

# A Tattling Town Like Windsor: Negotiating Proper Relations in Frances Burney's Early Court Journals and Letters (1786-87).

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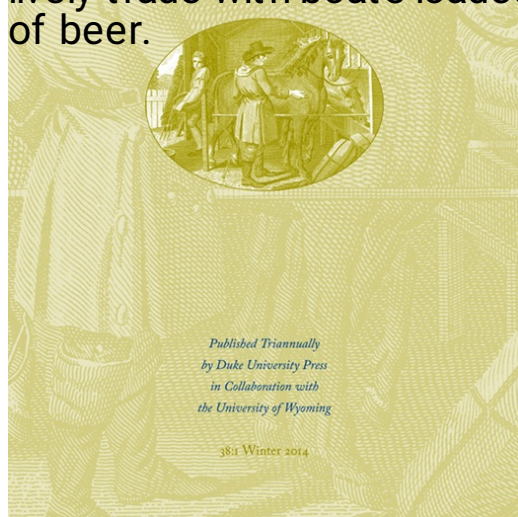


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The idea that Burney features in her own journals and letters as a novelistic heroine is something that readers over the years have noted and attributed variously to straightforward egotism or to a need for compensation. In this article, I read narrative performances Burney produced in her journals for 1786 and 1787, some of which are made widely available for the first time in the new edition of the court journals, not as egotistical or compensatory, but rather as evidence of the dilemmas Burney felt she had to deal with as a single woman in a particular context, dilemmas that, rather than fueling escapist fantasy, allowed her to reflect on practical problems of conduct. In particular, to see her concern about the nature of her relationships with male courtiers as evidence of compensation is to overlook its material importance to a woman of Burney's rank, upbringing, and temperament. A close reading of her accounts of her encounters with the Reverend Charles de Guiffardière, reader to the queen, reveals Burney's anxious internal negotiations with the requirements of propriety and her understandable fear of rumor and gossip in "a tattling Town like Windsor." Such negotiations are, of course, entirely typical of her own heroines, and they did not help Burney to protect herself from reality or allow her to indulge a fantasy of being the cynosure of all eyes. Rather, both she and her heroines address questions about how women were to navigate through life, the court being an especially challenging and unfamiliar environment through which to navigate.

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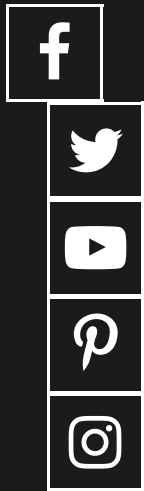
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