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THE BURNEY JOURNAL

Why Frances Burney "Forgets" Her Foremothers[1]

BETTY A. SCHELLENBERG

> . . . in nothing is the force of denomination more striking than in the term Novel; a species of writing which, though never mentioned, even by its supporter, but with a look that fears contempt, is not more rigidly excommunicated, from its appellation, in theory, than sought and fostered, from its attractions, in practice.
>
> So early was I impressed myself with ideas that fastened degradation to this class of composition, that at the age of adolescence, I struggled against the propensity which, even in childhood, even from the moment I could hold a pen, had impelled me into its toils; and on my fifteenth birth-day, I made so resolute a conquest over an inclination at which I blushed, and that I had always kept secret, that I committed to the flames whatever, up to that moment, I had committed to paper. (Burney, "To Dr. Burney," *The Wanderer* 8)

> . . . and if a rainy morning deprived [Catherine and Isabella] of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together. Yes, novels;—for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding—joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its

> insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. . . . "And what are you reading, Miss ___?" "Oh! it is only a novel!" replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame.—"It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;" or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 58-60)[2]

Jane Austen's list in *Northanger Abbey* of the qualities shared by the best novels—knowledge of human nature, an entertaining variety of character and wit, and an appropriate, aesthetically pleasing style—is nothing new; it echoes evaluations by many eighteenth-century private readers, reviewers, and literary historians of the novel.[3] What *is* of interest is her critique of how novel readers and novel writers are themselves portraying the genre, suggesting that the recognition of these crowning achievements of the form is somehow threatened from within. Her statement clearly formulates the issue as one of professional women writers' power *as readers* to influence the status of both the novel and its practitioners—and therefore to participate in the very construction of literary history—simply by naming or denying the texts they read. In an explicit challenge to Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth as "forgetters" of the tradition that has shaped them, Austen positions herself as a "namer"—even more, she couches her acts of naming in terms of a tradition that includes not only Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, but also Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*; Frances Burney's *Evelina*, *Camilla*, and *Cecilia*; and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*.[4]

Almost two hundred years later, the feminist literary histories of the 1980s and 1990s carried out invaluable work in the recovery of women's writing. By and large, however, the assumptions of these literary histories were that women writers had been "marginaliz[ed] or even eras[ed]" by the all-powerful male makers of literary history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. According to Clifford Siskin, the work of "[taking] writing out of the 'hands' of women," of "forgetting" their contributions, was not "a psychological lapse" of some kind, but rather the effect of a series of "key socio-economic and institutional" acts of exclusion, exemplified by mechanisms such as the "old-boys network" of *The Edinburgh Review* (195). Paula McDowell's analysis of the mid-eighteenth-century origin of "a distinct literary history of women" saw it as working "to contain and control what was by the eighteenth century recognized as a genuine threat to the existing social order: the unprecedented opportunities inherent in the new literary marketplace for women's public political and social critique" (222). While acknowledging that late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women who acted as literary life-writers and anthologists sometimes engaged in "violent repudiation of earlier women writers for transgressing the boundaries of their *own* historical periods," McDowell explained this as "a necessary strategy; a way of forestalling male criticism by repudiating the female 'other' . . ." (242-43).

Without denying the validity of these analyses, I believe that our efforts in writing eighteenth-century women's literary history are hampered less by a lack of awareness of the problem of erasure than by our resistance to rethinking women writers' and readers' positions towards, and implication in, this defining moment in women's literary history. Siskin identifies Jane Austen as the "source of important models" for male contemporaries who wished to subsume her rivals, insisting that he is not accusing Austen herself of being "ambitious and/or mean-spirited" in relation to other women writers (265 n. 8, 224, 207). I would agree that the well-known quotation from *Northanger Abbey* is anything but mean-spirited, but it does seem to me to be highly ambitious—ambitious for a place in a novelistic literary tradition. Devoney Looser has suggested that Austen, when she so insistently reappropriates Frances Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla* for a tradition that leads to and authorizes her own *Northanger*

Abbey, simultaneously shows a suspicion of the motives behind Burney's own hesitation to identify herself explicitly as a novelist.[5] Yet Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth, for that matter, were ambitious too. What, then, is the nature and situation of the ambition that would lead a woman writer either to name, or "forget" to name, another woman writer? For Burney, this is a story of contingency and accident, a small part of what I believe she would have viewed as the larger story about finding her own authorial position within a rapidly organizing print universe. In this essay, I will focus on why Frances Burney, in the early years of her career, seems to have decided to "forget" rather than to "name." In so doing, I do not intend to suggest that Burney, any more than Austen, was mean-spirited or single-handedly responsible for a marginalization of certain women writers. Rather, Burney's authorial self-construction is worth attending to because it was both particularly hers and determined by her historical position, both reactive to current conditions and influential in determining subsequent conditions of authorship for female novelists. As such, it represents one small instance of how literary history is made and how individual women writers helped to make it.

