"A tattling Town like Windsor": Negotiating Proper Relations in Frances Burney's early *Court Journals and Letters* (1786-1787)

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Six months after her arrival at Court as Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte, Frances Burney discovered that before her appointment the Queen's opinion of her had not always been so positive. Madame La Fite, Reader to the Queen and Instructress to the Princesses in French and German, whom Burney had met through their mutual friends the Lockes, had, she found, "extolling me to all she could induce to hear her, constantly *offered* me" to her acquaintance, "and told them that the *charmante Auteur de Cecile* was vraiment *l'heroine d'un Roman*!":

> And this which to the Queen's cool Judgment sounds a Character of romantic affectation & flightiness, was what she asserted of me so strongly after our first meeting at Norbury Park [the Lockes' home], that her Majesty frankly told me she had conceived, from that time, an idea of me so little to her satisfaction, that it had taken from her all desire ever to see me, till she heard of me again from Mrs. Delany.[1]

Seeing Burney at Mrs Delany's, however, helped to convince the Queen that giving her "such a character in the World" was "unjust, & … injurious," and thus the possibility of her appointment came about (2: 69).[2] Such a character – of "affectation," if not of "flightiness" – was one that others would suspect in Burney, however, and the sense that Burney figures in her own journals and letters as a novelistic heroine is one that readers have noted with both sympathy and hostility. Lady Llanover, daughter of Mrs Delany's niece Georgiana Mary Ann Port (known as

"Marianne"), with whom Burney spent so much time in her first two years at Court, is perhaps one of Burney's most notable (and vicious) critics on this front.[3] In *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (1861-2), she writes that

> Miss Burney was elated to such a degree by the appointment [at Court] that she gradually lost all consciousness of her actual or relative position. She lived in an ideal world of which she was, in her own imagination, the centre. She believed herself possessed of a spell which fascinated all those she approached. She became convinced that all the equerries were in love with her, although she was continually the object of their ridicule, as they discovered her weaknesses and played upon her credulity for their own amusement.[4]

Much more sympathetically, but in a vein not entirely unrelated, Lorna Clark has suggested recently that through the "empowering nature" of writing, Burney in her journals

> could be the heroine of her own epistolary novel, the most important person in the room, flirted with by all the men, feted by the literati, loved by sweet Hester Thrale, doted on by Johnson, feared by the Blues, favored by the queen, and so on.[5]

Clark argues persuasively that Burney's journals and letters exhibit a narrative structuring "that, no less than three times, yearns to take the form of a courtship journal but is resisted by reality" in the cases of George Owen Cambridge and Stephen Digby, "until, the final and third time," with Alexandre D'Arblay, "it comes to fruition."[6]

While Lady Llanover finds Burney crassly delusional, for Clark she is in need of the kind of compensation it seems we all crave: "Mankind cannot bear very much reality. Through her pen, Burney seeks to insulate herself from too much reality, from the possibility of failure. She writes to survive, to retell, in bearable form, her life's story."[7] This argument, although clearly defending Burney from the sort of patently unkind and class-ridden judgment indulged in by Lady Llanover, also to some extent tacitly confirms its implications without sharing its condemnation. By "insulat[ing] herself from too much reality," Burney seems to tend towards an "ideal world" of her own imagination. The censorious Victorian and sympathetic modern reader seem to come to a similar conclusion about Burney from different directions and with different motivations.

The Court journals, as Joyce Hemlow pointed out many years ago, were "not a private, but a semi- or mock-private communiqué." Addressed to Burney's sister Susan and their close friend Frederica Locke, "extracts at least … would be in public reading at Norbury Park." Written up some time later (perhaps many months), from memoranda made at the time, they comprised "not a day-to-day account but a selection of such incidents as were likely to afford interest or amusement."[8] That Burney consciously used the creation of narratives of "such incidents" as a method of distraction from her profound misery in her new life at Court is clear, especially from passages omitted in early editions but newly available since the publication of the new edition of the *Court Journals and Letters* in 2011.[9] One such passage comes towards the end of the Oxford journal, an account of the Royal visit in August 1786 that took place soon after the attempted assassination of George III. Much quoted and admired over the years, the journal is informative, lively and, occasionally, frankly funny. Towards the end, Burney explains that she has been "very minute" in her account of

the visit both because "it presented scenes so new to me" and because the usual inflexibly invariable routine of Court life means that "after you have had a month or two of general Journal, you will have nothing more to be new to either of us." In a paragraph cut from Barrett's and Dobson's editions, she continues:

