a lack of "stately dwellings, where luxury satiates the very wishes, and a superfluity of domestics makes even the use of our limbs unnecessary." She starts to walk and is charmed by "rural Liberty" (3.2.436-39). Her alignment with the country rather than London, symbolic of all that was corrupt financially and morally, awakens her moral sensibility. She is further convinced by an encounter with farm labourers who live on love. As the Wood Cutter says to his fiancée, the Hay Maker, "How could I prove my true love, an

I were rich? I will work—that Thou mayst feed: I will labour,—that Thou mayst be cloathed" (4.3.97-98). The example of these plain folks in part encourages Hilaria to leave the expenditure, luxury, and fashion behind and value country living and money spent charitably on gifts for others rather than for herself.

The chastisement of the younger Exbury son, Valentine, is the other force that convinces Hilaria to leave off fashion. He tells her that humans should be above such concerns because they are "gifted with descriminative faculties...a sense of virtue" (5.2.79-80). She is caught by him adorned with jewels from Lord Ardville, but is finally "drawn from the vortex of dissipation and Fashion" (5.4.301-2). These same jewels grant Valentine the release from a Bailiff, keep the Exbury family intact, and permit the couple's marriage because Lord Ardville does not want to look the fool. New wealth, because of the pride of its possessor, is at least partially transferred to the family branch that inherits its status and values good will and domestic rather than foreign virtue, as Lord Exbury says: "What is there of Fortune or distinction unattainable in Britain by Talents, probity, and Courage?" (5.4.291-93). Virtue is allied with familial inheritance, England, and rural life, while Fashion and greed are connected with overseas business, city life, superficiality, and a veneer of gentility.

However, while Hilaria's morality is awakened and the Exburys' financial crisis is averted, other characters are less successful. In addition to the menservants Davis and Dawson, Burney develops the character of the maid Mrs. Innis and introduces a "companion" figure, both of whom, like the inheriting and fortune-hunting lords, widen the play's range of attitudes towards money. Mrs. Innis believes a bogus fortuneteller's announcement that she will marry well, but though she awaits a declaration from a gentleman, none is forthcoming. Her position as a servant is instead reinforced by the repeated gesture of payment for her obedience to gentlemen (3.2.312, 604). The improbability that a gentleman will propose to her is in fact part of what the play relies upon for its humour. She concludes that "no good comes of waiting for Young Gentlemen" (5.4.99). As Burney shows by introducing but limiting the chance of a servant's upward social mobility, "Fortune or distinction" are not universally probable, and it may be that the extent to which the fortuneteller's prediction is both fulsomely believed and improbable is meant to reflect the discrepancy in fortune between a servant and a lady.

Litchburn, the companion, is a figure of the past who lives according to vertically defined rules of patronage and extreme deference. The world for which he longs, where deference is both worthwhile and honourable, is described by Heyck:

> In return for their patronage, patrons demanded deference, which included postures of gratitude, loyalty, service, and obedience. If a man felt entitled to claim assistance from his superior, he also felt it right to defer to that patron's opinions and wishes.... Deference was not regarded as servile, but as honorable
>
> ...[P]atronage and deference, more than force, held the society together. This was made possible by the fact that people were connected to each other by face-to-face relationships up and down the social hierarchy.[13]

At the end of the play, an anachronistic re-enactment of these old ways takes place: Litchburn's main antagonist throughout the play is ironically his entirely unsympathetic superior Lord Ardville, who fosters patronage less for the mutual enhancement of social alliances across ranks than to encourage a yes-sayer. A world where patronage is a system benefiting rich and poor alike, in Ardville's hands, becomes a system benefiting only the rich. By contrast, Lord Exbury as patron and employer is clearly meant to represent a virtuous patriarchal figure who can direct wealth charitably rather than selfishly, refusing either to hoard or to spend extravagantly. Litchburn's reward at the play's close, despite his thickheaded literal thinking, is to come under the wings of good Lord Exbury, who "shall make it [his] peculiar business to take care of [him]" (5.4.312-13). Although Exbury has suffered extreme financial trials, it is to him that other characters turn for guidance and clarification. He directs Hilaria towards taking Valentine as her husband and giving up Ardville's jewels and he clarifies the mystery of the Strange Man's identity. His closing language speaks of a middle path: "let your desires be as moderate as your affections are disinterested" (5.4.320-21). His financial management and benevolence, and his son Valentine's offer to take on Mordaunt's debts and enter the army, are more examples of the transfer of money out of generous rather than capitalist inclinations, like Censor's gift to Cecilia, and unlike Mrs. Wheedle's demand for payment.

