

Next-Door Neighbours: Contrast and Caricature in the early 1790s¹

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HENRY: The poor have still more to complain of, when chance throws them thus near the rich,
— it forces upon their minds a comparison might drive them to despair, if —

ELEANOR: — If they should not have good sense enough to reflect, that all this bustle and
show of pleasure, may fall very short of happiness; as all the distress we feel, has not
yet, thank Heaven, reached to misery.

(Elizabeth Inchbald, *Next-Door Neighbours*, 11–12)

On 9 July, 1791, Elizabeth Inchbald's comedy *Next-Door Neighbours* was first performed at the Haymarket, and was 'received throughout with the warmest applause' (*Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 12 July 1791). It continued to be well-received throughout the season, though it did not generate the same *éclat* as her other plays and now receives little critical attention. As was often Inchbald's custom, the play was openly acknowledged as drawn from two French comedies: Mercier's *L'Indigent* (1772), which furnished the contrast between rich and poor neighbours; and Destouches' *Le Dissipateur* (1737), which provides the comic subplot in which a dissipated young noble is deliberately ruined by friends with his best interests at heart. As the merging of these two titles suggests, the play focuses on a contrast between rich and poor, a theme to which Inchbald would return in her more popular play *Every One Has His Fault* (1792) and her novel *Nature and Art* (1796). The interplay between two contrasting situations had long been a focus for a genre of dialogue pamphlets which pitted disputants of opposing classes, genders, or political views against each other in discussion. However, the contrast would soon become a focus for loyalist propagandists who would seek to reinforce, rather than reconcile, notions of difference and opposition. In this article, I will suggest that *Next-Door Neighbours* has much in common with the contrast print, but that, like the conversation pamphlet, it also radicalises the depiction of caricatured opposites by allowing an interaction between them, and more importantly, an eventual revolution in their morals.

¹ This article was presented as a paper at the second *Cradled in Caricature* Symposium held at the University of Kent on 27 April 2012 with support from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Kent and the History of Art Department at University College London.

1. The Contrast and Caricature

A light-hearted comparison between a young, fashionable spendthrift and his impoverished neighbours, *Next-Door Neighbours* pivots on the kind of ‘contrast’ image which became so familiar to the British public during the 1790s. From the outset, Sir George Splendorville’s name alone singles him out as the object of caricature and ridicule: whilst he is described by his flatterers as ‘the most polished man alive’ (1791: 7), he is immediately shown (like his source character Cleon in Destouches’ *Le Dissipateur*) to have few resources except his wealth. Inchbald creates a counterpoint for Sir George’s vacuous lifestyle in his neighbours, the brother and sister Henry and Eleanor, who, though poor, ‘do not want for anything’ (1791: 12) because they have their virtue and each other’s society. Inchbald continually contrasts the attitudes of these next door neighbours, emphasising the ‘transition’ between rich and poor settings, a technique which would be repeated in her later writings (Kelly 1976: 87), and which would become a staple in British caricature by the following year.



FIGURE 1. FRENCH LIBERTY/BRITISH SLAVERY, JAMES GILLRAY, 21 DECEMBER 1792

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The exchange which begins this article, for example, juxtaposes the wretchedness of Henry’s and Eleanor’s financial situation with the opulence of their neighbour’s home in the midst of a

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ball, and might remind us of Gillray's caricature of the following year, *French Liberty/British Slavery* [See Figure 1]. Gillray equally mocks the naïveté of the meagre Frenchman, chewing on his onion, who believes he lives in the land of 'Milk and Honey', and, in the neighbouring picture, the hypocrisy of his English counterpart, who mutters about the Ministry 'Starving us to Death', as he tucks into an enormous hunk of beef.

Whilst the contrast here is stark, and satirises both parties, the caricature could be read as a more subversive exploration of relative notions of wealth and freedom, and their relation to happiness. The contrast, then, is less about the material (or corporeal) situation of the two parties, and more about their mental state and their attitude towards their respective riches. In exchange quoted, Eleanor thanks Heaven that she and her brother still have the 'good sense' to know what happiness is and the fortitude to avoid falling into misery or dishonesty. In opposing the characters of Eleanor and Henry to the 'prodigality' of Sir George (6), Inchbald begins to suggest the versatility of the contrast, emphasising not only the material differences which separate the neighbours, but also their differing moral stances.

