"How is our Blue club cut up!": Frances Burney's Changing Views of the Bluestockings

Hilary Havens, University of Tennessee

Frances Burney's perception of the Bluestockings, the famous eighteenth-century women's literary circle, has often been interpreted through her comic play, *The Witlings* (1779). It is generally believed that *The Witlings* fictionalizes the group and its leader Elizabeth Montagu as Lady Smatter and her literary club, who are frequently the targets of Burney's satire and the audience's derision. Many critics, such as Elizabeth Eger, Betty Schellenberg, and especially Margaret Anne Doody, link Burney's portrayal of the witlings with her reticence towards or even disdain of the Bluestockings.[1] Burney herself makes this connection apparent in her projected revisions to the play; she acknowledges "the unlucky resemblance the *adopted Nephew* [in *The Witlings*] bears to our *Female Pride of Literature*," Elizabeth Montagu.[2] In a letter of 29 August 1779, her father Dr. Charles Burney declared that his "objections [to the play] all fall on the Stocking-Club-Party – as my chief & almost only quarrel was with its Members. As it is, not only the Whole Piece, but the *plot* had best be kept secret, from every body".[3] Charles's fear about the plot's discovery by the real-life "Stocking-Club-Party" led to *The Witlings*' complete suppression by February 1780, despite Burney's "intention to make further radical changes to the text."[4] Like Charles, most critics have interpreted the play as Burney's trenchant critique of the Bluestockings, part of a larger cultural backlash against the group that peaked towards the end of the eighteenth century.[5]

But to interpret *The Witlings* as the embodiment of Burney's views on the Bluestockings gives only a partial perspective. In fact, Burney's relationship with the Bluestockings, focalized here through her relationships with three of the principal members, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Hester Chapone, underwent a complete transformation by the time she published her

father's biography, *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* (1832), which contains glowing tributes to the group and its members. This essay seeks to explain the radical change in Burney's attitude towards the Bluestockings, which corresponds with her romantic embarrassment regarding George Cambridge. Though little discussed, Burney's inclinations for Cambridge and membership in the Bluestockings were explicitly and humiliatingly linked in the 22 March 1783 issue of the *Morning Herald*:

> We hear, from undoubted authority, that two rising stars in the *blue* firmament are shortly to move in the same system: to the lady we are indebted for *two* much admired works; and though the gentleman has not yet favoured us with any *printed* production, yet the inhabitants of the parts adjacent to P[ortlan]d P[lac]e have long been instructed and improved by his learned discourses; we shall now no longer be in want of a pattern of conjugal behaviour, as the lady is well known to be the *great reformer* of this dissipated age![6]

Celebrated as the author of *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782), Burney is clearly the "lady" who has written "*two* much admired works," while Cambridge, a clergyman, was known for "his learned discourses." They also frequently met at Bluestocking gatherings, a fact emphasized in the first sentence of the paragraph: "two rising stars in the *blue* firmament." This "fatal paragraph," as Burney termed it in a letter to her sister Susan of 11 April 1783, weighed heavily on her mind and was frequently mentioned in her journals; nine months after its appearance, on 26 December 1783, Burney called it "the most cruel action that ever had been done to me."[7] This paragraph is the culmination of a series of published connections between Burney and the Bluestockings following her abandonment of *The Witlings*. This unwelcome publicity coincides with Burney's coldness towards the group, including Elizabeth Carter, whom Schellenberg and

Betty Rizzo have argued was exempted from Burney's disapproval.[8] This essay seeks to clarify Burney's status as a "second generation" Bluestocking and more particularly her attitude towards them, which was shaped initially by *The Witlings* and contemporary newspaper accounts and which later deepened into an appreciation far warmer than the skepticism that critics like Vivien Jones have observed.[9] *The Witlings* should not be viewed as the sole or primary documentation of Burney's views of the Bluestockings. Only a broad trajectory of her work – from her early journals and *The Witlings* through her companion comedy *The Woman-Hater* (1802) and later life-writings, namely "Consolatory Extracts," written no earlier than 1809,[10] and the *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* (1832) – can give a more complete account of her relationship with the Bluestocking circle, which evolved beyond any early animosity or negative feelings to sincere and public admiration by the end of Burney's life.

Early Journals, *The Witlings*, and the Newspapers

Shortly after the publication of her first novel *Evelina* (1778) catapulted her to fame, Frances Burney began and documented her friendships with members of the Bluestocking circle, including their leader Elizabeth Montagu and with Elizabeth Carter and Hester Chapone, two prominent members with whom she was close. By 1780, Elizabeth Carter was best known as a poet, translator, and writer. She was a celebrated polyglot who understood Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic. Norma Clarke declares, with no degree of exaggeration, that "Elizabeth Carter was the most highly regarded learned woman in England" by her contemporaries.[11] One of the main reasons why Carter was admired, according to Judith Hawley, was because "her proficiency in domestic skills to a large degree saved her from the general censure directed against learned ladies."[12] Carter's rare combination of erudition and feminine refinement is probably why Burney "long languished to see [her]." After