> Should I – by that time, – be arrived at a firmer state of Mind, I may write to my beloved Susan & Fredy without wanting *Facts* or *Narrations*, & only from the sources of Thoughts & Affections … But I now fly them both! – & while I keep both at a distance, my spirits recover. – The moment they approach, – those spirits are again gone! – I will harden myself all that I can, it is now my constant, serious aim. (1: 127; emphases in original)

The extent to which she is still struggling to "harden" herself then becomes clear at the end of the journal for November that year, in another passage omitted from the earlier editions:

> In writing Facts & circumstances, I have wholly omitted the state of my Mind,– & let me omit it still – omit – Good God! – I cannot write about that time! – Forget it too, my beloved Susan – forget it, my sweet simpathising Fredy! – to recollect what You suffered for me then, – for me & by me, – is of all my recollections the most painful! (1: 272)[10]

In these passages, "*Facts* or *Narrations*" – "Facts & circumstances" – are presented as providing a cover or distraction from "the state of my Mind". Yet if the "*Facts & Narrations*" produced during her early years at Court undoubtedly gave Burney a much-needed distraction from her unhappiness, this does not mean that they need also to be read primarily as helping her to insulate herself from reality, as stories told to escape a world she was, by implication, unable to face. In this article, I read narrative performances produced by Burney 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 compensatory (although I recognise the force and cogency of Clark's argument), 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 fuelling escapist fantasy, presented her with 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 significance as a matter of material importance to a woman of Burney's rank, upbringing and temperament.

When Frances Burney arrived at Court in July 1786, she was 34. She was at once a celebrated novelist and an impecunious unmarried daughter, and the appointment was seen as providing for her as marriage would have done. She herself wrote in a much-quoted passage to her sister soon after her arrival, "I am *married*, my dearest Susan, – I look upon it in that light, – I was averse to forming the union, & I endeavoured to escape it; but my friends interfered, – they prevailed–& the knot is tied" (1: 8). If marriage is one metaphor for her situation, the other is that of the cloister. In January 1787 she resolved, in an effort to reconcile herself to her life at Court, "to settle myself in my monastery, without one idea of ever quitting it; – to study for the approbation of my lady Abbess, & make it a principal source of content, as well as spring of action;–& to associate more chearily with my surrounding Nuns & Monks" (2: 25). Yet both metaphors tend to downplay Burney's situation as a single woman in a mixed environment – an environment, moreover, that was both in some ways highly restrictive and yet also disconcertingly unsupervised. Burney's anxiety about the lack of guidance on conduct is further underlined in recovered passages of the journals, such as her lament, on the subject of receiving visits, after her first month's service: "All I can do, is hold back to the utmost of my power, till I

better understand with what propriety I may come forward" (1: 142).[11] However much like married or cloistered existence Court life may have seemed in its apparently binding nature and demanding routines, Burney had to negotiate it while still carrying all the baggage – her own as well as that of wider society, if it's possible thus to separate them – of an unmarried and still (despite her relatively advanced age) – marriageable woman.[12] Her scruples seem sometimes tortuous to modern readers and seemed so, indeed, to some of her contemporaries, but the advice of those whom she trusted – Mrs Delany, Leonard Smelt, the Queen herself – seems to have supported the validity of her concerns.[13] Lorna Clark has rightly noted the "potent but unacknowledged influence of sexuality" in the journals more generally; the discussions with these advisers relayed by Burney in her Court journals – determining questions such as whom may she visit, or receive in her own rooms? with whom should she correspond? – are a tacit acknowledgment of the importance of this influence in Court life and the care needed to avoid rumour and gossip (facets of existence there to which I shall return).[14]

If Burney struggled in her ignorance of Court etiquette, especially at first, she also found Court custom put pressure on her own sense of propriety. Mrs Schwellenberg, Burney's irascible fellow Keeper of the Robes and very soon the bête noire of her existence (whom she dubbed "Cerbera" and found depressingly reminiscent of her unloved stepmother), was accustomed to entertaining the equerries to tea each evening.[15] Burney was expected to be present but rapidly found she was also required to efface herself almost completely to avoid jealousy and aggression from her fellow Keeper. The ill-health that kept Mrs Schwellenberg in London for much of the time between the end of September 1786 and mid-June 1787 released Burney from the misery of her bad-tempered and dominant company, but also meant

that she was required to preside over the tea-table in her absence.[16] This was manageable while she was able to find another woman to keep her company, but distinctly unsettling if not.