The contrast print is characteristic of a period in which a loyalist backlash in England cut short movements for social and political reform, primarily by associating its advocates with French Revolutionary values. Whilst, in 1789, many in England had been flattered to behold the French liberating themselves, seeing the storming of the Bastille as an emulation of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, they would soon realise that the French intended to go much further than the moderate constitution established in England. Many in England continued to support and admire the progress of the Revolution; however, by summer 1791, when *Next-Door Neighbours* was first performed, the tide was turning. The flight of Louis XVI and the subsequent political upheaval in June and July was followed the next year by riot and a spate of prison massacres, the scope of which seemed to outstrip the previous aims of revolutionary violence. Most supporters of French politics and principles in England were silenced or, like Inchbald and many of her circle, risked being labelled 'Jacobin' (Kelly 1976: 10). By the end of the year, the loyalist Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers was established in several major cities, churning out caricatures, tokens and polemical pamphlets against revolution and reform. The contrast print became a reflection of an 'us' and 'them' way of viewing not only the French, but by extension all those who had supported parliamentary reform; a distancing technique which juxtaposed images of British status quo, peace and moderate liberties with French violence, savagery and excess.

Moreover, as Diana Donald suggests of Rowlandson's *Contrast* (1792) (See Figure 2), whilst the opposing images of British and French female embodiments of liberty were immediately recognisable as signifiers in the French Revolution debate, 'the principal "contrast" in the minds of those who viewed the print in Manchester must have been not England and France, but rather the extraordinarily bitter conflict between loyalists and reformers, church and dissent' (1996: 152). Donald focuses on Manchester as a centre of struggle between the newly-formed loyalist association and the existing Constitutional Society, tensions which would be explored in Thomas Walker's *A Review of some of the political events which have occurred in Manchester during the last five years* (1794). That Rowlandson's print caricature could also be seen to stand for domestic political turmoil reflects the way that images of contrast (much like stock characters on the stage) evoked specific, often well-rehearsed debates for contemporary viewers, and suggests the way in which reformers could be demonized through their connections with France.



FIGURE 2. *THE CONTRAST (1792) WHICH IS BEST?* THOMAS ROWLANDSON, DECEMBER 1792

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2. Contrast and Conversation

Whilst print caricature presented neat and concise images of national (or political) difference, other media also satirised the contrast of opposing characters. Throughout the eighteenth century, the dialogue pamphlet had played a role in disseminating moral, social and political

messages to a plebeian audience, tapping into what Jon Mee has called ‘a delight in combative talk as a national characteristic’ (2011: 12). Bill Hughes speculates that the rapid exchange of ideas in print during the late eighteenth century often gave texts a ‘conversational quality’, in which ‘thesis invites prompt reply’ (2005: 12). This is nowhere more evident than in the ‘wide field of debate’ elicited by Burke and Paine (1791: 126), but is true of many types of textual production. Plays like *Next-Door Neighbours* presented internal conflict but, as David Karr notes, the ‘conventions of sentimental comedy’ could be used to ‘translate representations of family strife into wider social and political meanings’ (2001: 328). The same is true of the widely-used conversation format for pamphlets: we are presented with an argument in microcosm, but one which is easily translated to national context. These dialogues could either reinforce stock caricatures with propagandist or one-sided arguments, or create a forum for rational discussion in which individuals from different walks of life could meet as equals.

Inchbald prioritises this reasoning and rational conversation as a method of self-improvement in her play, an agenda which was also addressed in her own novels and those of her literary friends. It had also been the mainstay of the ‘conversable worlds’ formed through the debating societies of the 1780s (Mee 2011), and in the polite coffeehouse or salon culture championed by the *Tatler* and *Spectator* earlier in the century. Similarly, the printed dialogue was not a new format: throughout the eighteenth century, in England and France, it was used to present a debate between two characters, usually fictional stereotypes, but sometimes famous figures, in which a particular issue was addressed: for example, the abolition of slavery, the necessity of taxation, or the role of dutiful wives. Whilst many of these pamphlets were fairly simplistic in their vocabulary and their ideas, presenting a straightforward contrast (not unlike the caricatures discussed earlier) between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ thinking, there were some which tackled complex social, economic or political ideas and which, moreover, promoted debate and discussion amongst a much broader cross-section of society.