their meeting on 4 June 1780, Burney wrote that "She is really a *noble* looking Woman, – I never saw Age so graceful in the *female* sex yet, – her whole Face seems to *beam* with goodness, piety & philanthropy."[13] Burney similarly recorded strong first impressions of Hester Chapone, who formed an important friendship with Elizabeth Carter.[14] Though not as learned as Carter, Hester Mulso was a highly educated woman, with knowledge of French, Italian, and some Latin. She had gained renown as Samuel Richardson's correspondent in 1750-51, arguing against arranged marriages and advocating for women trusting their own judgment and emotions when selecting a partner. Following the death of her husband John Chapone only ten months after their marriage, Hester Chapone returned to writing and the public eye in the 1770s as an author of advice literature.[15] Chapone had attained the height of her fame when she appeared in Frances Burney's life-writings; in a letter of 30 April 1780 Burney recounts second-hand from her friend, Miss Gregory, "'such an Eloge of Evelina! – such a Description of You! – 'tis from Mrs. Chapone, too.'" Burney's commentary on this exchange – "There's for you, – who would not be a blue stockin*ger* at this rate?" – shows that she is flattered by Chapone's attention and even desirous to be included among the Bluestockings.[16]

Burney's early impressions of Elizabeth Montagu, the "Queen of the Blues," were not as glowing as those of Carter and Chapone, but were still largely positive. As she prepared to meet her on 16 September 1778, Burney semi-facetiously referred to her as "our sex's Glory," writing afterwards that "*My expectations*, which were *compounded* of the praise of Mrs. Thrale, & the abuse of Mr. Crisp, were most exactly answered, for I thought her in a *medium* way."[17] In a letter to her father of 18 April 1780, Burney's view of Montagu had warmed – "allowing a little for parade & ostentation, which her power in Wealth, & rank in Literature offer some excuse for, – her Conversation is very agreeable, – she is always reasonable & sensible, & *sometimes*

instructive & entertaining" – and after Montagu's departure, she acknowledges in letters to her father and sisters that she truly misses her company.[18] However, Burney did have reasons to be reticent towards Montagu. Montagu did not like *Evelina* and was hesitant to support Burney's dramatic ambitions, comparing her with Henry Fielding, who "was so admirable in Novel writing, [he] *never* succeeded when he wrote for the stage."[19] Burney's perceived antipathy towards Montagu could also be filtered through the real antagonism that her male mentors felt towards the leader of the Blues. On the day of her first meeting with Montagu in 1778, Samuel Johnson famously counseled Burney, "fly at the *Eagle*! – *down* with Mrs. Montagu herself!"[20] And Samuel Crisp, her surrogate father, advised her in a letter of 19 January 1779 not to accept Montagu's offer to read Burney's play in advance, arguing that "this same *seeing it* (in a profess'd Female Wit, Authoress, & *Maecenas* into the Bargain) I fear, implies too much *interference* – implies, *advising, correcting, altering,* &c &c &c – not only so, but in so high a Critic, the not submitting to such grand Authority, might possibly give a secret, conceal'd lurking offence". Crisp goes on to counsel that "the whole be *all your own – all of a Piece*…I would not give a pin for the advice of the ablest Friend, who would not suffer me at last to follow *my own* Judgment, without resentment," advice that would turn out to be hypocritical. After all, Crisp – along with Burney's father – was one of the main censors and suppressors of *The Witlings*.[21]

Perhaps Crisp had some inkling that *The Witlings* would cause "offence" to the Bluestockings and especially Montagu, despite Burney's written praise of Carter and Chapone and clear respect for Montagu. Though Doody has argued that other women – such as Hester Thrale and Burney's stepmother Elizabeth Allen – could have been models for Lady Smatter,[22] it is generally accepted that the leader of the "witling" group and target of much of the play's satire

is a fictionalized version of Montagu. The sanctimonious Censor describes Lady Smatter as an "insufferable Being, for having, unfortunately, just *tasted the Pierian Spring*, she has acquired that *little knowledge*, so dangerous to shallow understandings, which serves no other purpose than to stimulate a display of ignorance."[23] Her name "Smatter" obviously derives from the smattering, or no real depth, of knowledge that she possesses. Moreover, she has few inner virtues to compensate for her lack of solid knowledge: she is a "Cruel, unfeeling Woman!" who threatens to "disinherit" her nephew Beaufort "incontinently" if he marries the newly-penniless Cecilia.[24] She only approves of their marriage at the end of the play to preserve her reputation, which Censor threatens to sully with lampoons and ballads if she withholds her consent.[25] Despite these negative characterizations, several critics have sympathetically interpreted Lady Smatter as a critique of patriarchal educational restrictions on women, including Barbara Darby, the author of the only monograph on Burney's plays, who contends that Lady Smatter is the victim of Censor.[26] While Darby, perhaps, goes a bit far, her argument that the character is a warning against men's educational exclusion of women is convincing, even despite Lady Smatter's shaky morality. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Lady Smatter is a criticism of female literary society members, if not members of the Bluestocking circle itself.

