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“This crowded Sheet”: Speaking Through Space in Frances Burney and Georgiana Waddington’s Correspondence

EMMA WALSHE

Frances Burney’s archive holds a vast collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscripts, written during a lifetime that spanned nearly a century. As well as penning novels, plays, memoirs, and diaries, she wrote an immense number of letters: those that survive will fill twenty-five edited volumes in total. Though her fictional works were the first to experience a critical revival, Burney’s letters now enjoy equal acclaim. Academic focus has, however, predominantly rested on their content rather than their physical appearance. We therefore remain largely unaware of the extent to which Burney’s familiar letters convey their meaning as much through material layout as through written language. Her deft use of the manuscript page communicates messages through the filling of a margin, the size of paper chosen, or the specific placement of handwriting. Her correspondence with Georgiana Mary Ann Waddington in particular illuminates the manner in which Burney communicated her affection, anger, and deference towards her old friend through a complex semiotics of materiality.

In 2000, Nigel Hall stated that “little has been written about the materiality of writing” (83). This is no longer the case, particularly in epistolary studies. In the last fifteen years the study of manuscript materiality has flourished to become an established sub-genre, with a host of critical proponents. Important studies by James Daybell, Susan Whyman, Dena Goodman, and Liz Stanley foreground the practice of reading a letter “with attention both to the physical characteristics of the manuscript as well as to the social contexts of its composition, delivery, reception and latterly its archiving” (Daybell 1). Epistolary materiality, therefore, has become a serious consideration in our reading of letters written and exchanged during the long eighteenth century. In the wake of these advances, this essay strives to read what Daybell defined as “the

material rhetorics of the manuscript page” (2) and to inquire into their significance within Burney’s own letters.

In literary theory, then, epistolary materiality is becoming well-established. In the modern publication of edited letters, however, it has yet to become an aspect which editors feel must, or even can, be transcribed fully and regularly. Financial limitations prevent expensive solutions, such as extensive facsimile imaging or online digital editions; moreover, complex annotation frameworks are considered a cryptic impediment to the readability of modern editions. Despite these practical and theoretical complexities, it is needful to consider these problems because of their effect on academic and popular conceptions of the letter.

As Claudine van Hensbergen argues, “the way in which we read 18th-century letters now derives, primarily, from the practices and ways in which modern editors and critics choose to arrange and discuss them” (513). The letters that we read are necessarily products of “these transformations and accruals made through editorship” (Stanley 142). The question is not, then, whether we can wholly replicate the manuscript in print or digital editions: that is impossible. Rather, it is the extent to which we attempt to incorporate material information into the edited text. If editions support this shift in recent criticism—to see the letter as a material object—we may begin to illuminate the correspondences of particular letter writers, such as Burney, in new ways.

In his study, “Accounting for Absence: The Transcription of Space,” A. R. Braunmuller focuses on the significance of “space filled” and “space not filled” (2) in Renaissance manuscript and hand-printed texts. He markedly predates critics such as Daybell in arguing that these “non-semantic physical attributes” (1) are often deliberate, as “capable of expression and solicitous of interpretation” (2) as the words which fill them. In particular, “the spatial arrangement of a letter’s text conveys, or may convey, a great deal” (4). In recognizing the ability of a text’s materiality to convey meaning, Braunmuller urges modern editors to move beyond typographical limitations, to reconsider their approach to layout and spacing in their published transcriptions. He is

echoed by Jerome McGann, who more recently asked the question: “could one develop a model for editing books and material objects rather than just the linguistic phenomena we call texts?” (39). In lieu of an established and widely practiced formula, this essay seeks to represent these spaces (and other significant physical characteristics) through experimental material transcriptions.<sup>1</sup> These foreground the importance of materiality to interpretative readings of Burney’s letters.<sup>2</sup>

Burney’s correspondence with Georgiana Mary Ann (née Port) Waddington is a pertinent example of epistolary communication directed and shaped by a keen sense of materiality. Hester Davenport has accurately noted that their relationship was “prickly” and full of anxieties, which manifested themselves in their epistolary behaviors (97–98). Certainly, Burney’s and Waddington’s disagreements on the value of particular aspects of the material letter surface repeatedly. Yet their arguments go far beyond the words they write. In fact, their tempestuous relationship had a significant impact on the physical layout of Burney’s letters to Waddington.