Neither Innis nor Litchburn is granted any more notice than patronage and employment, and neither rises in status; their unfitness for

social elevation is, however, rather more assumed than stated. Burney's late comedies, *A Busy Day* and *The Woman-Hater*, both show characters who are explicitly and vocally barred from elevated social positions on the basis that they are undeserving of them, or furthermore, that they are happier "in their place." *Love and Fashion* connects spending patterns with the extra-monetary quality of morality. In the last two comedies, this idea is extended, so that almost exclusively extra-monetary factors are the mechanisms by which class self-consciousness is encouraged and the resulting sense of social cohesion is based not on goodness but on pride. The more often new money can purchase the trappings of rank, the more necessary it is to find extra-monetary ways to keep the designation of "true" rank unattainable for outsiders. Raven argues that at the end of the eighteenth century, the single largest social group that was ridiculed in literature was the *nouveau riche* who were tagged with the vice of pretension: "[m]isuse of wealth...also plainly involved concepts of taste and propriety, and was entangled, like the ideas surrounding the accumulation of wealth, with judgements upon the acceptability of social mobility.... [G]reatest hostility was directed to those misdirecting fortunes amassed in a single working career."[14] In *A Busy Day*, it is particularly against this growing group that Burney shows her genteel characters exercising innovative exclusions and evaluations.

A Busy Day includes the family of a *nouveau riche* retired tradesman, a working businessman, the gentry, a prematurely returning *para*nabob and a nabob's heiress—but these groups are shown to have little if nothing to do with one another. The only financial exchanges of any importance occur between people with inherited wealth rather than "made" money and with the discriminating breeding that they themselves deem as desirable. Here Burney takes great pains to show that social acceptability does not inevitably accompany increased wealth. The Wattses in *A Busy Day* are very wealthy, but they do not have the comportment that renders them "genteel." They can only parrot "refinement." Raven observes that the meaning of vulgarity changed during the eighteenth century. Formerly a term used to designate someone "commonplace" or "ordinary," it later meant "deviance from standards of taste," and disparity between social actions and status.[15] It became increasingly attached to the *nouveaux riches* as a term designating their rank as bogus. The newly rich woman in particular was identified in literature of the period by her conspicuous consumption, often shown in her fashions, and the tradesman was identified by his

inability to maintain proper familial order.[16] Burney uses both of these stereotypes in her depiction of the Wattses.

Mr. and Mrs. Watts and their elder daughter, Margaret, are notable for a number of reasons. We have repeated reminders that their fortune has been made quickly, has elevated them from the meanest beginnings, and is now being used wastefully. We hear, for instance, that the father was an "errand boy" (1.322), the mother a maid, and the younger daughter was clothed in hand-me-downs (1.299) because they were (the pun is appropriate) "poor as Job" (1.300). Their rise in fortune has thus occurred in about eighteenth years. The word "vulgar" occurs over a dozen times in reference to the Wattses, and their extravagance is indicated by the use of costumes and the dialogue via which they draw attention to their clothes, coach, and servants. Mrs. Watts refers to her new shoes repeatedly (they are too small—perhaps a sign of big-footed coarseness!), and Margaret speaks conspicuously about her hat and dress. As a retired businessman, Mr. Watts feels forced into extravagance, "to leave off my things now as good, and better than I used to buy them at first," to have his "wig dressed every day! And to wear my best coat to dine in!" (3.287-90). Other rich men actually scorn signs of frugality: "if you talk to any of 'em of getting a shoe mended, or any thing a little saving, they'll stare at you as if you was out of your mind" (3.298-300). There is some sympathy evoked by this character, though, because he is so nostalgic for a time when he was allied with other businessmen who respected him, rather than being unaffiliated with rich men who ignore him: "as long as business did but go on,...then I was somebody!" (3.248-49). The implication is that he would have been happier to stay with his class. He no longer runs his business or his family: his wife and daughter rule the household, and take his money with "never a word, just as if it was their own gaining" (3.258-59).