Looking forward one afternoon to a tête-à-tête with Mrs Delany, Burney was disappointed to receive another visitor, Miss Finch, in addition; Mrs Delany, however, was then (as very often happened) "carr[ied] away" to the Queen:

> I had now, therefore, no one, but this Chance-comer, to assist me in doing the honours to my two Beaus [equerries Major Price and General Budé]: & well as I like their company, I by no means enjoyed the prospect of receiving them alone: – not, I protest, & am sure, from any prudery, but simply from thinking that a single Female, in a party either large or small, of Men, unless very much used to the World, appears to be in a situation awkward & unbecoming.[17]

When Miss Finch then rose to leave, Burney "was quite concerned,"

> & frankly begged her to stay & help to recreate my Guests. – She was very much diverted with this distress, which she declared she could not comprehend, as she should have no sort of objection to receiving *any quantity of Men* at any time herself, but frankly agreed to remain with me; & promised, at my earnest desire, not to publish what I had confessed to her, lest I should gain, around Windsor, the character of a Prude. (1: 180; emphasis in original)

The way in which Burney recounts this episode is worth consideration. She denies "prudery," while recognising that if her feelings should be known she would be likely to "gain ... the character of a Prude," suggesting subtle differences between the way Burney herself defines the word and its common usage. John Gregory's popular conduct book, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), recognised that prudery was an accusation young women attempting to behave with propriety may have to

contend with: "By prudery is usually meant an affectation of delicacy. Now I do not wish you to affect delicacy; I wish you to possess it. At any rate, it is better to run the risk of being thought ridiculous than disgusting."[18] The relation of Burney's work to conduct-book advice has been much discussed; one notable aspect of this passage is that Burney follows what might be seen as a "delicate" concern at being put in a "situation awkward & unbecoming" with a rather risqué remark.[19] Whether the emphasis was Miss Finch's as well, or simply Burney's in the writing, its inclusion is clearly "indelicate" and it was, unsurprisingly, excised in the earlier editions of the journals. Indeed, many of the excisions made in Barrett's edition can be seen as aimed at removing such contradictory moments. Remarking "how often attention paid to Burney, especially (though not exclusively) male attention, is the constant subject and recurring theme of the journal-letters, even the main organising principle," Clark notes that this is "certainly at odds with the projected image of the modest, decorous, easily abashed maiden."[20] Moments like this one suggest a more complicated "projected image" in the journals, one which encompasses more fully the complexities of being both delicate and knowledgeable, both "easily abashed maiden" and woman of 34.

Tea with the equerries is, as Clark points out, one of the main points of narrative focus in the Court journals, "unfold[ing] like a scene of romantic comedy."[21] Yet, as a much earlier commentator on Burney observed somewhat acidly, "Days and pages of Diary were given over to Fanny's futile, fluttering little intrigues to break away from the equerries at tea."[22] If Burney found that tea-time provided fruitful material for exercising her skills in rendering lively dramatic dialogue for the entertainment of her readers, she also sought actively to escape it. Her journal for October 1786 records, on her realisation that Mrs Schwellenberg was likely to be

absent for some time, the formation of "a grand design ... to obtain to my own use the disposal of my Evenings" (1: 200), but it was only in December of that year, when the current equerries' time was up and a new equerry arriving, that she made a concerted effort to follow through her design: "Again I resolved to make a new effort for freedom. With a new Equerry would be the time; & the absence of Mrs Schwellenberg, & no plan being begun, & no custom pursued, made this my most promising opportunity" (1: 314).[23] Burney's plan was frustrated, however. Her advisers were not supportive; Mrs Delany "totally disapproved" the plan:

> Without the concurrence of the Queen, she said, no innovations ought to be risked, & as the King's attendants for so many Years had drank their Tea with the Queen's, she thought it could only pass for dissatisfaction, with their Majesties, to break the custom, & probably, for prudery, with the Gentlemen themselves. (2: 14)

Mr Smelt, meanwhile, "did not seem to think this [the freeing of her evenings] very feasible, but said nothing positively against it" (2: 68). These dampening responses from two of the people at Court whose judgment Burney trusted most caused her to modify her plans and they suggest that she had little hope of success. Her narrative of the attempt and its failure thenceforward centres on a figure who is at this point only just coming into prominence in her journals and who forms the focal point of the ensuing discussion.