Georgiana Mary Ann Port (1771–1850) was the great-niece of royal favorite Mary Delany and lived with her in Windsor as a companion. Burney’s introduction to Delany, and thus to the royal society that she kept, led to her appointment as Keeper of the Robes in 1786. Port, though almost twenty years her junior, became one of Burney’s closest court acquaintances. After Port’s marriage to Benjamin Waddington removed her from court, their correspondence began in earnest, and Port—unhappily married—relied upon frequent letters for emotional succor. Burney became the godmother to Fanny Waddington, and was equally close to Waddington’s other surviving daughters, Emilia and Augusta.<sup>3</sup> Despite exchanging letters over a period of fifty-four years, remarkably few remain: in 1822, Waddington burned over thirty-seven years of her correspondence with Burney. A mere 153 letters survive in total, 140 written by Burney, and thirteen written by Waddington.<sup>4</sup> Out of this small number, the Barrett Collection holds only eleven.<sup>5</sup> Although so few of Waddington’s letters

survive, it is clear that “Marianne,” as Burney referred to her, was a demanding correspondent. She was easily offended by instances which she considered to be neglectful of epistolary duty. Burney’s remaining letters are structured around apologies, justifications, and arguments in defense of her own epistolary brevity: “I know not by what strange fatality it happens, loving you my ever dear Marianne, as tenderly and as faithfully as I love you, that I seem destined never to begin a Letter to you but as a Culprit—” (27 July 1802, *JL* 5: 377).<sup>6</sup> For Waddington, the sincerity of friendship was demonstrated by epistolary length. For Burney, however, the mere existence of a letter, however brief, was proof enough.<sup>7</sup>

It is true that a great deal of Burney’s surviving letters to Waddington are extremely short. Bernard Bray, in Margaretta Jolly’s *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, briefly defines the “note or billet” as a sub-genre of letter. “[A] specific, shorter form of letter in which the ceremonial formulas were abridged,” the note was used only in intimate exchanges and conveyed messages that were “simple and of immediate interest” (2: 552). Burney’s letters to Waddington often fall into this category: they are short in paper and in purpose, meant only to be carriers of news. Burney’s letter announcing her return to England from France, for example, is one such note, merely confirming her arrival (19 Aug. 1812, *JL* 7: 5). A letter from 3 March 1797 provides a further example of this:

I am too desirous to hear you are well, & free from alarm at the descent in Wales, to wait for time to fill the large paper you *claim*, once more, therefore take a few—but kind words—of earnest enquiry, & answer them speedily.

But for this anxiety, I should not, I confess, so soon have written, since I find you estimate my Letters by their size, not their affection.

And this is not a period for long Epistles with me—I have JUST inoculated the little darling of two

Hearts, & your mind, which in maternal feelings at least sympathises with mine, will readily imagine I must in truth want some account of you to write even a word at this epoch.—God bless you—naughty Girl as I think you. (*JL* 3: 287–88)

This is the full missive, four sentences long, most of which is preoccupied with refusing Waddington the “large paper” and “long Epistles” that she expects, as Burney accuses her correspondent of “estimat[ing] my Letters by their size, not their affection.”

Burney’s short letters frequently do not abide by established epistolary conventions. Rarely do they bear superscriptions or subscriptions, or any kind of recognizable introduction. Often they are written on pieces of paper cut or torn from larger sheets. One of Burney’s earliest surviving letters to “Miss Port,” dated 15 August 1788 and asking her to “come Home with me to Tea” (*CJ* 4: 420–21), is scribbled on a half-sheet of octavo paper.<sup>8</sup> The six surviving notes from a later series exchanged between 14–28 June 1813, in which Burney and Waddington attempt to arrange a meeting amidst their busy schedules, are similarly businesslike and short (*JL* 7: 125 and 7: 139–47). Four of them are described by Hemlow in their headnotes as fragments; one is a single sheet of octavo and one a single sheet of duodecimo. They begin in *medias res*:

O yes—I was sure you would *understand* what, in my place, you would have *felt*—*Wednesday*, my sweet Mary—because it is before Thursday. To Mrs. Lock I will speak to-morrow—she was prevented coming this morning—but will be here then:

And to Mrs. Angerstein when we meet.

Mrs. Br<oom>’s kindest thanks—adieu Adieu. (14 June 1813, *JL* 7: 141)

These notes are clearly informal continuations of a now lost

conversation, and make sense only for the intended recipient. They do not need and, therefore, do not have, a conventional conclusion.

Sometimes Burney responded playfully to Waddington's complaints about her epistolary shortcomings, her tone light and indulgent: "You amuse yourself very much with playing upon me what you call my approbation of brevity" (16 Nov. 1797, *JL* 4: 41). Their mutual acknowledgment of the specific physical properties of their correspondence often prompted Burney into extended flights of imagination.