While the *nouveaux riches*' misuse of money is mocked by Burney, who Raven claims "popularized the vulgar trader,"[17] the misuse of money by the gentry is also satirized. Sir Marmaduke, a landowner, is conspicuous not in his consumption but in his hoarding. He laments any loss of money, from a rise in interest rates, or the loss of a hayrack on his land, or the death of a man who has not repaid a debt. Despite his love of money in the abstract, though, Marmaduke does have scruples about the source of money. Where the familial line is concerned, his elder nephew, Cleveland, must marry someone of distinction, and someone who can pay

off the mortgage; a younger nephew, Frank, can marry whomever he likes.

The fiancée Cleveland chooses is Eliza, the younger Watts daughter who has spent most of her life in India as the ward of the now-dead Mr. Alderson. A series of misunderstandings are cleared up over the course of the play, including Cleveland's discovery that he is called home to an arranged marriage to Miss Percival, his brother Frank's efforts to court Eliza, and his aunt Lady Wilhelmina Tylney's horror at the prospect of an alliance with a businessman's daughter. Although Lady Wilhelmina's prejudices against businesspeople are denounced by Cleveland and others, Cleveland's actions disprove his full acceptance of the City family. Eliza's acceptability to the Tylneys depends finally on her having enough money to pay the mortgage, but importantly, she is also deemed by Lady Wilhelmina to have fine breeding, while her parvenu family is uncompromisingly rejected as vulgar. Even though she was adopted by Mr. Alderson, her fortune is still inherited, and as such is more acceptable than money made in business; further, as Raven clarifies, a benevolent nabob who distributed his wealth wisely was acceptable[18] and Eliza repeatedly mentions Mr. Alderson's goodness of character. Upward social mobility without "taste" or any aspect of inheritance thus accomplishes little when it comes to the actual day-to-day acceptance of people like the Wattses by people like the Tylneys.

Any possible negative association of Eliza and Cleveland with the new wealth of the nabob is neatly avoided in *A Busy Day*, though Burney does use the play to comment on attitudes towards Indian people. With the exception noted above, Raven observes that nabobs were next to *nouveaux riches* businessmen in being objects of scorn in England at the end of the century.[19] As Hannah Cowley has a character observe in *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780) that at a recent auction, "the nabobs and their wives outbid one at every sale, and the creatures have no more taste—" than to put a picture of a London mayor in the nursery.[20] Burney circles around the figure of the nabob but does not depict him, focussing instead on the family of a former tradesman. Certainly Cleveland has been seeking a living in India, but has been recalled after one year, which has "broken up, in so peremptory a manner, the rising promises of [his] own industry" (1.209-10). Thus, though Cleveland was in the process of making money for himself, he gains an inheritance *before* he can become identified with the men who return to England conspicuously rich. Because Eliza is a *woman* who *inherits* the money made in India, she

does not play the same role socially as a *wealthy man* returning from India. Equally important, her money is converted almost immediately into an investment in land for a genteel family, not contributed to her vulgar family. Though Cleveland's final speech professes his admiration for the middle-class merchant, whose work is "the source of our Splendour, the Seat of integrity, the foster-Mother of Benevolence and Charity, and the pride of the British Empire" (5.909-11), the money that ensures the begrudgingly accepted marriage is inherited money. For Cleveland, the virtues of businesspeople are ironically "foster-Mothered" and not "hereditary," though his wife-to-be claims for herself a foster-father's fortune.