The common strategy of early feminist critics was to understand Frances Burney's career as entirely typical of that of any woman writer of her time, for whom propriety and the doctrine that a woman's place is in the home would be considerations overriding all others. According to this model, Burney's psychic and professional survival necessitated splitting off her identity as female writer from the models of female propriety which she endorsed in her writing, thereby repudiating any sign of career ambitions.[6] Yet several important readings of Burney's career have complicated this view. Catherine Gallagher, for example, has described a Burney who was "raised to the trade" of authorship in a family making its own place in an emerging literary-professional class: "the writings of other families might have been imagined as second-order realities, as accomplishments indicating a (past or present) economic independence, but the writings of the Burneys were the business of their lives" (216-17). Most recently, Janice Farrar Thaddeus, in *Frances Burney: A Literary Life*, has set out to provide a corrective account of Burney as an increasingly self-conscious professional: "I wish to stress at the start that Frances Burney at the age of 60 was—at least in some predicaments,

and especially in her professional capacity as writer—very strong and confident. . . . This point must be made—and made firmly—because Burney has so often been depicted as self-deprecating, even fearful" (3, 6).

These studies suggest new approaches to Burney's own record of her early publishing life, approaches which acknowledge the options available to her and her agency in making career choices. It is my view that, as a writer emerging in the later 1770s, Burney deliberately chose the developing model of the literary professional as a means of fashioning a coherent public identity that could be continuous with, and complementary to, the life of deep domestic attachments that was also her choice. Burney used a print-culture model of professionalism to establish an authorial identity that freed her, to a significant extent, from the limitations of an essentialized feminine identity. She fashioned this identity, I will argue, against the opposing poles of Bluestocking amateurism and pragmatic entrepreneurialism; in so doing, she remained strategically silent about, even at times actively repudiated, the women writers from whom she had learned, but who inhabited those two extremes.

Frances Burney knew very well that she was not entering the literary public sphere as a pioneer. When she launched her print career with *Evelina* in 1778, to speak only of successful women novelists, Sarah Fielding's and Frances Sheridan's literary contributions had been complete for over a decade while Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Scott had produced most or all of their published work, and Frances Brooke continued in the public eye as a respected, if sometimes controversial, literary professional. Most of these writers had been named by Mary Scott in her 1774 poem *The Female Advocate* as among numerous female authors who have "of late . . . appeared with honour, in almost every walk of literature," with the result that "the sentiments of all men of sense relative to female education are now more enlarged than they formerly were" (vii, vi). Burney's own journals and letters register her consciousness of Fielding, Lennox, and Brooke, at least, as having achieved public recognition for some form of literary "career." She knew also that for many of her contemporaries, women's place in the public sphere of letters and the arts was a given; as she quotes Edmund Burke writing to her in 1782 in praise of her novel *Cecilia*, this was "an age distinguished by producing extraordinary women."[7]

This is why Burney's own friends responded to her early anxieties about public naming as somewhat unusual; Burney's correspondent Samuel "Daddy" Crisp notes in this respect that she is one of the "Prudes," and Hester Thrale scolds her for "over-delicacy."[8] From this perspective we can see that Burney did not find herself squeezed into a mould labelled "female author" which by definition forced her to transgress a gendered private-public divide. Rather, she chose to modify that role as a means of furthering her professional ambitions in the context of Britain's rapidly elaborating print culture. That Burney herself quickly attained the height of respectable fashion at this time is facetiously recorded in a 1784 letter from Anna Laetitia Aikin to her brother—"Next to the [hot-air] balloon, Miss B. is the object of public curiosity: I had the pleasure of meeting her yesterday. She is a very unaffected, modest, sweet and pleasing young lady: —but you, now I think of it, are a Goth, and have not read Cecilia. Read, read it, for shame!" —and echoed more earnestly by a correspondent to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1785, who endorses "Miss Burney's *Cecilia*" as his example of "a particular exception" to a new subscription library's ban on romances because it is "a work of superior excellence." She was named, among other wise women, in Samuel Hoole's 1783 poem *Aurelia: or the Contest* and in the Epilogue to Thomas Holcroft's 1787 play *Seduction*.[9] Thus, the question was not whether a respectable woman author might have a public identity. Rather, it was a matter of what sort of identity she should pursue and how she would negotiate those ascribed to her, whether that of the genderless, disembodied "author of *Evelina*"; of "little Burney," Dr. Burney's daughter; of the "domesticated" companion of Mrs. Thrale;[10] of the protégée of the Bluestocking Mrs. Montagu; or of a lion of the *ton*.