Burney's forced abandonment of Lady Smatter and *The Witlings* in February 1780 did not correspond to a distaste for the Bluestockings since her journals and letters written later that year contain the warm impressions of Carter, Chapone, and Montagu mentioned above. Her interest in the group actually began to dampen around the middle of 1781, as she became increasingly associated with the Bluestockings in print. The growing distance between the women is apparent in a letter of 31 May-3 June 1781, in which Burney disdainfully records a paragraph from the *Morning Post*: "Miss Burney, the sprightly writer of that elegant Novel,

Evelina, is domesticated with Mrs. Thrale, as Miss Moore is with Mrs. Garrick, and Miss Carter with Mrs. Montague." Burney's response reflects her extreme chagrin at being cast as Hester Thrale's dependent and being publicly linked with the Bluestockings: "It is, however, most insufferably impertinent to be thus dragged into print, notwithstanding every possible effort & caution to avoid it. There is nothing, merely concerning myself, that can give me greater uneasiness, for there is nothing I have always more dreaded, or more uniformly endeavoured to avoid."[27] Months later, Burney had a similar response as she recorded "the verses in the news paper where they poked me in with all the *belles Esprits*". The short poem she mentions was printed in the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* on 12 March 1782 and "record[s] in story, / Such as shine their sex's glory!" Burney, in fact, is placed in the same couplet as Carter, only a few lines above Chapone, as the poem concludes with a lengthy compliment to Montagu:

> *Carter's* Piety, and Learning,
> Little *Burney's* quick discerning…
> Let *Chapone* retain a place,
> And the mother of her grace…
> Fertile-minded *Montague*!
> Who makes each rising art her care,
> "*And brings her knowledge from afar*!"
> Whilst her tuneful tongue defends,
> Authors dead, and absent friends…[28]

Burney must have been irritated with the diminutive reference to herself, especially in comparison to the more dignified descriptions of Carter, Chapone, and Montagu, but was most of all displeased at the public notice of her talents. She complained in a letter of 16 March 1782 to

Susan, "In such honourable Company, to repine at being placed, would perhaps be impertinent; so I take it quietly enough, but I would to Heaven I could keep clear of the whole!"[29] Little did she suspect that the verses were probably written by her father, whose reaction was the complete opposite of his daughter's: he was "so *delighted*" that he "carries them [the verses] constantly in his Pocket, & reads them to every body!"[30]

Burney's increasingly distanced herself from Carter, Chapone, and Montagu through the end of 1782 and into 1783, as she continued to be linked publicly with them in conversation and in print. Her life-writings from November 1782 show that she met with Chapone infrequently and communicated with her only indirectly through mutual friends.[31] In a conversation with Hester Thrale on 27 October 1782, Burney reveals her discomfiture with the "comical to excess" personal praise she has received from the public and recasts it as a physical insult against the other Bluestockings: "the truth is, that the people, hearing I am an Author, & seeing me neither as wrinkled as Mrs. Montagu, as old as Mrs. Carter, as fat as Miss More, nor as deformed as Mrs. Chapone, know not where to stop in their *personal* preference".[32] Burney's impolitely direct language, especially her words regarding Chapone, is another indication of her detachment from the three women. Her coldness towards the Bluestockings continued through July 1783, the month she alluded to Samuel Hoole's poem "Aurelia, or the Contest" (1783) in a letter to Susan. As in the verses from the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, Burney is mentioned alongside Carter, Chapone, and Montagu:

> 'Twas I directed CARTER's piercing eyes
> To roll inquisitive through starry skies;
> To her the lore of Grecian schools I brought,
> And rooted in her heart the truths she taught.

I, to CHAPONE, th'important task assign'd

To smooth the Temper, & improve the mind….

I stood, a favouring muse, at BURNEY's side

To lash unfeeling Wealth, & stubborn Pride,

Soft Affectation, insolently vain,

And wild Extravagance with all her sweeping train;

Led her that modern Hydra to engage,

And point a HARRELL to a mad'ning Age:

Then bade the moralist, admir'd & prais'd,

Fly from the loud applause her talent rais'd.

Ev'n MONTAGU my aiding hand must own,

That plac'd her high on Learning's polish'd throne,

That taught her arm the critic spear to wield,

Foil'd the sly Gaul and drove him from the field…[33]

Hoole's passage celebrates the talents of the Bluestockings, though instead of being diminished in comparison to her peers as in the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, Burney arguably reaps the highest and most extended acclaim because of her memorable characterizations, particularly Mr. Harrel from her recently published *Cecilia*. Initially, these verses did not appear to cause Burney the same amount of discomfort as the earlier verses, though in a journal entry for 18 December 1783, Burney recounts being "put…abominably out of Countenance" at being asked by an acquaintance "to repeat *my own share* in that poem!"[34] Her discomfort at the newspaper verses and Hoole's poem corresponds not only with a dislike of publicity, but also with her growing distance from the Bluestockings during this period.