The Reverend Charles de Guiffardière, Reader to the Queen and teacher to the Princesses, is first mentioned early on but very briefly as a "well-bred & sensible man" in the entry for July 19th 1786 (1: 23). Although he still figures as a notable character in Barrett's and Dobson's editions, the new edition of the Court journals allows us to see that substantial passages in Burney's accounts of her conversations

and difficulties with Guiffardière were omitted from the earlier versions, passages that contribute significantly to an understanding of the complex sexual tensions highlighted by their encounters. Later, writing up her journals months in arrears from memoranda made at the time, Burney was able to introduce him more significantly to Susan and Fredy with a foreknowledge of his increasing prominence in her life – or, at least, of his potential as material in her account of "Facts & circumstances" (1: 272). She writes with a certain relish for the narrative potential such a subject offered:

> Shall I introduce to you this Gentleman such as I now think him at once? or wait to let his Character open itself to you by degrees, & in the same manner as it did to me? – I wish I could hear your answer! – So capital a part as you will find him destined to play, hereafter, in my concerns, I mean, sooner or later, to the best of my power, to make you fully acquainted with him. (1: 238)

Known as "Giffy" to the Queen and Princesses, the clergyman proved to be a more mercurial and unpredictable character than Burney had at first appreciated and his code name became "Mr Turbulent".[24] Clark has pointed out how the "exhausting scenes (of verbal, sometimes even physical, conflict)" between Burney and Guiffardière "are exhaustively described, as a clash of intellects and wills," and sees them as fictionalised in a particular way, Burney playing the "embattled heroine" in a seduction narrative, suspicious "that the married clergyman may have a guilty predilection in her favour; the unstated sexual attraction is the source of energy and suspense. When his too-insistent attentions fade away, M. de Guiffardière too fades from the narrative."[25] Yet this doesn't represent entirely accurately the nature of Burney's presentation of her relationship with Guiffardière. Sexual tension there certainly is, but it is more complex than this summary implies, as are the reasons for its "fading away."

As Burney tells it, Guiffardière presented one of the key obstacles to the fulfilment of her desire to free her evenings, as a result of his determination that she should meet the new equerry, Colonel Greville. Burney presents Guiffardière as a chameleon-like figure, shifting from an "importunate Casuist" (2: 42) who discomfits her on the subject of religion during the three-hour journey from London to Windsor, to a misanthrope lamenting and "murmuring on the ill condition of human life" (2: 50), to "a mere mischievous *polisson* [naughty child]" (2: 58). Finding that she has not met the new equerry and does not intend to do so, since she is hoping quietly to let drop the custom followed so rigidly by Mrs Schwellenberg, Guiffardière begins a teasing campaign to make her change her mind:

> "You will not make the Tea, ma'am, & leave the Colonel out?"
>
> "I have never had the Colonel *in*, Sir, – & therefore there is nothing peculiar in the omission."
>
> "And why, ma'am? *why* have you not? – there cannot be a more amiable man, – a man of manners, person, address, appearance, & conversation more pleasing, – more *enchanting*, ma'am!"
>
> "I don't at all doubt it, Sir, – "
>
> "Shall I fetch him, then?"
>
> "No, Sir. –"
>
> "*Vous avez donc peur*? –" (2: 42-3; emphases in original)

Such exchanges continue for a couple of weeks. At first Burney explains that she "did not chuse to trust him with the motives for my proceedings, which he might probably think affected, or else relate to the Colonel himself, with whom he is very intimate, & draw inferences, and make comments, very little to be desired" (2: 51). At this early stage in her depiction of him, it is not so much Guiffardière's possibly suspect interest

in herself that concerns her (although that is also implied), but his apparent mischievous interest in insisting there is something personally significant in her avoidance of Greville. When she does try to explain her desire for some time to herself, Guiffardière exclaims that he perceives '"nothing in all this but a most extraordinary simpathy – for *Colonel Greville* also loves solitude!"' and then cries "with affected solemnity" that he forebodes '"something ominous in all this! – What a meeting it may prove at last!"' (2: 54; emphasis in original).

The meeting finally happened just a few days after this exchange, when Guiffardière, in "a determined victory over my will & my wish" (2: 62), gleefully delivered a request from Mr Smelt and Colonel Greville to join Burney and Miss Planta at tea.[26] The scene is presented as one of comical embarrassment; Burney "could almost have laughed, so ridiculous had the behaviour of Mr. Guiffardière, joined to his presence and watchfulness, rendered" it, and Colonel Greville "coloured violently on his entrance," confirming to her that Guiffardière "had been as busy with the Colonel about me, as with me about the Colonel" (2: 63). Once Guiffardière had witnessed the "ominous" meeting, however, passages omitted from the earlier editions of the journals describe how he then proceeded to become theatrically jealous of Greville, subjecting Burney when she spoke to him to "such looks […] of reproach & of watchfulness" that she can "scarcely help laughing" (2: 100-101). His behaviour became that of a neglected child:

> quite wild to see me thus readily engaged in a separate conversation, [Guiffardière] gave all the interruption in his power; He bent forward every other minute with some new demand, – now more sugar – now more cream – now it was too strong, – now too weak, – &, while he would not suffer me to

> listen quietly, marked my being engaged so strongly, that I saw, soon after, Major Price himself quite struck with attentive observation to us; […] (2: 102)

As so frequently in her novels, Burney renders this scene of domestic persecution with a fine sense of how the ludicrous shades into the distressingly uncomfortable. Politely imprisoned by the tea table, she is left hoping that the Major's knowledge of Guiffardière's character will prevent the raising of "any rumours, or even shadow of a surmize upon such a subject" (2: 102).