For Burney, the most formative influence in this pursuit and negotiation was that of the literary circle centred at the Streatham house of Henry Thrale, presided over by Hester Thrale as hostess and Samuel Johnson as intellectual head. As William McCarthy has put it, during this time "An introduction to Streatham came to be a *badge of success in one's line*" (24–25; emphasis added). Burney's accounts of this group paint a portrait of professional authorship at the time. Burney and her Streatham friends unabashedly subscribe to the narrowest sense of the professional as working for financial gain, seeing the publication of a novel or the production

of a play as a means of economic self-support and accompanying social autonomy. In this view, seemingly self-evident to us, the group was in fact endorsing emergent views of the skilled author as worthy of her hire, as entitled to remuneration for intellectual labour despite the moral principle that knowledge should be publicly shared for the benefit of all humankind.[11] Thus, Samuel Crisp's first comments upon learning that Burney is author of *Evelina* include the statement that the bookseller Lowndes "would have *made an Estate* had he given [Burney] 1100 pounds for it, & . . . ought not to have given less!" (*EJL* 3: 65), drawing on the parallel of author and landowner which was fundamental to arguments in favour of authorial copyright privileges in the eighteenth century.[12] Like Crisp, when Johnson proposes to Burney that they go together to Grub Street because "we have a very good *right* to go, so we'll visit the mansions of our Progenitors, & take up our own Freedom!" (*EJL* 4: 209), he clearly assumes that the hard-won identity of professional author is available to Burney as a woman.

The terms Burney uses to recount her publication of *Evelina*, while disingenuously denying ambition, are clear in their equation of authorship with print: "I had written my little Book simply for my amusement, I printed it . . . merely for a frolic, to see how a production of my own would figure *in that Author like form* . . . [But I] destined [*Evelina*] to no nobler habitation than a circulating library" (*EJL* 3: 32; emphasis added). Once the link between true authorship and print has been established, publication can be the source not only of profit but also of honor. And so Burney gives pride of place in her journals and letters to the published members of the Streatham group and makes it clear that her publication of *Evelina* is the basis of her own admission to the inner circle. As an initiate to the profession, Burney proudly records moments when members of the Streatham circle signal acceptance of her as a fellow intellectual labourer, across the divides of gender, age, and social status. Thus, in recording a conversation with Sir Joshua Reynolds which she has been dreading, Burney uses pointedly horizontal, egalitarian terms to describe the relieving of her anxiety: they discuss "Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets; —we had *both* Read the *same*, & therefore could praise them with *equal* warmth,—& we *both* love & reverence the Writer, & therefore could mix observations on the *Book* with the *Author* with *equal* readiness" (*EJL* 3: 201; emphasis added).

Professionalization for any group involves establishing an exclusive

claim to expertise. It is here that we see Burney drawing distinctions between her own circle of authors and others as mere hacks, at one extreme, or mere conversational wits, at the other. Thus, George Huddesford, who dares to name Burney "*irreverently*" in his pamphlet *Warley*, is dismissed by Thrale as a nameless "Wretch," "God knows who,—in the Garret," while the "conceited" poet Mr. Keate, who preens himself at the praise of his ode "upon Building" from a sycophantic circle of female relations, crying "affectedly," "Why surely . . . you would not have me *Publish* it" is directly contrasted by Burney to her dedicated and hardworking father, who "thank Heaven, is an author of a different stamp, pursues his Work at all the leisure moments he can snatch from Business or from sleep" (*EJL* 3: 206-07; *EJL* 2: 36).