As has been recognised in the most popular conversation pamphlet of the period, Hannah More’s *Village Politics* (1792) (and in her later *Cheap Repository Tracts*),³ conversation, like Inchbald’s play, could be at once politically charged and deliver a moral message. Malcolm

³ *Cheap Repository Tracts* was the overarching title given to a series of over 100 political and religious tracts published between 1795 and 1797 under a scheme devised by Hannah More with the object of providing the poor with reading matter of an improving nature as a counterweight to the ballads and ‘penny dreadfuls’ in chapbooks which were commonly hawked around and whose style they imitated.

Cook has noted in his introduction to a collection of French Revolutionary conversation pamphlets:

Peut-on dire que les dialogues reproduisent sous une forme littéraire les contrastes inhérents aux personnages de tendances opposés. Très souvent [...] les auteurs des dialogues que nous présentons mettent en scène des personnages qui, visiblement, essayent de maîtriser une langue qui évolue. (Cook 1994: viii)

[One could say that the dialogues reproduce in a literary form the inherent contrast between characters of opposing views. Very often [...] the authors of the dialogues presented here depict characters who are clearly trying to master a language which is evolving.]⁴

Whilst, as Cook points out, we cannot assume that the ‘evolving language’ used in the conversations always reflects the vernacular of the characters presented, the notion of conversation as a way of making sense of a changing society is a valuable one to keep in mind. It is the ephemeral nature of these texts and their immediate contribution to a discussion, which makes the conversation tract (much like a play), such a fascinating phenomenon.

The conversation pamphlet provided a space for disputants from different classes or of conflicting political principles to work out their differences, but the means of doing this differed greatly. In More’s *Village Politics*, Jack Anvil the blacksmith discovers his friend Tom Hod reading Paine’s *Rights of Man*, which brings about a conversation on Paine’s principles. On the subject of equality, Jack is practical rather than idealistic:

[...] suppose, in the general division, our new rulers were to give us half an acre of ground a-piece; we cou’d to be sure raise potatoes on it for the use of our families: but as every other man would be equally busy in raising potatoes for *his* family, why then you see if thou wast to break thy spade, I should not be able to mend it. Neighbour Snip wou’d have no time to make us a suit of cloaths, nor the clothier to weave the cloth, for all the world would be gone a digging (7).

More sets out, in her ‘imagined world of plebeian conversation’, to effect moral reform by foregrounding hard work and faith in the law (Gilmartin 2011: 138). Jack opines that ‘I am a better judge of a horse-shoe than Sir John; but he has a deal better notion of state affairs than I’ (11). This suggests that everyone has a fixed role to play in society, which is not up for discussion; and effectively re-draws the contrast between rich and poor. Conversation here is a means to an end, delivering at the same time a ‘politically counter-revolutionary and morally radical’ message in the working man’s vernacular (MacDonald Shaw 2002: viii). Even where sympathy is expressed, for instance, for the hardships of life during the French Revolution in another loyalist publication, the emphasis is on physical work rather than dabbling in politics:

⁴ All translations are the author’s.

MONSIEUR FRANCOIS: [...] It is not that the country has lost its fertility; but, when every one is to be either a soldier or a statesman, none are left to till the ground or get in the harvest.

JOHN ENGLISH: That's a bad business, and not to be cured by all your fine speeches: for you know there's no preaching to the stomach, as it has no ears (Association for Preserving Liberty and Property 10).

John English's argument here is reminiscent of the ironic contrast made in *French Liberty/British Slavery* [Fig. 1] and reminds the reader that no amount of proselytising 'fine speeches' are a substitute for a hard day's work and a round English meal. The implication here, as in *Village Politics*, is that the consideration of political questions is the province and privilege of the elite, and that anyone attempting to fill the minds of the lower classes with reformist ideas (such as Paine), was stirring up trouble and distracting them from their duties. That this point is made through conversation between equals, however, ironically repositions the role of 'rational' argument, creating tension between the radical ideology which must be disproved, and the persuasive techniques employed by the conservative disputant.