Of course, the published notice that troubled Burney the most and which she mentioned multiple times in her journals over a series of months and years was the "fatal paragraph" of 22 March 1783 that connected her romantic feelings for George Cambridge with their mutual association with the Bluestockings. Burney had admired George Owen Cambridge since January 1783: he was ordained in the Church of England, and his family owned an estate at Twickenham and occupied a higher social position than the Burneys.[35] Much of Burney's avoidance of the Bluestockings during this period stems not merely from her distaste for publicity, but moreover from the increased scrutiny that their association carried, particularly the social embarrassment at the exposure of her private romantic inclinations. On 25 November 1783, Burney recorded her "disappointment & chagrin" that Chapone had heard the "cruel report" regarding Burney's possible attachment to Cambridge, likely an allusion to the *Morning Herald* paragraph. Burney concedes that "her own observations I doubt not confirm it; for she happened, most unfortunately, to sit next me at Mr. Pepys, on that Evening when Mr. G[eorge]: C[ambridge]. there, as one other at Mrs. Montagu's, braved all difficulties to talk with me, & stood facing me, & chatting, all the Night."[36] In her journal for the next day, Burney's diction emphasizes that her growing distance from the Bluestockings is linked to her romantic insecurity regarding George Cambridge: "I came Home so sick from Mrs. Chapone, with the apprehension of perhaps meeting Mr. G. C. in public Company, that I only rejoiced I escaped an Invite from Mrs. Montagu before I knew he was to be there. What I shall do I know not, – what I *can* do to silence a report so full of mischief. What on Earth can thus have kept it up?"[37] The *Morning Herald* is explicitly on Burney's mind in her diary of 17 January 1784; after mentioning George Cambridge's arrival at a party, Burney writes, "I, now, wished Miss Gregory gone, – for she is my *worst* fear, having herself spoken to me of that odious paragraph." At that same party,

Burney records her annoyance with Elizabeth Montagu who also circulated the rumors: "*I* wanted *no* explanation, & vexed I was at Heart; – *She* has never ever seen us *speak* to each other, & probably supposes we now speak no more, – yet still keeps alive her suspicions, & bursts forth with them as certainties!"[38] Even as late as 22 May 1784, Burney mentioned "the Paragraph" in her journal in relation to the continued suspicions of her friends regarding George Cambridge.[39] As the "fatal paragraph" weighed on her mind for more than a year, Burney virtually cut ties with the Bluestockings, acknowledging her extended absence in a journal entry for 24 April 1784: "Mrs. Montagu engaged me for Saturday next, & Mrs. Chapone for Wednesday se'night. I have absconded so long, that I must now go a general round."[40] As a celebrated female author, there is a limit to Burney's ability to escape the group, and she casts her return as a duty rather than a pleasure.

Later Writings from *The Woman-Hater* to *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*

Almost two years after the publication of the "fatal paragraph" and after Burney had given up all hopes of George Cambridge's reciprocal affection, her attitude towards the Bluestockings began to warm, though this shift has been little discussed. In a letter of 15-19 January 1785, Burney perceives that Elizabeth Carter is aware of the rumors surrounding her and Cambridge: "I observed Mrs. Carter whispering something to Mrs. Ord, &, most unfortunately, heard the last words, which were '*and Miss Burney*,' to which, rather less softly, she added '*That, I think, would be a very good match*.'"[41] Though Carter's expectations are far more explicit than those expressed by Chapone on 25 November 1783, Burney's response to the conversation is not alarm, as before, but merely a reflection on its oddity. Burney's muted reaction signals more than her waning feelings for Cambridge; at this point, she was also no longer avoiding the Bluestockings. Shortly before Burney assumed her position at Queen

Charlotte's court on 11 May 1786, she explicitly connects her recent distance from the Bluestocking circle with Cambridge: after Miss Thrale asks whether Burney has "deserted *the Blues*," Burney acknowledges feeling some "regret at excluding myself from those parties, for so much has passed, in former Days, relative to Mr. G[eorge]: C[ambridge]."[42] Signs of this returning warmth had begun to appear in Burney's life-writings. In her journal for 1 May 1784, Burney gratefully reports an act of Montagu's kindness: "Mrs. Montagu was civiller than ever; – 'Here, cried she, taking my Hand when I came in, is an Evelina & a Cecilia in one.'"[43] Montagu continued to support Burney over the years, recruiting subscribers for Burney's third novel *Camilla*.[44] Of Elizabeth Carter, Burney declared in a letter of 6-8 January [1784] to Susan that she "is a charming Woman; I never liked her so much before; but I never before saw so much of her to like."[45] The qualifying phrase, "I never before saw so much of her to like," indicates a revision of Burney's opinions; this is confirmed in another letter of [24 January 1784], in which Burney declares, "Were I to see much of her, I really think we should be exceeding good friends."[46] Burney continued to mention Carter infrequently throughout her journals and letters until 1798, the period when Carter's health began to decline. As for Chapone, Burney gratefully acknowledged her role in introducing her to Mary Delany, who became one of her closest friends.[47] Years later, in a letter of 9 January 1794 to her sister Esther, Burney declared that "I have always loved as well as respected" Chapone.[48] And on Chapone's death in 1801, Burney mourned in a letter to her father, "How is our Blue club cut up!"[49] Burney's use of the word "our" indicates, at the disbandment of the Bluestockings, not only her nostalgia for the group, but her clear, though privately expressed, association with them.