Amateur Literary Culture in *The Witlings*

Burney's journals record her fascination with the renowned conversational powers of Samuel Johnson, but wit employed in authorial projects such as Johnson's biographical prefaces to the English poets is clearly more admirable than the conversational "flash" of a *salonnière*. Perhaps in compensation for her own sense of unease in large conversational circles, Burney repeatedly mingles disdain with evident fascination when discussing such conversational "flashers" as Elizabeth Montagu, "Queen of the Bluestockings," who holds herself up for mockery as well as flattering attention and who cares "not a fig" to hear the views of others, "as long as she [speaks] herself" (*EJL* 4: 33, 38, 99). In this context Johnson's famous challenge to Burney to attack Montagu—"*Down* with her, Burney!—*down* with her!—spare her not! attack her, fight her, & *down* with her at once!—*You* are a *rising* Wit, —*she* is at the *Top* . . ." (*EJL* 3: 151)—might be read to evoke, not so much a single and internally competitive literary sphere, as the attack of a rising professional system on an earlier hierarchical structure, one built primarily upon the leisured cultivation of conversational skill and embodied in the literary salon rather than in the disembodied authorial production judged by widespread public approbation.[13]

I believe that, in this formative stage of professionalism, Burney found the approbation of other literary professionals and of the public preferable to Mrs. Montagu's version of advocacy, which insistently

embodied her as female, accomplished, and therefore worthy of patronage, but simultaneously reminded her of her subordinate social status by expressing disgust at the vulgarity of *Evelina*'s Branghtons and Captain Mirvan.[14] Certainly, Burney shuddered at the thought of having her current project, the manuscript *Witlings*, subject to "the interference of the various Macaenas's who would expect to be consulted,—of these I could not confide in *one*, without disobliging all the rest;—& I could not confide in *all*, without having the play read all over the Town before it is acted. Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Greville, Mrs. Crewe, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Cholmondeley, & many inferior &cs, think they have an *equal* claim, one with the other, to my confidence" (*EJL* 3: 264).[15]

Thaddeus has observed that *The Witlings* is ultimately about "competing kinds of authority, intellectual, financial, and familial" (55). If so, Burney's highly critical portrayal of the Esprit Party, presided over by the superficial but despotic critic Lady Smatter and its doggerel-poet Mr. Dabler, reflects her perception that the amateur author and his patron are competing with the professional, exploiting the resources of social connections and propertied leisure to monopolize readers' attention. When an incestuous and exclusive coterie circle obstructs the free circulation of texts and the resulting determination of value through public opinion, the needy but genuinely gifted author lacks the mediation of the influential reader-patron in reaching a public and gaining the just rewards of her or his labours. Hence, the skepticism of Miss Jenny, the milliner's apprentice, upon being assured that the smartly dressed Mr. Dabler is "one of the first Wits of the age," who "can make Verses as fast as [his landlady, Mrs. Voluble] can talk" (1.52-53). When Miss Jenny exclaims, "Dear me! why he's quite a fine Gentleman; I thought Poets were always as poor as Job" (1.54-55), Mrs. Voluble explains, "Why so they are, my dear, in common; your *real* Poet is all rags & atoms; but Mr. Dabler is quite another thing; he's what you may call a Poet of Fashion" (*Witlings* 1.56-58). Mr. Dabler, it seems, is usurping the rightful place of the "real Poet," who is starving somewhere off-stage. The problem, then, is the fact that the Esprit Party's members talk only to each other and merely echo one another's views; not surprisingly, the currency they exchange consists entirely in degenerate copies of the works of authors long dead and their own inferior productions. Such self-enclosed

reflexivity, superficial adulation of past writers, and mutual puffery hold out no hope for the struggling contemporary professional who needs to have her publications talked about.