Radical pamphlets also used conversation as a means of persuasion; however, they tended to express more respect for the exchange of opinions. As Paine had noted in his 'wide field of debate', 'as knowledge is the object contended for, the party that sustains the defeat obtains the prize' (1791: 126). The 1797 *Dialogue Between One of Mr Burke's 320,000 Sound Ones, and one of his 80,000 incorrigible, pure Jacobins* accepted and encouraged conversation on these grounds. The English Jacobin urges, 'when we associate together, we should promote rational conversation to edify one another, and not encourage corrupt and profligate discourse, that levels all principles' (1797: 26). This proviso attempts to distance the disputants from the kind of caricatured figures set up in other conversations, suggesting that civilised discussion is the primary focus of the text. Nonetheless, we see a satisfying victory for the Jacobin, who says simply 'I am a friend to peace and reform, and if those be Jacobin principles, I am one of the 80,000' (1797: 8). He likens his argument with the Sound One, who is 'in Mr Reeve's Society' (the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers) and so 'knows which side his bread is buttered on', to a neighbourly dispute.

I presume, it may very justly be compared to two neighbours disagreeing, and if the one breaks the other's fence, or otherwise damages his property, how can the dispute be settled, if he that considers himself injured refuses to hear any proposals for recompence, but insultingly tells the other he is not a proper person to 'treat with' (1797: 8).

Despite his reluctance to enter into a debate with the Jacobin, the Sound One is soon convinced that the Jacobin's views, far from being 'Frenchified all over' (1797: 11), are in fact just and humane. He is made to realise that by supporting the war with France he is

participating in mass murder and spreading famine and distress, a thought which keeps him awake all night until he comes back seeking a second conversation, asking for the Jacobin's advice on how to be a better citizen. This is particularly similar to the conclusion of *Next-Door Neighbours*. After several scurrilous attempts to embezzle the other half of his father's fortune, and to seduce the poor and defenceless Eleanor, Sir George Splendorville is prevailed upon to see the error of his ways. As we shall see, both he and the loyalist character in this pamphlet are convinced by the reasoned arguments of the enlightened citizens around them and resolve to live their lives according to the principles of the rights of man and civic virtue.

3. The Conversation Enacted: *Next-Door Neighbours*

It may be useful here to offer a summary of the plot of *Next-Door Neighbours*. The play opens on the contrast between the insouciant Sir George Splendorville and his neighbours Henry and Eleanor, whose ageing father, Willford, has been imprisoned for a small debt. Struck by Eleanor's beauty, Sir George plots to seduce her, by giving her brother the money necessary to liberate Willford and so securing her gratitude. Upon discovering Sir George's ulterior motive, Willford returns his money and delivers himself once more to jail. Meanwhile, Sir George is in dire straits financially, as his friends and his lover Lady Caroline mercilessly abuse his liberality. Sir George's father has left a large fortune, but half of it lies in trust for his daughter, who he consigned at a young age to his brother (Sir George's uncle), and who has disappeared without trace. Plotting to secure the rest of his inheritance, Sir George and his lawyer, Blackman, go to the solicitor Mr Manly, and attempt to convince him that the sister and heir he has been searching for is dead. Unbeknownst to Sir George, however, Mr Manly has already received visits from Willford and his family, who have been confirmed as the long-lost relatives of Sir George, and from Lady Caroline, who reveals that through various gifts and chicanery, she now possesses most of Sir George's fortune. In an elaborate closing scene, Sir George comes to his senses and uncovers Blackman's plot to embezzle the inheritance; he and Eleanor are proved to be brother and sister; Lady Caroline reveals herself as a faithful lover to Sir George and recovers his fortune; and there is even a hint that Henry and Eleanor (no longer siblings, but cousins) may one day be married.

As this article has already signalled, *Next-Door Neighbours* capitalises on the contrast of material situations, the scene switching quickly from the Sir George's opulent ballroom to 'an Apartment, which Denotes the poverty of the Inhabitants' and the brother and sister Henry and Eleanor (10). Despite their circumstances, Henry and Eleanor are depicted as fortunate in each other's company, and they improve their lot by conversation in a manner which is

reminiscent of the characters of Thomas Holcroft's experiment in moral reformation, *Anna St Ives* (1792). In Holcroft's novel, the intrepid Anna notes that she has 'been taught some high and beneficial truths and principles' by 'instruction, conversation, and by other accidents', and attempts, through conversation, to impart these truths to her suitor, Coke Clifton (1792: 216). Similarly, Henry only has to imagine conversation with his imprisoned father 'before my eyes, [he] talks to me of his consolations' (1791: 14) to be impressed by his morals. His sister Eleanor, too, has learnt her morals not from books, but 'from misfortunes – yet more instructive' (1791: 34). Moreover, Anna St Ives' conversation is seen by her male suitors as a gift to be bestowed, whereas when Sir George's fortune forsakes him, so do his fashionable friends and their 'company' (1791: 46). Thus, whilst some characters find consolation and virtue in conversation and its instructive qualities, the polite sociability of Sir George's circle cannot be so enlightened.