But Burney's changing feelings towards the Bluestockings from 1785 onward were not merely confined to the privacy of her journals and family circle. They can be discerned in a

number of her writings intended for various audiences, including her play, *The Woman-Hater*, her "Consolatory Extracts occasioned by the tragic death of her sister Susan Burney Phillips in January 1800", and her *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*. Burney's 1801 tribute to the Bluestockings – "How is our Blue club cut up!" – was penned as she was recycling and rehabilitating the character of Lady Smatter in *The Woman-Hater*. Lady Smatter is the only surviving vestige of *The Witlings* and becomes one of the key characters in *The Woman-Hater*,[50] though she again is not part of the central romantic pairing. The main plot of the play focuses on the heroine Sophia's love story and the reconciliation of her parents, Eleonora and Wilmot; Wilmot has wrongly suspected Eleonora's fidelity and mistakenly raised his nurse's daughter Joyce as his own. Joyce, who joyfully revels in her own ignorance, declares at one point, "decamp, Mrs. Chapone!"[51] This is less an attack on Chapone and more an acknowledgment of the importance of her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) within the zeitgeist of the late eighteenth century. The eponymous figure is Sir Roderick, whose disappointment over a long-ago broken engagement with Lady Smatter has transformed him into a raging misogynist. Although Lady Smatter plays a comparatively minor role in *The Woman-Hater*, she has a new self-awareness of her intellectual limitations and is a focus of one of the romance plots.[52] She still misquotes plays and poems with alacrity, but openly admits "My only misfortune is a bad memory. It puzzles my quotations amazingly."[53] Though Kate Chisholm has argued that Lady Smatter is again "the butt of the play's satire, exposed time and again as a sham,"[54] this self-understanding of her intellectual limitations signals some character growth, despite her initial careless dismissal of Eleonora.

Lady Smatter's victorious love story is another sign that Burney had revised some of her views of the Bluestockings. While Lady Smatter is initially courted halfheartedly by Young

Waverley (who abandons his mercenary aims towards her and instead marries Sophia for love), she regains Sir Roderick's heart. Burney could now empathize with Lady Smatter: in 1793, between her composition of *The Witlings* and *The Woman-Hater*, Burney had married Alexandre d'Arblay at the age of forty-one. She no longer felt inclined to mock a mature woman's love story or term her "wrinkled," "old," "fat," and "deformed" as she had denoted the Bluestockings in 1782.[55] Instead, Lady Smatter's matrimonial triumph is foreshadowed from the very beginning of the play: "But I wonder I should have no answer from Sir Roderick. I expected him at my feet. But ever since I broke that poor wretch's heart, I am told he has been a perfect Brute. I am glad of it; for I should certainly have again rejected him. Though, really – it's surprising he should not come."[56] In light of the rantings of the misogynistic Sir Roderick, Lady Smatter's prognostications seem foolish, until she interrupts his long tirade against women at the end of the play and transforms it into a marriage proposal:

> Sir Roderick. You are a poor, helpless, childish race of beings! So ignorant – that you never know a gust of wind from a clap of Thunder; and so feeble, that you can't pare an apple without cutting your fingers, nor mend a Pen – without chopping off a bit of your Thumb. So now – Good by t'ye! (*going*)
>
> Lady Smatter. Hold, Sir Roderick! You did not always think thus of Women!
>
> Sir Roderick. So much the worse!
>
> Lady Smatter. Time was – when you and I, Sir Roderick, were Friends!
>
> Sir Roderick. Madam! (*staring*)
>
> Lady Smatter. Should I hold out – thus! – ah, Sir Roderick! – the olive branch –
>
> Sir Roderick. If I don't believe I am in the moon!
>
> Lady Smatter. Would you utterly reject it?

> Sir Roderick. By the lord Harry, Lady Smatter, if you want to make a fool of me again – Lady Smatter. No, upon my word! See the token of Faith! (*playing her hand before his Eyes*)
>
> Sir Roderick (*taking it*). O Lady Smatter! what a devilish Jilt you have been to me!
>
> Lady Smatter. Forget it, my dear Sir Roderick, – and let us, henceforth, be constant Friends.
>
> Sir Roderick. My head turns round! – O Lady Smatter! – can I believe you? – my dear Sir Roderick did you say?[57]

Lady Smatter's victory over Sir Roderick not only proves the hollowness of his imprecations against women: "poor, helpless, childish," "ignorant," and "feeble." In five short speeches, Lady Smatter is able to convert Sir Roderick from antagonist to fiancé. Despite her minor role in *The Woman-Hater* in comparison to *The Witlings*, she is solely responsible for reforming the former play's titular "woman-hater."[58] While not as virtuous as Eleonora nor an attractive ingenue like Sophia, Lady Smatter's knowledge of her intellectual limitations and ability to entice the most hardened of misogynists nearly transforms her into a positive, proto-feminist force that symbolizes Burney's renewed appreciation for the Bluestocking circle that she once so trenchantly ridiculed in *The Witlings*.

More explicitly than with *The Woman-Hater*, which was never performed, Burney's "Consolatory Extracts occasioned by the tragic death of her sister Susan Burney Phillips in January 1800" contains a series of private memorials to the Bluestockings. These, arguably, better reflect Burney's views on the group because unlike her journals and letters, which she altered later in life in anticipation for their public consumption,[59] these were solely intended as a private memorial in response to her beloved sister's death. As a result, the "Consolatory

Extracts" is little known and studied;[60] it contains 105 pages, partially filled with 58 discrete entries, a substantial portion of which can be linked to the Bluestockings, in particular Catherine Talbot, Carter, and Chapone. Sixteen of those 58 entries are from Carter's and Talbot's correspondence, and four are from Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*. In percentage terms, 34% – or just over a third – of the works cited in "Consolatory Extracts" are by Burney's Bluestocking friends. That their entries occupy a considerable portion of "Consolatory Extracts" confirms the pervasive influence the Bluestockings had upon Burney at the turn of the nineteenth century.