If Burney was prepared to distance herself from the powerful salon hostess as one model of the woman of letters, she was equally determined to draw distinctions between her own acclaimed work and that of a derivative and sentimental amateur, even if that meant denying solidarity with other women writers. In one extended and highly shaped account in her journal, Burney struggles to disentangle herself from an encounter with the exceedingly dismal Lady Hawke, thrust upon her as a "sister authoress" by that lady's zealous flesh-and-blood sister Lady Saye and Sele. Indeed, the term "authoress" is used insistently by this enthusiastic fan, appearing eight times in Burney's six-page account. Burney is obviously uncomfortable with the assumption of a common bond as a female author with Lady Hawke, who writes because "I really can't help writing. One has great pleasure in writing the things; has not one, Miss Burney?" but has "never printed yet" —although she intends to print her epistolary novel, *The Mausoleum of Julia*, "just for her own friends and acquaintances." In rejecting the doubly gendered term "sister authoress," Burney is here rejecting the restrictive model of the "extremely languishing, delicate, and pathetic" woman writer who writes only for a coterie of family and friends—and the women who patronize her. But, significantly, it is in this context that Burney reports that Lady Say and Sele "mentioned to me a hundred novels that I had never heard of, asking my opinion of them, and whether I knew the authors" (*DL* 2: 60-66). As she resists the label of amateur authoress, Burney here repudiates the association of the novel with women writers, sensing, perhaps, that "constructing a separate, entirely female tradition threatened to lock women writers into a literary-historical ghetto" (Spencer, *Afterlife* 117).

Perhaps for this same reason, Burney is quick to name, as we know, Johnson, Richardson, Marivaux, Burke, and her own father in her novel prefaces, lending authority to her writer's voice by invoking an all-male novelistic and aesthetic tradition; Thaddeus has called this "a canny transvestism [assumed] in order to control and extend her audience" (37). In this she is not alone; Frances Brooke, for example, at about the same time complains in the preface to the second edition of her novel

The Excursion that women's claims to write good novels were being questioned but then goes on to name only the male novelists Richardson, Johnson, Mackenzie, and Goldsmith (1-2).[16] Jane Spencer's recent analysis of the profound influence of "ancient metaphors of literary genealogy" on eighteenth-century constructions of "a national literary tradition" provides us with insight into the possible symbolic significance of such choices: Spencer points out that since the generative function in the tradition was understood as male, the relation of daughter to a male writer was more easily imagined than that of daughter to a mother figure (Spencer, *Afterlife* 104, 119). In Burney's case, her following in the footsteps of her biological author-father makes such an imaginative connection all the more likely with respect to other forefathers. Pragmatically speaking, commentators and reviewers made very clear the value of association with Richardson and Fielding: among many instances are Mrs. Thrale's insistence to a sceptical male acquaintance that "Dr. Johnson . . . says Richardson would have been *proud* to have written *[Evelina]*," followed by Johnson's avowal of "things & Characters in it *more* than worthy of Fielding" (*EJL* 3: 114–15) and the *Monthly Review*'s praise of *Cecilia* as exhibiting "much of the dignity and pathos of Richardson; and much of the acuteness and ingenuity of Fielding," as well as a style that "appears to have been formed on the best model of Dr. Johnson's" (453).

But in the space between the private journal entry naming the harmless Lady Hawke and the public naming of male forefathers lies a significant number of unnamed women writers. The young, private Burney refers admiringly to Elizabeth Griffith, Frances Brooke, and Charlotte Lennox, for example. Excitedly reporting on her first meeting with Brooke, the 22-year-old Burney writes that the elder author "is very short & fat, & squints, but has the art of shewing Agreeable Ugliness. She is very well bred, & expresses herself with much modesty, upon all subjects.—which in an *Authoress*, and a Woman of *known* understanding, is extremely pleasing" (*EJL* 2: 4–5). In addition to commenting on Brooke, Burney is here alluding to Sarah Scott's 1754 novel translation *Agreeable Ugliness*, though Scott is never named. She similarly at another point records a discussion of two dialogues by "our Mr. Harris" (*EJL* 3: 106), Sarah Fielding's collaborator James Harris; the two pieces were both published anonymously in Fielding's 1748 *Familiar Letters between*

the Principal Characters in David Simple, but the textual context and its author are not in any way identified by Burney.

While Scott's obscurity and the focus on Harris might explain these respective silences, traces of more uncollegial repudiations remain as well. In 1783, Burney refused Brooke's invitation to join her in joint-editorship of a periodical paper. Burney assigns no reason for her refusal of the offer, which must in one respect have been flattering coming from this seasoned and admired writer, beyond the statement that she has nothing left to write in the aftermath of her exhausting work on *Cecilia*. It is hard to imagine Burney having nothing to contribute to the periodical genre, given her constant and voluminous production of short set-pieces in her letters and journals. Brooke's reply, "I am sorry you are *disinclin'd* to writing at present, but I have that opinion of your Sincerity, that I do not believe you wou'd have given that reason if it had not been a true one," implies some suspicion of this explanation as less than candid (qtd. in McMullen 204-05). Is it possible that Burney was attempting to limit her association with women too closely connected to Grub Street, too tied to the day-to-day grinds of making a theatrical or a periodical venture profitable?