Burney's fear of rumour had its basis in past experience. Rumours had dogged her inconclusive relationship with George Owen Cambridge, even finding their way into print in early April 1783, when "a newspaper paragraph […] coupled her name" with his.[27] Shortly after her anxiety about the "shadow of a surmise" developing, thanks to Guiffardière's behaviour, in relation to herself and Greville, Burney discovered that rumours had actually been circulating about the attention paid to her by Price, who had been one of the equerries in post when she began her service. Price was a good family friend of Burney's cousins in Worcester, to whom she was close, and so it was not surprising that the two struck up a cordial friendship. Price resigned from Court service in October 1786 as a result of ill-health, but this apparently had not prevented Colonel Manners, an equerry who had not even come to Court until after the Major's departure, picking up on the gossip and helping to keep it alive. When Price visited Windsor in June 1787, Burney had, she wrote, "the real provocation to receive immediate & indubitable proofs that the nonsence [sic] which had been told me concerning him, had not only reached him, but had made a deep impression upon his mind, & alteration in his conduct" (2: 171). She was not at all under the impression that the Major actually had any romantic feelings for her, and it seems quite clear that she experienced none of her own for him, but she was saddened

that their friendship should suffer as a result of the rumours that had circulated: "What a busy & meddling World it is!" (2: 176), she exclaimed, concluding, "All this fuss & folly has much lessened my regret at his resignation" (2: 185).

The gossip concerning Price and Burney had found its way from Court out into the wider world, but the Court itself was particularly fertile ground for rumour: as Rudolf M. Dekker has commented, "Sociological and historical studies have emphasized the importance of gossip in village communities. […] As distinct social groups, royal courts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can well be compared" to such communities.[28] Seen from this angle, Burney's anxieties and calculations while dealing with and within a "tattling Town like Windsor" (2: 218) seem less overly-dramatized, less centred on her own status as heroine, and more comprehensible. On February 27th 1787, on the same occasion that had seen Guiffardière persecuting Burney at the tea table with endless requests for sugar, cream, and so on, Burney found herself alone with Colonel Greville when everyone else had dispersed. "I thought I might now," she explains, "without any charge of prudery, retire also to my Room; but Colonel Greville detained me, by begging, […] that he might remain where he was until Mr. Guiffardière returned." (Still the "charge of prudery" is a concern.) They then "sat, & chatted over the Company":

> But when Mr. Guiffardière opened the Door – & saw only us two! – sitting in a social Tête à Tête – his looks – & his start – were really intolerable. […] I was even afraid, so threatening was his countenance, & so unrestrained his Eyes, that he would have permitted speech also to his tongue, – & have said *what, alone together at last*! but he just forbore that […] (2: 104; emphasis in original)

Instead, Guiffardière seated himself by the door, "quite aloof, while the Colonel's Chair was next to mine, & there sate silent, as if not to interrupt us." Omitted from the earlier editions of the journals, this episode elicited from Burney an anguished exclamation: "I *have* been so <scared>, my dearest Susan, where such behaviour was truly <cruel>! – Good God! What agitation have I suffered from it! – Here, however, it was merely alarming, – though even that was disagreeable enough to make me half angry" (2: 104; emphasis in original). It is unclear what precisely Burney refers to here, but it seems more than likely she has in mind an incident or incidents from the period during which she still had hopes of her relationship with George Owen Cambridge. The vocabulary of fear employed emphasizes how in certain settings and circumstances interactions between the sexes became, at least in the minds of some of those involved or observing, especially fraught with potential for materially damaging misconstruction and gossip. Susan, Hester Davenport has noted, "expressed herself 'both scandalised and frightened' by [Guiffardière's] behaviour," a combination of responses that echoes Burney's own.[29] Once Guiffardière had returned to the room and made Burney fear his suppositions, she felt trapped: "Late as it was, I did not dare to offer to retire, lest he should charge me with staying for a Tête à Tête, & going when it was interrupted" (2: 104).