A number of the passages that Burney appropriates from Chapone, Talbot, and Carter focus on friendship and revised feelings, corresponding to her renewed appreciation of the group. In one of her quotations from *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the year 1741 to 1770* (1809), Burney cites a passage from Elizabeth Carter on the treatment of "absent friends":

> *Mrs. Carter* says – "People may pay their absent friends all the attention they can *reasonably* expect, without imagining they should interrupt a stronger & more necessary application to the *present* scene of business, or <&c> It would be exacting a strangely extravagant proof of constancy & tenderness in our Friends to insist on their being deaf & blind to the objects which surround them, to bewilder themselves in the Land of reverie & introspection.[61]

Within the context of the passage, Carter imagines Talbot – abroad and occupied – still thinking of her, though unable to write a reply. Burney's inclusion of this passage was perhaps an acknowledgment of the renewed friendship she felt towards the Bluestockings, despite never quite recovering their intimacy after 1783. Similarly, the material Burney borrows from

Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* is focused on friendship and self-control, such as the following long passage from Chapone regarding anger and counseling forbearance:

> Our anger is most unruly, when we are conscious of blame, or apprehend we have laid ourselves open to censure. Where we know we have been wrong, the least injustice in the degree of blame imputed to us, excites our bitterest resentment; but where we know ourselves faultless, the sharpest accusation excites pity, or contempt, rather than rage. Who ever feels very angry, must suspect himself to be very wrong, & resolve to stand the decision of his own conscience, before he casts upon his antagonist the odium probably due to himself. *Chapone*.[62]

Chapone's distinctive view of anger is that it is only experienced by the guilty and that the innocent feel milder emotions instead. Again, this passage could be applied to Burney's estrangement from the Bluestockings and frequently expressed irritation – if not anger – regarding their allusions to her relationship with George Cambridge. Burney also made a few changes to Chapone's words so that they are more applicable to her state of mourning: she has substituted "anger" for "passion," which is more specific. Her words also shift Chapone's from the second- to the third-person perspective. Chapone had originally written, "Whenever therefore you feel yourself very angry, suspect yourself to be in the wrong, and resolve to stand the decision of your own conscience before you cast upon another the punishment, which is perhaps due to yourself."[63] Burney's movement to the third-person perspective enables a more universal application of Chapone's words, including herself.

Burney's decisive appreciation of the Bluestocking circle is confirmed in her final published work, *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*, which contains her mature re-assessment of the group. Admittedly, it is difficult to know how much those passages came from notes left behind by

Charles Burney or were attributable solely to Burney and how to value those passages, which were explicitly meant for public consumption, alongside Burney's other views of the group. Yet, the views – if not in overt praise, at least in tone – are similar to those expressed in "Consolatory Extracts" and *The Woman-Hater*, and Burney's journals and letters contain comparable sentiments from 1785, though she likewise edited them late in life in the expectation that they too would be published. Moyra Haslett's reading of Burney's *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* as a "defence of the Bluestockings" is convincing, though there are some barbs about Elizabeth Vesey ("constantly coupled with something grotesque") and Elizabeth Montagu (possessed of "No sudden start of talent").[64] Though Burney does depict Montagu as one constantly seeking "applause," overall she acknowledges "Mrs. Montagu was rare in her attainments; splendid in her conduct; open to the calls of charity; forward to precede those of indigent genius; and unchangeably just and firm in the application of her interest, her principles, and her fortune, to the encouragement of loyalty, and the support of virtue."[65] Her strong praise of Montagu's talents, philanthropy, and virtue more than cancels out her description of Montagu's foibles. Similarly, Burney's tone regarding the circle is warm and even nostalgic, "it afforded to all lovers of intellectual entertainment a variety of amusement, an exemption from form, and a *carte blanche* certainty of good humour from the amiable and artless hostess, that rendered it as agreeable as it was singular." She also publicly highlights her membership: "Dr. Burney and this Memorialist were now initiated into the midst of it."[66] Burney publicly identifies herself here as a Bluestocking, the clearest indication of her approval of the group.

Following her tribute to Montagu, Burney's "defence of the Bluestockings" within the *Memoirs* contains her final praise of Chapone and Carter. Burney characterizes Chapone's coteries as "rational, instructive, and social," emphasizing that her conversational powers

emerged in *tête à tête*: "her sound understanding, her sagacious observations, her turn to humour, and the candour of her affectionate nature, all then came into play without effort: and her ease of mind, when freed from the trammels of doing the honours of reception, seemed to soften off, even to herself, her corporeal infirmities."[67] She continued to express her gratitude towards Chapone for introducing her to Mary Delany.[68] And Elizabeth Carter received special treatment in the *Memoirs*. Instead of being grouped in with the other Bluestockings, Carter was given extended individual praise later in the text:

> The Doctor truly revered in Mrs. Carter the rare union of humility with learning, and of piety with cheerfulness. He frequently, and always with pleasure, conveyed her to or from her home, when they visited the same parties; and always enjoyed those opportunities in comparing notes with her, on such topics as were not light enough for the large or mixed companies which they were just seeking, or had just left: topics, however, which they always treated with simplicity; for Mrs. Carter, though natively more serious, and habitually more studious than Dr. Burney, was as free from pedantry as himself.
>
> By temperance of life and conduct, activity of body, and equanimity of mind, she nearly reached her 90th year in such health and strength as to be able to make morning calls upon her favourite friends, without carriage, companion, or servant. And with all her modest humility upon her personal acquirements, she had a dignified pride of independence, that invested her with the good sense to feel rather exalted than ashamed, at owing her powers of going forth to her own unaided self-exertion.[69]