Such an explanation offers itself particularly in the erasure that occurs between an early and a belated response to Charlotte Lennox, by this time chronically down-and-out despite her major publishing successes of the 1750s and 1760s. In 1778, as a newcomer to the Streatham circle, Burney comments, "[Dr. Johnson] gave us an account of *Mrs. Lenox*: her Female Quixote is very justly admired here; indeed, *I* think *all* her Novels far the best of any *Living* Author, —but Mrs. Thrale says that though her *Books* are generally approved, Nobody likes *her*." Significantly, this conversation as recorded in Burney's journal immediately moves to discussion of Harris's dialogues, and then Johnson questions Burney, asking "'what sort of Reading do you delight in?—History?—Travels?—Poetry?—or Romances?'" She resolutely refuses to answer the question, certain that "the examination which would have followed, had I made any direct answer, would have turned out sorely to my discredit" (*EJL* 3: 105-06). As I have been arguing, Burney's journal at this time, just after the publication of *Evelina*, is very much about learning the protocols of successful authorship. This sequence seems to record her struggle

to reconcile her admiration of a woman's writing with the unexpected revelation that that writer is a social outsider, followed by an immediate textual submersion not only of the names of women writers, but even of the identification of preferred genres. It is worth noting here that Burney is *not* in fact mocked by Johnson for reading Lennox's novels, or romances; rather, she appears to believe she must *forestall* such an association.

Years later, this struggle is well over, having ended in Lennox's total defeat. Burney responds to an inquiry from Charles de Guiffardière about Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, wherein the Doctor's "preference there expressed of Mrs. Lenox to all other females had filled him with astonishment, as he had never even heard her name," with the comment

> These occasional sallies of Dr. Johnson, uttered from local causes and circumstances, but all retailed verbatim by Mr. Boswell, are filling all sorts of readers with amaze, except the small party to whom Dr. Johnson was known, and who, by acquaintance with the power of the moment over his unguarded conversation, know how little of his solid opinion was to be gathered from his accidental assertions. (*EJL* 3: 105-06)

Faced with a male reader's amnesia about the still-living Lennox, Burney shows no concern to revive her memory, indeed implying that silence represents a more accurate public judgment than did Johnson's "accidental" statement of preference. She here seems to have forgotten not only her own earlier "just" admiration of Lennox's novels above those of all living authors but also Hester Thrale's recognition of artistic merit as separable from writerly personality.

Burney's refusal to name women writers, then, is arguably calculated and categorical—and, as Jane Austen notes, influential. If, as it has been argued, the period of the 1750s to 1770s was one of a temporary instability and openness in the "definition of differences of social structure and gender," a condition superseded by more rigidly restrictive role definitions in the latter decades of the century (Guest 115-16), Burney's practice with respect to other women writers, in contrast to her own aspirations, appears to have contributed to that rigidity. In the

relatively small literary world of 1780s London, one's membership in the right group—the most select professional circle, as opposed to the amateur Bluestocking and coterie networks on the one hand or the hard-fagging Grub Street fraternity on the other—might well have seemed a fragile thing, to be protected with vigilance. Jane Austen's ostensibly restricted provincial setting of two decades later, where her interactions with fellow novelists were mediated by print, may in fact have been the freer of the two.

I am suggesting here that Burney was simply responding with acute sensitivity to the pressures occurring around her. At the same time, however, other women writers were making other choices. In 1785, not long after the publication of *Cecilia*, the translator and novelist Clara Reeve published a two-volume history of the romance and novel genres in dialogue form, *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries, and Manners*. Although the *Progress* has figured in feminist histories primarily as a didactic text condemning the amorous fictions of Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood,[17] an examination of Reeve's method reveals an overriding concern with deploying acts of naming and obliteration to construct an accurate and value-based, rather than purely arbitrary, literary history in the newly ephemeral world of market-driven publication. In introducing Behn, for example, Reeve's principal mouthpiece Euphrasia insists on her desire to "do justice to [Behn's] merits" as well as to "cast the veil of compassion over her faults." Behn's novella *Oroonoko* is singled out to ensure that its author's name "will not be forgotten," while with respect to the rest, Euphrasia's male interlocutor Hortensius concludes, "Peace be to her *manes*!—I shall not disturb her, or her works." This careful sorting in itself enacts a memorial. Similarly, when Hortensius "help[s her] memory" to Eliza Haywood's early amorous fictions, Euphrasia admits reluctantly to them, "all of which I hope are forgotten," while saying that she had intended to name *Betsy Thoughtless*, *The Female Spectator*, and *The Invisible Spy* as Haywood's reformed writing of the mid-century. It is the last two of these "by which she is most likely to be known to posterity"; the discussion concludes with "May her first writings be forgotten, and the last survive to do her honour" (1: 118-22). Thus, Reeve's overview at once asserts that a natural selection process is at work in literary history, by which unworthy productions will sink into