If Burney found gossip (or the fear of gossip) about herself and single men a cause for irritation and anxiety, the behaviour of the married Guiffardière could have been perhaps all the more potentially embarrassing. What Burney seems to have struggled with most, however, is not the impression that Guiffardière ever had a serious sexual interest in her (if she did ever believe this, the impression was fleeting), but the problem of how to *articulate* to Guiffardière himself her sense of the impropriety of his behaviour. While others could potentially misinterpret such

behaviour, the possibility of this is not really what bothers her once it has become clear that he is well-known for his antics at Court and indulged to boot: a few days after Guiffardière's interruption of Burney's tête-à-tête with Greville, she witnessed a scene in which the clergyman teased the Princess Augusta in mildly suggestive style, commenting:

> […] I was greatly surprised: I had not imagined any man, but the King or Prince of Wales, had ever ventured at a *badinage* of this sort with any of the Princesses; nor do I suppose any *other* man ever did: Mr. G: is a favourite so great with all the Royal Family, that he safely ventures upon whatever he pleases: & doubtless they find, in his courage & his rhodomontading, a novelty extremely amusing to them, or they would not fail to bring about a change.
>
> For myself, I own, when I perceived in him this mode of conduct with the Princesses, I saw his flights, & his rattling, & his heroicks, in a light of mere innocent play, from exuberance of high spirits: & I looked upon them, & upon him, in a fairer light. (2: 110)

Clark too draws attention to this passage, but sees it as an indication that, realising she is not singled out by his behaviour to her, Burney then regards Guiffardière as less interesting and thus "he soon cuts less of a figure in her narrative."[30] Yet this moment of realisation comes *before* some of the most exhausting scenes between Burney and Guiffardière, and her commentary on these reveals, I would argue, that her interest in him is not centred on a desire to write him into a novelistic seduction narrative in which she can figure as heroine, but is focused rather on the difficulties of articulating her own sensitivities about proper behaviour to a man who is, precisely, innocent of sexual designs.

After one scene of particularly vehement "rhodomontading" in March 1787, in which Guiffardière both falls on his knees and, when she tries to leave the room, forces her back to her chair, Burney reconsiders her own behaviour. She regrets "a check so rude & violent to the gaiety & entertainment of an acquaintance which had promised me my best amusement during our Winter campaigns," but resolves to put into practice "quite a new system; & instead of encouraging […] every thing that could lead to vivacity & spirit, I was fain to determine upon the most distant, & even forbidding demeanour…" (2: 121). After some months, during which this "new system" has puzzled and offended Guiffardière, he demands that Burney should "explain [her] late *chilling demeanour*." Burney is nonplussed: "I wished him rather to feel, than be told, the improprieties I meant to obviate" (2: 238; emphasis in original). The problem is that if Guiffardière himself does not "feel" these improprieties, Burney needs to spell them out – but to do so is to reveal her own understanding of the sexual potential in his actions, something she cannot bring herself to do:

> I quite languished to say to him the truth at once; that his sport, his spirit, & his society, would all be acceptable to me, would he but divest them of that redundance of gallantry, which rendered them offensive to me – but I could only think *how* to say this, – I could not bring it out; his attestations of innocence made it seem shocking to *me* to have to censure him, & I felt it a sort of degradation of myself, to point out an impropriety that seemed quite out of his own ideas! (2: 239; emphases in original)

Resorting to "general promises of becoming more *voluble*," Burney finds Guiffardière believes this amounts to "a sort of concession that I owed him some reparation for the disturbance I had caused him," an interpretation which she disclaims, only to find that

"all his violence was resumed" (2: 239). Encounters with Guiffardière become a testament to the degree to which human beings can misinterpret each other – a practical example of somatic illegibility, in which he claims to read Burney's demeanour correctly while she emphatically denies his interpretation. Soon after this conversation, they have another in which Guiffardière asserts, "'… you well know you have treated me ill, – you know, & have acknowledged it!'" To Burney's indignant, "'when did I do what could never be done?'", he responds, "'…I thought your *Eyes* said it, which is the same as the voice; your Eyes, – your look, & your manner, – all looked quite sorry that you had used me so ill.'" Burney protests "it must be utterly impossible I should have had either looks or manner so foreign to my feelings" (2: 244), and seems inclined to attribute his claims to his "strange" and "wild" character (2: 246), rather than consider any further the opacity (or contrariness) of bodily signals. These signals, in her view, mark Guiffardière's behaviour as improper, while he is in fact, she believes, "really innocent of all evil intention," leaving Burney "at a loss how to point out to him my dislike of his actual proceedings, without appearing to harbour doubts which he might cast, to my infinite dismay, upon myself" (2: 240). Wishing to believe that her own "feelings" and "manner" are consistent with one another, her difficulties with Guiffardière stem from the apparent disjunction between his manner (that of a distracted lover) and his feelings (those of a faithful husband, whose devotion to his wife in her illness during the later months of 1787 introduces him to Burney "in his fairest light" [2: 269] and effectively curtails his "rhodomontading"). Had his manner been consonant with his feelings – that is, had he been in reality the would-be lover his actions implied, "all difficulty would subside, however unpleasantly; for the abhorrence with which I should be filled, would remove from me all hesitation & fear" (2: 240).