Carter embodied "the rare union of humility with learning, and of piety with cheerfulness," which echoes praise by her contemporaries for both her erudition and domestic accomplishments. The final paragraph is, perhaps, even more significant. Just as Burney saw

Carter and Chapone as models of forbearance in "Consolatory Extracts," she now viewed Carter as a model of old age and dignity. Burney's observations on Carter's octogenarian excursions – "in such health and strength as to be able to make morning calls upon her favourite friends…a dignified pride of independence,…[and] her own unaided self-exertion" – were published when Burney herself was in her eightieth year, suggesting Burney's own desire to emulate Carter's conduct. This final praise and tribute to old age confirms that Burney had moved past any discomfort towards the group and being publicly associated with them. Just as Burney herself had matured from a self-conscious ingenue and unrequited lover into a royal servant, wife, grieving sister, and elderly biographer, her views of the Bluestockings had evolved from embarrassment and irritation to sincere and open admiration.

{{Acknowledgements to be added here after peer review}}

[1] Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 112; Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 149-50; and Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 70. See also Norma Clarke, *Dr Johnson's Women* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2000), p. 190.

[2] Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* [*EJL*], ed. Lars E. Troide, Stewart J. Cooke, and Betty Rizzo, 5 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1987-2012), 4:9.

[3] Charles Burney, *The Letters of Charles Burney*, vol. 1: 1751-1784, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, SJ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 280. The italics are Charles Burney's and emphasize his concern at the prospect of social alienation by the Bluestockings. See also Betty A. Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 161.

[4] Peter Sabor, "Introduction to *The Witlings*," in Frances Burney, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, *Volume 1: Comedies*, ed. Peter Sabor, Geoffrey M. Sill, and Stewart J. Cooke (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995), p. 4. See Hester Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George III* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2000), p. 9.

[5] Elizabeth Eger argues that "By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the combined social and intellectual prominence of such a significant number of intelligent women was being greeted with suspicion and disgust by many men….'Bluestocking' became a term of comedy and abuse, echoing earlier distrust of learned women's 'slipshod' appearance and morality." (*Bluestockings*, p. 205) See also Gary Kelly, "General Introduction: Bluestocking Feminism and Writing in

Context," in *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785*, gen. ed. Gary Kelly, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 1:ix-liv [xi].
[6] *Morning Herald*, 22 March 1783; cf. *EJL*, 5:335, n. 62. See also Paula Stepankowsky, 'The "Fatal Paragraph" is Found!', *Burney Letter* 7.1 (2001): 1-2. Margaret Anne Doody notes that "In early April 1783, Frances was seriously distressed by a newspaper paragraph, a gossip hint that coupled her name with that of George Cambridge", though she does not identify this paragraph or link it to the Bluestockings. (*Frances Burney*, p. 152).
[7] Burney, *EJL*, 5:334-35, 466.
[8] Betty A. Schellenberg, "Bluestocking Women and Rational Female Fiction," in Volume 2 of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: English and British Fiction 1750-1820*, ed. Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 148-63 [154]; and Betty Rizzo, "Burney and society," *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 131-46 [141].
[9] Vivien Jones, "Burney and gender," *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111-29 [120]. There are a number of studies that identify Burney as a second-generation Bluestocking, including Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, "Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography," *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2003), 1-19 [5]; Gary Kelly, "Bluestocking Feminism," in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 163-80 [177]; Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9; and Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 11.
[10] See Hilary Havens, "Memorializing Sorrow in Frances Burney's 'Consolatory Extracts,'" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 43.3 (2019): 23-40 [30].
[11] Clarke, *Dr Johnson's Women*, p. 26.
[12] Judith Hawley, "Carter, Elizabeth (1717–1806), poet, translator, and writer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; accessed 20 July 2020. [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4782]. Clarke also contends that "Praise of Elizabeth Carter was often designed to counter unspoken assumptions drawn from the stereotype of the learned lady as both arrogant and pedantic." (Clarke 25)
[13] Burney, *EJL*, 4:133, 137.
[14] See Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 60.
[15] Rhoda Zuk, "Chapone [née Mulso], Hester (1727–1801), writer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 September 2004; accessed 20 July 2020. [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5128].
[16] Burney, *EJL*, 4:93.
[17] Burney, *EJL*, 3:144, 156.
[18] Burney, *EJL*, 4:67, 111, 114.
[19] Burney, *EJL*, 3:162 and n. 10.
[20] Burney, *EJL*, 3:153.
[21] Burney, *EJL*, 3:239.
[22] Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 93, 97.