The play opens in the ballroom, for which the lavish Sir George has ordered a new chandelier. The lines themselves are innocuous, but the audience is immediately put on guard for the kind of innuendo and suggestion that carefully-chosen language could contain:

SERVANT: My master said the last ball he gave, the company were in the dark.

BLUNTLY: And if you blind them with too much light, they will be in the dark still

(1791:1–2).

The banter between servants here carries hints about the unenlightened minds and conversation of the guests, as well as the unlighted room, with undertones not unlike those of *Rights of Man*, in which Burke's arguments against the Revolution are likened to 'darkness attempting to illuminate light' (1791: 14). As David Karr has noted in his analysis of Holcroft's radical theatre, an exchange such as this could have been invested with further connotations through the use of a 'mapped gesture', appealing to an audience which knew full well how to read between the lines (2001: 344). Bluntly, the officious man servant of Sir George has been argued to 'represent a radical potential' in the way he plays the social hierarchy and is 'empowered to act', furthering the caricature of his master and expressing barbed social criticism (Smallwood 2008: 301–02). Through this exchange, the audience is prepared to evaluate the conversation of Sir George's guests and to contrast their moral and intellectual qualities with those of his impoverished neighbours.

Next-Door Neighbours is as much about reversal as it is about the establishment of contrast. Indeed, the penniless opportunist Mr. Lucre exclaims to Sir George, 'I often wish to see you reduced to my circumstances, merely to prove how much I could, and *would*, do to serve you'(8). The double-dealing in this sentence, with its empty expression of friendship

and its jealous wish to usurp, appears characteristic of the play's relationships and contrasts. Sir George's intended wife, Lady Caroline, accepts his diamonds whilst declaiming against the guests who 'not only come to devour his dinners, but him' (1791: 6). The duplicity of all, however, pales in comparison with that of Sir George; ordering Henry to him, he insultingly makes explicit the comparison 'I am told you are very poor – you may have heard that I am very rich' (1791: 26), then gives him money to pay off his father's debts, in the hope of seducing the grateful Eleanor. Again, Inchbald makes use of the contrast, to suggest that all is relative when it comes to value: Bluntly believes that Eleanor will be 'worth a thousand' pounds if she refuses Sir George's advances, 'but if she complies, you have thrown your money away', which is 'just the reverse' of how Sir George sees it (1791: 29). The web of deceit spun by Sir George, then, is based on a value system entirely his own and does not operate as expected on those around him. This brings to mind the notion of the 'commercialization of human bonds', as sexual relationships become mere transactions where barter and intimidation usually seal the deal (Karr 2001: 350). This is seen, for instance, in Charlotte Smith's novel *Desmond* (1792), where the gambler Verney effectively sells his wife to a French aristocrat in order to settle a debt. Like Coke Clifton in *Anna St Ives*, Sir George becomes increasingly contrary as the other characters (in this case Bluntly) moralise. With more success and brevity than Holcroft, however, Inchbald suggests that rational conversation still has the power to redeem Sir George, and the intervention will come from the creation of what Jon Mee has called 'conversable worlds' (2011). The play continually blurs class boundaries by juxtaposing financial and moral wealth, creating a liminal space for dialogue between Sir George and his poor neighbours. Therefore, when Henry and Eleanor's father, Willford, demands of Sir George, 'look me in the face while you insult me' (1791: 41), and notices that he cannot, he suggests the beginning of Sir George's moral reform. Sir George's shame shows that he is 'not a *hardened libertine*' (1791: 41), an observation which sets the scene for the peer's later crisis of conscience and transformation into a valuable member of the community.