oblivion and merit will be rewarded by posterity,[18] and recognizes the need to help history along by strategic naming and forgetting.

Reeve's study works to undermine perceived gender distinctions of moral and aesthetic value, whether distributed between authors, genres, or readers. Euphrasia devotes considerable attention to Charlotte Lennox, Sarah Fielding, Frances Sheridan, and Frances Brooke as "capital writers" of the romance/novel form. She presents these writers as versatile and accomplished, taking time to name their translations, children's books, and oriental tales. But she also makes it clear that one consequence of the feminization of the novel genre is a kind of forgetting which is already underway. Thus, she introduces Sarah Fielding immediately after extended discussion of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding with the words "Miss *Sarah Fielding*'s works are not unworthy next to be mentioned after her brother's . . . They well deserve the protection of your sex *Hortensius*, and the plaudit of ours" to which Hortensius replies, "You must bring me acquainted with this lady's works, pray what are their titles?" The assumption that novels written by women are unworthy the notice of men must be overcome as a precondition to preserving the memory of a writer like Sarah Fielding. Unlike Burney's journals, here there is no coy disclaimer about not having read a hundred novels known to her sisters; rather, Reeve redefines such readerly knowledge as professional expertise. Thus, when Hortensius taunts her "that from your part in our past conversations, any person who did not know you well, would conclude that your principal, if not only study, had been Romances and Novels," she replies, "If like the industrious bee I have cull'd from various flowers my share of Honey, and stored it in the common Hive, I shall have performed the duties of a good citizen of the Republic of letters, and I shall not have lived in vain" (Reeve 1: xi-xii; 2: 98).

Reeve's text, in its use of a dialectic between male and female readers' notions of the memorable, and in its carefully weighted discussion both of texts that Reeve would like to see forgotten and of texts she wishes to memorialize, attempts to intervene in the construction of a literary tradition. By contrast, I have been suggesting that Frances Burney contributed to what Clifford Siskin has called "The Great Forgetting—a Great Forgetting that became . . . The Great Tradition." The mechanism of how this occurred, Siskin argues, "was a matter of whose texts, read

or *even unread*, did get talked about and reproduced and whose texts, unread or *even read*, slipped into silence and out of production" (218). To "get [herself] talked about" in Siskin's terms, Burney aligned herself with a largely masculine Streatham circle of literary professionals, in the process writing her numerous female colleagues, whom she herself read, out of the canon while earning a prestigious rank for herself—and for the domestic novel—in the developing literary hierarchy.

Although speculating about Frances Burney's public silence on the subject of the professional woman writer may not provide simple or satisfying answers, the question remains worth asking. Most immediately, we may gain a greater understanding of Burney's own negotiation of a professional identity at a crucial moment in the establishment of the print-based author function, whose mixed messages of authorship pitted patronage against self-determination, amateur disinterest against professional association, embodied gender and status against disembodied merit, genius against economic enterprise. Her early career illustrates just how much space a woman writer could create for herself in this formative moment. At the same time, a fuller picture of how and why Burney wrote women writers out of her stories may help us to understand the complex and fateful turns of late eighteenth-century women's literary history.

NOTES

[1] This article consists of excerpts from *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, by Betty A. Schellenberg, © Betty A. Schellenberg 2005. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press. I am grateful to the members of the North American Burney Society who offered their comments on this paper at the Annual General Meeting of October 2007 in Vancouver. Some of their comments are reflected in this final version.

[2] Maria Edgeworth, as author of *Belinda*, is, of course, the target here together with Burney.

[3] For an overview of criteria applied by readers and reviewers of novels in the eighteenth century, see Schellenberg 120–40 and Runge 276–98.