[23] Frances Burney, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney: Volume 1. Comedies*, ed. Peter Sabor, contrib. ed. Geoffrey M. Sill (London: William Pickering, 1995), 1.196-203; p. 13.
[24] Burney, *Comedies*, 3.649-50, p. 36; 5.616-17, p. 93.
[25] Burney, *Comedies*, 5.819-21; p. 98.
[26] Barbara Darby, *Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late-Eighteenth-Century Stage* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 36. See Deborah Heller, "Bluestocking Salons and the Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22.2 (1998): 59-82 [73]; Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, "Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography," in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2003), 1-19 [3]; and Peggy Thompson, "'Strange Animation and Vigour': Self-Representation in Frances Burney's *The Witlings*," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 12.2 (1997): 15-25 [17-18].
[27] Burney, *EJL*, 4:354, n. 62, 355.
[28] Burney, *EJL*, 5:32; *The Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (12 March 1782), cf. Burney, *EJL*, 5:39.
[29] Burney, *EJL*, 5:36.
[30] Burney, *EJL*, 5:36. Burney's editors Lars Troide and Stewart Cooke note that "in the year 1822 a MS. copy of them was found among Dr Burney's papers, with so many erasures, interlineations, and changes, as to give the most direct external evidence that they were the Doctors own composition. (*EJL* 5:38)
[31] See Burney, *EJL*, 5:134, 145.
[32] Burney, *EJL*, 5:152.
[33] Samuel Hoole, *Aurelia; Or, The Contest* (London, 1783), pp. 62-63; cf. Burney, *EJL*, 5:371.
[34] Burney, *EJL*, 5:450.
[35] John L. Abbott gives an extended account of Burney's fraught relationship with George Cambridge, though he depicts the Bluestockings as peripheral figures ("'This Long & Cruel Perplexity': Frances Burney in Love, 1784-86," *The Age of Johnson* 17 (2006): 261-96). See also Lorna J. Clark, "The Diarist as Novelist: Narrative Strategies in the Journals and Letters of Frances Burney," *English Studies in Canada* 27.3 (2001): 283-302 [291-93]; and Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 151-58.
[36] Burney, *EJL*, 5:421.
[37] Burney, *EJL*, 5:424.
[38] Frances Burney, *Additional Journals and Letters, Volume 1: 1784-1786* [*AJL*], ed. Stewart Cooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 21, 22.
[39] Burney, *AJL*, p. 76.
[40] Burney, *AJL*, p. 58.
[41] Burney, *AJL*, p. 188.
[42] Burney, *AJL*, p. 411.
[43] Burney, *AJL*, p. 61.
[44] Janice Farrar Thaddeus, *Frances Burney: A Literary Life* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 132.
[45] Burney, *AJL*, pp. 3-4.
[46] Burney, *AJL*, p. 19.
[47] Frances Burney, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* [*JL*], gen. ed. Joyce Hemlow, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972-84), 4:104; *EJL*, 5:283-95.
[48] Burney, *JL*, 3:35.

[49] Burney, *JL*, 5:106.
[50] In between *The Witlings* and *The Woman-Hater*, Burney returned to many of the characters from the former in a fragmentary comedy held at the Berg collection, including Cecilia, Beaufort, Lady Smatter, Jack, Codger, and Censor. See Sabor, "Introduction to *The Witlings*," 4; Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill, Introduction to *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater*, by Frances Burney, ed. Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002), 9-35 [20-21]; and Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 300-2.
[51] Burney, *Comedies*, 2.4.35, p. 214.
[52] For continued discussion of Lady Smatter's minor role in *The Woman-Hater*, see Darby, *Frances Burney*, 146; and Sabor and Sill, Introduction to *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater*, 19.
[53] Burney, *Comedies*, 2.6.9-10, p. 219.
[54] Kate Chisholm, *Fanny Burney: Her Life, 1752-1840* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 97.
[55] Burney, *EJL*, 5:152.
[56] Burney, *Comedies*, 1.11.21-25, p. 207.
[57] Burney, *Comedies*, 5.23.61-84, pp. 283-84.
[58] Although Sir Roderick is the eponymous "woman-hater," it is true that Wilmot's treatment of his wife is a more insidious, though less declarative form of misogyny within the play.
[59] See Lorna Clark, "Epistolarity in Frances Burney," *the Age of Johnson* 20 (2010), 193-222 [195]; and Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 485-86.
[60] See Chisholm, *Fanny Burney*, p. 194.
[61] Frances Burney, "Consolatory Extracts," c.1800. A.MS. 49 pp. mssHM 293. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, f. 16; cf. Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, letter of 14 February 1754, in *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, From the Year 1741 to 1770*, 4 vols. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1809), 2:155-56. Burney slightly alters the ending; Carter's original described "the land of romance, the country which properly belongs (poor souls!) to none but lovers." (2:156).
[62] Burney, "Consolatory Extracts," 24-25.
[63] Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady*, new ed. (London, 1786), 119. I am using the 1786 edition of Chapone's *Letters* instead of the 1773 first edition because two of the four passages Burney selects are not included in the first-edition text. Since Burney wrote her commonplace book after 1800, it is logical that she would use a later edition of Chapone's *Letters*.
[64] Moyra Haslett, "Bluestocking Feminism Revisited: The Satirical Figure of the Bluestocking," *Women's Writing* 17.3 (2010): 432-51 [443]; Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 2:265, 271.
[65] Burney, *Memoirs* 2:271, 272-73.
[66] Burney, *Memoirs*, 2:263.
[67] Burney, *Memoirs*, 2:283, 284.
[68] See Burney, *Memoirs*, 2:302-314
[69] Burney, *Memoirs*, 3:341-42.