Although the prologue to *Next-Door Neighbours* stressed that Inchbald's comedy was 'free translation' from the two French plays, she interweaves her own concerns over the moral bankruptcy of the elites, and her interest in achieving a rational transparency in both public and private affairs. Indeed, reviewers clearly recognised her stamp on the two plots brought together in the play, *The Attic Miscellany*, for example, noting:

She is the more deserving of applause, as the amusement it affords is chiefly derived from her own judicious management, and not from any merit in the original (1791: 408).

Inchbald's satirical treatment of Sir George taps into contemporary debate, expressing a distrust of 'the will of the monied classes to correct social justice' (Green 2004: 57). This is significantly tempered, however, from her source texts: in *Next-Door Neighbours*, the proximity of Sir George and his wealth creates a contrast which intensifies Eleanor and Henry's sorrows; but in Mercier's *L'Indigent*, the poor weaver Joseph laments:

Pour avoir encore de l'or, le riche a trouvé le secret de nous affamer (1824: 5).

[*In order to have even more gold, the rich have discovered the secret of starving us.*]

Joseph claims on several occasions that the rich are directly responsible for his poverty and evidences egalitarian principles which Inchbald neglects to translate. This is certainly a strategic omission: in Joseph's opinions, a British audience in 1791 might detect distasteful seventeenth-century 'levelling' attitudes, or worse, French Revolutionary principles. It is not rank and riches but the abuse of them that Inchbald pointedly attacks, attempting to escape allegations of radicalism.

Inchbald's agenda is personal reform, disabusing the rich of their privileged and irresponsible lifestyles. Thus, in her translation from Destouches' *Le Dissipateur*, her second source text, Inchbald de-prioritises the elaborate plot conceived by Cleon's uncle and lover, who encourage him to fritter away his money until he is ruined and abandoned by his friends. She realigns the focus from this humorous deception, to the process of reform and rehabilitation: to this end, Lady Caroline and Bluntly chastise Sir George for his extravagance early in the play, rather than encouraging it, and Willford, too, suggests that there is hope for him yet. Whilst Cleon in *Le Dissipateur* is dragged kicking and screaming to the realisation that money will not bring him happiness, Sir George is presented from the outset as a redeemable character, held back by peer pressure and a bad education. The depiction of his improvement, however, was perhaps wasted on some reviewers: whilst the *Attic Miscellany* recognised the similarities between Sir George Splendorville and Sheridan's Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal*, the reviewer struggled to interpret his mixed feelings over Sir George as a character with whom the audience could neither 'commiserate' nor 'rejoice' (408). Thus, whilst the play appeared to present a stock character, a caricature of selfishness and dissipation like Sheridan's Charles, Inchbald intentionally subverted the audience's expectations, offering instead a portrait of the rehabilitated libertine.

Whilst we have so far seen Sir George as an authoritative character, expecting respect and admiration from both his peers and his neighbours, Inchbald portrays a more justified pride in the character of Henry; he asserts his rights even in the grip of poverty: coming home and finding his importunate landlord, the lawyer Mr Blackman, in his rooms, he proudly defends himself.

BLACKMAN: Pray who are you, sir?

HENRY: I am a man.

BLACKMAN: Yes – but I am a lawyer.

HENRY: Whatever you are, this apartment is mine, not your's [sic] – and I desire you to leave it.

(1791: 21)

Henry denies Blackman's suggestion that a lawyer is in some way more than 'a man', and he simply asserts his identity, empowered by his confidence in the inalienable rights of man. Therefore, when he defends his property against his uninvited guests, we feel the 'rightness' of his behaviour. Henry's refusal to identify himself by a name or profession emphasises at once, but more forcefully, the anonymity of the poor in eighteenth-century society, the extent to which social interaction and treatment is based on these qualifiers. Once more, however, Inchbald's translation is significantly less volatile than Mercier's *L'Indigent*, in which Joseph attacks the presumptuous aristocrat for addressing him in the informal 'tu':

Je suis Joseph, un ouvrier, & non pas votre ami; si je l'étois, nous pourrions nous tutoyer [...] je ne suis pauvre que parce qu'il y a trop de riches (1824: 38)

[*I am Joseph, a labourer, & not your friend; if I were, we could call each other 'tu'* [...] *I am only poor because there are too many rich people.*]

Again, Inchbald tempers Joseph's aggression towards the rich and focuses instead on rational discourse as a means to overcome class prejudice. This stance is compounded by the reaction of Henry's father and sister to Sir George's attempted seduction: Eleanor tells her father he must return to prison, rather than have his debts discharged by 'a man as far beneath you in principle, as you are beneath him in fortune' (40). This is a more sympathetic translation of the same scene in *L'Indigent*, in which the father chastises Du Lys and his kind:

Riches malheureux, gardez votre or indigent, & laissez nous la volupté des larmes (1824: 72)

[*Unhappy rich people, keep your destitute gold, & leave us the pleasure of our tears.*]

Choosing not to translate this somewhat extravagant language of sensibility, in which tears are a sensual pleasure and to some extent a commodity, Inchbald favours more rational discourse, which seeks to convert before it condemns.