If the wealthy Wattses are unacceptable because they can only badly parrot the behaviour of the "real" gentry, in *The Woman-Hater* gentility is shown to be imitable at least momentarily. A young woman of a poor family was made to impersonate the daughter of a better-off family, as in *Evelina*, and is finally removed from her imposed position by the coincidental arrival in one location of the "real" and "false" daughter and the reunion of estranged parents. But while gentility is exposed in this last comedy as a set of behaviours that anyone can imitate, and while Burney intensely satirizes those who are misguided or mean-spirited and rich, a rather conservative message emerges from the play: the idea that members of the same class have a "natural" affinity for one another, that their "true" natures cannot be forever hidden by disguise, and that all are happiest "in their place."

In a fashion similar to Sir Marmaduke, who seems obsessed by money, Sir Roderick is obsessed by the idea that he is preyed upon by those who would take advantage of him. In his eyes, money is an entitlement to land, goods, and emotion and he mean-spiritedly seeks to protect a vertical hierarchy of respect that he fears is slipping away. Against the accusation that he is angry, he responds to one servant, "who the devil may be anger if I mayn't? Ha? Who has a better right? Can you tell? A'n't I your Master? A'n't you all my hirelings? Who pays for the house that shelters you? Who pays for the cloaths that cover you? Who pays for the food that crams you till you are all sick? Why I, I, to be sure" (1.7.34-38). He fears that his employees are eating him out of hearth and home, all without regard for gratitude or service to him. Like Ardville, he would be happiest in a world that grants to those who deem themselves socially superior the right to demand deference without any

benevolent compensation. And his fears about encroachment are not entirely paranoid. As the ranking gentleman of the area, his social position is well acknowledged and his ability to "make someone's fortune" is sought after by Old and Young Waverley, his steward, the steward's nephew, "Miss Wilmot," his sister Eleonora, and his niece Sophia. However, Sir Roderick's view of inheritance is capricious and linked not to blood but to performance: his heir must publicly profess a hatred of women. Perhaps this character's financial principles indicate a view that arbitrary priorities were inappropriately replacing traditional paths of inheritance. This error is corrected when, at the end of the play, Sir Roderick is shown to be "making friends again with Nature" (5.23.89) when he heals his breach with the formerly beloved Lady Smatter and abandons his woman-hating, righting the idiosyncratic impulse in favour of restored faith in love.

Lady Smatter is similarly indictable for wrongful expenditure on the basis of vanity and pretension. She is a self-appointed local literary patroness. Unlike other characters—especially Mordaunt in *Love and Fashion*, or his more extreme novelistic counterpart Harrell—who ruin themselves through gambling, Lady Smatter's "necessary expenses" are literary pieces: "but last week that sonnet cost me ten Guineas!...And the beginning of this, the inscription of that tract was fifteen...and...the dedicatory ode this morning has cost me twenty" (1.11.34-37). Burney seems less to be making an argument against patronage than she is arguing against patronage that is misdirected because of a lack of discernment. Lady Smatter is almost "ruined" because she has no cultivated taste. Her pretension to intellectual rather than social rank is thus not only is a waste of money, but misdirects money that would more properly be spent on helping the poor, an activity that a proper gentlewoman would regard as a fully acceptable way to participate in the local economy. As she says, once odes are purchased, "how is it possible to provide for all one's indigent Relations?" (1.11.41-42). For Lady Smatter, when it comes to choosing between blood and water, the merest imitation of literary pursuits is sufficient to merit the disinheritance of family, and so she elevates Jack Waverley's claims to Sir Roderick's fortune over her own niece's because he professes a poet's sensibility. Lady Smatter, too, though, seems to come to her senses, and appears in the final scene as a "herald of Peace" (5.23.12).