Such moments testify to Burney's anxious internal negotiations with the requirements of propriety. Such negotiations are, of course, entirely typical of her own heroines, and thus far the likeness between the writer and her creations holds good. But it is arguably because Burney's novels address questions that their author also had to address, questions about the way women navigate social life (and Court was a particularly challenging and unfamiliar environment to navigate), that we find her journals seem to offer her as "the heroine of her own epistolary novel," rather than because such things helped Burney to "insulate herself from too much reality" or allowed her to indulge a fantasy of being the cynosure of all eyes. Indeed, while the writer could clearly recognise the narrative and dramatic potential in a figure like Guiffardière, it is not necessarily easy to see the encounters Burney describes as compensatory; her recognition that he did not present any actual threat exacerbates her difficulty rather than diminishes her interest, and what she offers her readers is not a would-be seduction narrative but a "turbulent" character unable to appreciate the implications of his behaviour. Characteristically, Burney recognises the varying measures of comedy and distress such a character can cause: most frustratingly, he throws responsibility for the detection of sexual signals back onto a woman who cannot acknowledge – beyond the confines of her journal – that she understands such things.

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[1] *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor et al., 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011-), 2: 69, hereafter cited parenthetically.

[2] Burney became close to Mrs Delany after they first met in January 1783; it was during a visit to her at Christmas in 1785 that she first met the Queen.

[3] Another key figure who advanced this view of Burney was the critic John Wilson Croker, who judged Burney insufferably egotistical. The *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, for example, he saw as

having “one single object […] namely, the *glorification of Miss Fanny Burney* – her talents – her taste – her sagacity – her wit – her manners – her temper – her delicacy – even her beauty – and, above all, her *modesty*!” (*Quarterly Review* 70 [1842]: 244-45).

[4] Augusta, Lady Llanover, ed., *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany; with interesting Reminiscences of King George III and Queen Charlotte*, 6 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1861-2), 2nd Series, 3: 361. Lady Llanover’s hostility to Burney had its roots in the deterioration of Burney’s relationship with her mother, Georgiana; for further details, see Hester Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George III* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000; 97-99). I am indebted to one of this essay’s anonymous readers for the insight that this hostility may also have been strengthened by “the dalliance of Alexander Burney with Augusta, who might well have resented his attentions when it became clear that they were going nowhere”.

[5] Lorna J. Clark, “Epistolarity in Frances Burney,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 20 (2010): 216. See also Clark’s essay, “Dating the Undated: Layers of Narrative in Frances Burney’s *Court Journals*,” *Lifewriting Annual* 3 (2012): 119-39, in which her discussion of the time lag in the composition of the Court journals leads her to comment that “Croker’s suggestion that Burney was writing a fiction in which she cast herself as heroine does not seem too far off the mark” (122).

[6] Clark, “Epistolarity,” 199. Burney and the Revd George Owen Cambridge had “carried out,” in Peter Sabor’s words, “a long and ultimately futile flirtation just before her appointment at Court” (*Court Journals and Letters*, 1: 36, n.168). Stephen Digby, disguised in earlier editions of the journals and letters as “Mr Fairly,” had been appointed the Queen’s Vice-Chamberlain in 1783. He and Burney became particularly close during the period of the King’s illness in 1788-89, but later in 1789 he became engaged to Charlotte Gunning, to Burney’s distress.

[7] Clark, “Epistolarity,” 216.

[8] Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 202. For further detail about the complex composition of the Court journals, see Clark, “Dating the Undated”.

[9] The modern edition replaces Austin Dobson’s six-volume *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay, 1778-1840* (1904-5). This superseded Charlotte Barrett’s original edition of the journals and letters, *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay* (7 vols, 1842-7). Although Dobson provided a new introduction and commentary, however, “the text of his edition is otherwise identical with that of its

precursor," bar a few unpublished letters included as appendices (see Peter Sabor's "History of the Manuscripts and Earlier Editions," *Court Journals and Letters*, 1: xxx).

[10] Clark explains that by December 1786 Burney was a full year behind in the composition of her journals, so it can be concluded these words were not written until the late autumn of 1787 ("Dating the Undated," 121-2).