Throughout the play, therefore, Inchbald's language implies the reversal of a stark contrast, by which moral fortune outstrips and subverts the blessing of wealth and status. Sir

George realises this after losing his fortune at cards, and being persuaded by Blackman to embezzle the rest of his dead father's wealth. 'Is truth, immutable truth, to be corrupted and confounded by men of the law? [...] in this crisis of my sufferings, it is the only consolatory reflection left me, that truth and I, will never separate' (49–50). Blackman is a lawyer before he is a man and believes truth to be a malleable construct, a state of mind and morals which is contrasted unfavourably against the upstanding and aptly-named solicitor Mr Manly, whose moral compass and sense of duty steers the play towards its *dénouement*. Inchbald gives Mr Manly the decisive lines, so open-ended that they must evoke in the audience's mind circumstances more broad than the unravelling of the play:

Be not surprised --- great discoveries, which we labour in vain for years to make, are frequently brought about in one lucky moment, without any labour at all (1791: 70).

Inchbald here alludes not only to the search for Sir George's lost sister, which is now at an end, but Sir George's sudden 'great discovery' of 'how to be in future happy' (1791: 70); there is also a hint to the audience here about the great possibilities which exist for improving their lot. Whilst a part of this relies on 'luck', the play's ending also compounds a sense of inevitability, as if 'great discoveries' and changes in circumstance are the unavoidable consequence of getting to know one's neighbours. In this sense, Inchbald recreates the radical conclusion of *L'Indigent* but judiciously omits the anti-monarchic bent of Mercier's original, in which the notary refuses the invitation to become part of the happy family as its 'King', preferring to be considered as a 'friend' (1791: 117–18). This suggestive ending is emphasised by Vaughan's epilogue:

Use for a signal then – your Magic Fan
And all the House will follow to a Man
Or should there be a disaffected few –
A counter-revolution – rests with you.

(1791: 72)

Whilst this final stanza is addressed to Inchbald, the playwright-enchantress who turns the audience to her will, the final line is somewhat ambiguous. The 'counter-revolution' here would bring any reticent audience members around to the point of view of the appreciative audience, but whether the onus lies with Inchbald or the audience members is unclear and would depend on the emphasis put on the final 'you'. Again, the possibility that this epilogue is challenging its audience to effect a 'counter-revolution', which in this case has a radicalising effect on the more conservative audience members, showcases the radical potential of Inchbald's play, which Gary Kelly describes as 'Jacobinical' (1976: 87), and

which caused her friend John Taylor to warn her ‘to beware of her politics, as their apparent leaning might injure her fortune’ (Boaden 1883: 314).

The possibility for reversal and reform expressed in *Next-Door Neighbours* gives the audience plenty of opportunity to reflect on the permanence of the contrast. Inchbald draws her characters and her class-contrast from a wealth of contemporary caricatures, but she goes beyond not only the audience’s expectations but also the conventions of her genre by using this as a basis for subversion. It is through the conversion of these caricatures into transparent protagonists who embody the principles of moral reform that *Next-Door Neighbours* achieves both its comedy and its message. Inchbald could hide behind the fact that the play is merely ‘free translation’ (prologue), but it is her pointed contrast of the two French plays which gives *Next-Door Neighbours* a morally (and potentially politically) radical edge. The play suggests the mutual benefits of both conversation and interaction between different social strata in a radical re-enactment which blurs the boundaries between rich and poor, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary and which removes the figurative fence between these next-door neighbours.

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⁵ The majority of the primary texts cited in this article were accessed via Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), provided by Gale Learning. They are cited as books because they are all facsimiles or original printed texts, and because ECCO is a subscription-only database and does not seem to have a stable URL. (<<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/>>)

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