Sir Roderick and Lady Smatter have their senses awakened, so their symbolic value as misguided members of the aristocracy is

mitigated. Another character who pursues money through more desperate and illegal rather than immoral means (although she is also the pawn of another person's scheme) also voluntarily gives up her pursuit. The imposter daughter, Joyce, frees *herself* of the tag of the fortune-hunter[21] when her mother/Nurse's ruse is revealed. She embraces instead the opportunity to work. Unlike other characters, whose movement towards the working world is feared and halted finally by a financial salvation, or whose pretensions are self-cultivated rather than imposed by others, Joyce eagerly seeks work and she revels in "being herself" when the jig is up. She quickly overcomes her ideas of dismay: "I can't scrub rooms—and I won't scrub rooms!—And I can't turn ballad singer, and—yes, I can, though! That I can" (4.8.82-84). When her adoptive father offers her his continued financial support, she declares that she cares little for it and is eager to forgo all of the material trappings of financial and social rank, including a library full of books, leaving them to someone else. She will finally be allowed the exuberant physicality she has suppressed for so long.

Joyce's love of work certainly emancipates her from a domineering father and points to the oppressive world of leisured passivity that a genteel woman endured. However, despite Joyce's ability to imitate gentility, Burney indicates by the prevention of Joyce's upward mobility that there is a sort of "natural" propensity for some people towards work and that they are happier in the station to which their birth destines them. The play also shows that the working characters have an affinity for each other and that they are united in their anti-intellectual interests, just as the "true gentility" of the "real" daughter Sophia and her mother are apparent to viewers. Joyce declares she will marry Bob, a lowly oaf who cannot read. Social hierarchies are confirmed by the mutual interests of people within a class and the lack of correspondence between those of differing ranks. This is more than a matter of money; though Joyce retains her imposter father's financial support, she is decidedly removed from the horizontal affiliations that unite him with his wife and "real" daughter, and we sense she will seek out the company of the other servants in the play. At the close of *The Woman-Hater*, lines of birth and once-thwarted romantic connections return to their "natural" paths, past wrongs are righted, and the social order is restored.

Issues such as where money comes from, how it is circulated, and how money and personal qualities affect social position are all of primary importance in Burney's comedies. Burney shows resolutions to conflict that uniformly prevent the downward mobility of the heroes and heroines who seem entitled by birth to an elevated status, and the upward mobility of lower-rank characters. At the same time, she seems to grant social power to people with older forms of wealth or with wealth united with good sense and virtue, as if to imply that in lieu of inherited money, adherence to a life of virtue is the only valuable quality that might garner social acceptance. The solidified stratifications in social rank that she shows in her comedies are accompanied by a sense of a strong mutual interest between members of similar financial backgrounds, be they inheritance, business, trade, or domestic service. This sense of mutual interest, and the different discriminations Burney represents where money and status are concerned, can be read in the context of an emerging class consciousness in England at the end of the eighteenth century, when the meaning of wealth and status was being thoroughly renegotiated and redefined, and not entirely without a longing for a time when such negotiations were not necessary.

Notes

[1] Thomas William Heyck. *The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History From 1688-1870* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992), 55.

[2] Heyck, 245.

[3] Frances Burney, *The Witlings, The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor et al., vol 1 (Montreal &Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1995), 3.259-61. All subsequent quotations are from this edition, cited by act, scene, and line number where these designations are available.

[4] Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1988), 77.

[5] Sandra Sherman, "'Does Your Ladyship Mean an Extempore?' Wit, Leisure, and the Mode of Production in Frances Burney's *The Witlings*," *Centennial Review* 40:2 (1996), 401.

[6] Sherman, 409.

[7] D. Grant Campbell, "Fashionable Suicide: Conspicuous Consumption and the Collapse of Credit in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*," *Studies in Eighteenth-century Culture* 20 (1990), 135.

[8] Heyck, 245.

[9] James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 239.

[10] Raven, 186.

[11] Raven, 169.

[12] Raven, 158.

[13] Heyck, 60-61.

[14] Raven, 181.

[15] Raven, 138.

[16] Raven, 142-44.

[17] Raven, 145.

[18] Raven, 228.

[19] Raven, 222.

[20] Hannah Cowley, *The Belle's Stratagem, The Other Eighteenth Century: English Women of Letters 1660-1800,* ed. Robert W. Uphaus and Gretchen M. Foster (East Lansing: Colleagues P, 1991), 293.

[21] Doody, 308.