[11] As she writes a little later, "I was then too uncertain of any of my priveleges [sic] to assume a single one of them unauthorised by the Queen" (1: 173), a determination that leads to an "oppressive" scene in which Burney resists giving dinner to Mme La Fite and the German novelist Mme La Roche; both Miss Planta and, more significantly, the Queen approve Burney's "steadiness" on the occasion, however (1: 176).

[12] In *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction*, E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield give the mean age of women at first marriage between 1750 and 1799 as 24 years and nine months (1981; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 255.

[13] Leonard Smelt was Sub-governor to the royal princes and a friend of Burney's father. His influence had been instrumental in securing her appointment (see *Court Journals and Letters*, 1: 193, n.587 and 588).

[14] Lorna Clark, "The Diarist as Novelist: Narrative Strategies in the Journals and Letters of Frances Burney," *English Studies in Canada* 27.3 (2001): 290.

[15] According to Burney's summary of a typical day, tea would be between 8 and 9 pm, after which the equerries would usually be summoned by the King to attend the daily concert (1: 37).

[16] Burney was far from alone in the relief she felt at Mrs Schwellenberg's absence; on hearing that she was to remain in town rather than accompany them back to Windsor in September 1786, Miss Planta, English teacher to the Princesses, "made a sort of involuntary exclamation – 'Good God, Miss Burney, if Mrs. Schwellenberg was not so sick – *& so cross* – how happily we might all live! –"' (1: 178).

[17] Of the tendency to refer to the equerries as "Beaus," Hester Davenport notes that "there seems to have been a general archness between the women of the household and the Windsor uniforms," but she also judges that the journals and letters "do not support the allegation that [Burney] thought herself the centre of their amorous attentions" (Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid*, 92).

[18] John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (Dublin, 1774), 17. In "Courting Ruin: The Economic Romances of Frances Burney," Miranda Burgess notes the contradiction by which Gregory

repudiates affectation while effectively conceding that "in seeking a husband, it is better to assume false modesty than to be caught with one's modesty down altogether" (*Novel* 28.2 [1995]: 134).

[19] See Joyce Hemlow, "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books," *PMLA* 65.5 (1950): 732-761. While Hemlow argued that Burney should be understood as a courtesy author, Burney's use of such material is seen in ironic terms by later critics such as Kristina Straub in *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), Margaret Doody in *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunwick: Rutgers University Press, 1988) and Julia Epstein in *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

[20] Clark, "Epistolarity," 198. It could also be argued that one of the generic features of the journal is that it makes the experience of its writer central, and thus "attention paid" to the author is likely to figure significantly.

[21] Clark, "Epistolarity," 202.

[22] Emily Hahn, *A Degree of Prudery: A Biography of Fanny Burney* (London: Arthur Baker, 1951), 223.

[23] Equerries served a period of three months; as Hester Davenport notes, "one of the aspects of the tea-hour that Fanny at first disliked was that these 'Windsor uniforms' were always changing" (*Faithful Handmaid*, 66).

[24] On Burney's, and especially Susan's, use of code-names, see Clark, "Dating the Undated," 127-8 and n.30.

[25] Clark, "Epistolarity," 199.

[26] English teacher to the Princesses, Margaret ("Peggy") Planta was one of Burney's regular companions at Court; apparently a good-natured but not sparkling character, she and Burney got on well, but she was no substitute for Susan and Fredy.

[27] Doody, *Frances Burney*, 152. Burney thought the paragraph the work of William Weller Pepys, who she also believed had published a poem mentioning her name after the publication of *Evelina*; given evidence that the poem's author was in fact Burney's father, Doody asks, "Could Dr. Burney have been the author of this piece as well? […] there is reason to imagine that whoever sent the paragraph into the newspaper did so in the hopes of pushing George Cambridge toward an honorable and open declaration. If that were the intention, the treatment did not take effect" (152).

[28] Rudolf M. Dekker, "Sexuality, Elites, and Court Life in the Late Seventeenth Century: The Diaries of Contantijn Huygens, Jr.," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23.3 (1999): 105. The teenaged Marianne Port, as Hester Davenport notes, was a more obvious subject for gossip at Court at this period: her attraction to the much older equerry Colonel Goldsworthy was clear to (and seems to have been disapproved of by) many. Susan Burney christened her "Friskitten" and Burney herself regretfully determined that Marianne was not a suitable match for the Lockes' son, William (see Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid*, 93-8 and *Court Journals and Letters*, 2: 273-6). Given her dread of rumour, it is ironic that in his hostile review of the *Diary and Letters* Croker sees Burney herself as the worst kind of gossip, describing her as a "tale-bearer" and "a deliberate spy" (*Quarterly Review* 70, 259).

[29] Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid*, 65.

[30] Clark, "Epistolarity," 199.