[4] Austen refers explicitly to most of these texts, but also alludes, in her heroine's assumption that her world operates by the conventions of Gothic fiction, to *The Female Quixote*, and in her mockery of the public stir caused by a socially inexperienced young heroine, to *Evelina*.

[5] Like Burney in her invocations of male prose authors in her own novel prefaces, discussed below, Austen, in Devoney Looser's words, "co-opted [Burney and Edgeworth] to advance her own classificatory cause" (194); but her own ambitions for a "place in the literary market, and ultimately in the history of letters" (191) led her, unlike Burney, to "[invoke] a women's literary tradition" (194) to suit her own definition of the genre she was working in—one that claimed importance through its incorporation of both "masculine" and "feminine" (201) generic features.

[6] See Poovey. That this model is an accurate description of Burney's experience as a woman of the later eighteenth century is the starting assumption of studies by Straub 6–8 and Epstein 7, 198–201.

[7] *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay* 2: 93. Further references to Burney's journals and letters after 1781 are to this edition and will be indicated by the abbreviation "*DL*."

[8] *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, Vol. III: The Streatham Years, Part 1 (1778–1779)* 192–94; further references to Burney's journals and letters of 1778 to 1779 are to this edition and will be indicated by the abbreviation "*EJL* 3." References to Burney's journals and letters from 1774 to 1777 will be indicated by the abbreviation "*EJL* 2," and references to Burney's journals and letters of 1780 to 1781 will be indicated by the abbreviation "*EJL* 4."

[9] See Aikin (Barbauld) 2: 23; *Gentleman's Magazine* 55 (1785): 535; for the Hoole and Holcroft namings, see *DL* 2: 216–18 and Myers 284.

[10] These portrayals of Burney can be found on the title page of *Cecilia*; in a 1778 pamphlet entitled *Warley: A Satire* (see *ELJ* 3: 192-94); in anonymous verses in the *Morning Herald* for March 12, 1782, apparently written by Charles Burney (see *DL* 2: 76-78); and in a newspaper article (qtd. in *DL* 1: 492), respectively.

[11] See Rose, especially 85-91.

[12] See Rose 6-8.

[13] Burney's tendency to shape her comments about Montagu and the Bluestockings in a pattern of contrast to Thrale and the dynamics of the Streatham literary conversations is a particularized version of Gallagher's helpful contrast between the "Somebodies" the Burneys sought to please as patrons and the "Nobodies" Frances Burney imagined as the audience of *Evelina* (215-30). In the end, however, I do not agree with Gallagher's equation of Thrale and Montagu as patronesses upon whom Burney's career depended to a great extent (227-30). In this I am influenced by Betty Rizzo's thorough analysis of the friendship between Thrale and Burney in *Companions without Vows* 88-96.

[14] See *EJL* 3: 157-59; 162 n. 10. Burney's own descriptions of Mrs. Montagu insistently associate her wit with her sex in a manner that seems to delimit the superiority of that wit; see, for example, "Mrs. Thrale ranks her as the *first of Women*, in the Literary way" (*EJL* 3: 151), and, quoting Thrale, ". . . she fears you [Johnson] indeed, but that, you know, is nothing uncommon: & dearly I love to hear your *disquisitions*,—for certainly she is the first woman, for Literary knowledge, in England." It is Johnson who pushes at the boundaries of the gender category here in his reply, "she diffuses more knowledge in her Conversation than any Woman I know,—or, indeed, *almost* any Man" (*EJL* 3: 152).

[15] Ultimately, Burney viewed the literary-professional claim to status as alternate and equal to the social, describing Miss Monckton's "conversaziones" as "mix[ing] the rank and the literature, and exclud[ing] all beside" (*DL* 2: 123).

[16] Brooke does insert a reference to the French novelist Mme Élie de Beaumont, but only in a footnote quoting her praise of Richardson.

[17] See, for example, Spencer's *Rise of the Woman Novelist* 76 and *Afterlife* 97-99 as well as Runge's *Gender and Language* 156-60.

[18] See also the work's conclusion, where Euphrasia refuses to discuss novels published after 1770, insisting that "The public will do them justice, and time will shew, whether they owed their success to intrinsic merit, or to the caprice of fashion. I will not be drawn in to say any thing more of them." She then throws herself, "without asking the aid of puffing, or the influence of the tide of fashion" on the judgment of "an impartial and discerning public" (2: 100).

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