Your Note-Letter was little only in Paper; its contents were both interesting & entertaining. I adopt the form, for it soothes one in the opening with the air of being expeditious. Yet, though I am so ready to imitate this fashion of Lilliput, myself, I would rather from you, & some few others, receive Epistles penned upon good broad quartos of Brobdinag. (1 July 1816, *JL* 9: 164)

In adopting the "form" of Waddington's "Note-Letter" (by using octavo herself), Burney deliberately mimics her use of paper and stuffs it with writing: it is four pages long, with pages two and three cross-written. The smaller paper size affects her mood positively—in filling a page more quickly, Burney feels "expeditious" and productive. It also stimulates her mind to produce a colorful Swiftian paper code, in which octavo is Lilliputian and the "broad quartos" are expressive of the scale of Brobdinag. Playing with the malleable meaning of the word "little" (both a measure of scale and a qualitative judgment), Burney accentuates the clashing value systems espoused within their correspondence. Waddington believed that consistent littleness in scale equated directly to littleness of affection. For Burney, however, this simple correlation did not exist.

Burney's teasing playfulness reveals itself in other direct interactions with the material letter paper. Writing to Waddington on 16 July 1824, Burney proudly tells her old friend the news that her son, Alexander, "has got an appointment in the Church" (*JL*

11: 539). This would have been a particular moment of triumph for Burney, because Waddington, like many others, held a dim view of Alexander's career prospects. An "incurably negligent son" with an attitude of "general moral malaise" (Harman 342; 377), Alexander's education at Cambridge had been less successful than Burney had hoped, and he had refused a commission in the French army. Burney's moment of maternal victory extends beyond the linguistic content of her letter because she chooses to write it on a used envelope, previously addressed "To / The Revd Alex D'Arblay / 11 Bolton Street / Piccadilly" (*JL* 11: 538). In recycling the envelope paper for a second letter, Burney reiterates her son's achievement by allowing the previous superscription ("The Revd Alex D'Arblay") to remain visible to the new recipient. As with her previous Swiftian analogy, the formal aspects of the paper become integral to the mischievous message that Burney conveys to Waddington. The material form echoes and corroborates her words.

In other letters, this imaginative exploration of form gives way to a sharp resentment of Waddington's unyielding standards. A letter from 2 June 1797 sees Burney angrily retort to what must have been a particularly critical epistle from Waddington. Here, Burney's argument against lengthy letters and in defense of epistolary brevity is prolonged, developed, and energetic. Her retaliatory remarks are sharp and direct—"And why are YOU so much more severe?" (*JL* 3: 316); "you have wrought yourself into a fit of fancied resentment" (316). She does not hesitate to address the hypocrisy of Waddington's criticisms and supports herself with numerical evidence: "You forget, meanwhile, the numerous Letters, I have, at various epochs, received from yourself not merely of half pages, but of literally three lines" (316). Indeed, of the six letters written by Waddington in the Barrett archive, four are extremely short in both size and message: two are written on octavo paper and two on duodecimo.<sup>10</sup> The duodecimo letters in particular—which date from 25 July and 7 August 1823—are very slight notes; their rushed news of visits, illnesses and familial concerns is confined to their tiny first pages only.<sup>11</sup> Though these cannot be taken as representative of Waddington's larger, and unknown,



correspondence, their presence is certainly a partial corroboration of Burney's accusations.

The culmination of Burney's argument in her 1797 letter is presented firmly, and emphasizes the opposing positions she and Waddington occupied in this debate: "From all this, which reluctantly, though openly, I have written, you will deduct That while you think me unkind (as I apprehend) I think you unjust" (317). Burney's comments reveal the extent to which Waddington correlated the health of their friendship with the material production of letters. Liz Stanley argues that in epistolary exchange, "it is the *acts* of giving and receiving that are most important here: the *objects* are not the main point" (140). Waddington, however, complicates this gift relationship theory. She was a correspondent who not only was "utterly dissatisfied without its [friendship's] constant manifestation" (*JL* 3: 316) but also required that these manifestations have particular qualities. Epistolary reciprocity, then, was not enough—the objects were as important as the intent, and their friendship meant nothing unless "regularly proved by *length* of letters" (316). Burney, on the other hand, considered the letter to be a "material expression of connection and continuing relationship" (Stanley 141). She calls her notes "mere vehicle[s] to prevent uneasiness" (*JL* 3: 316) and "marks of *affection*" (316) because they should not have to signify more.

Epistolary space is defined and redefined throughout their argument. Describing the same short letters, Waddington characterizes them as "shabby morsels of paper" (*JL* 3: 316), whilst Burney calls them useful "*bulletins* of Health, Entertainment, or Information" (316–17). Capitalizing on her friend's distaste for scruffy fragments, Burney enjoins her correspondent "to fill up the space once more" and write more positively; otherwise, she threatens to "send you again the shabby Paper, or wide margin, you have received so indignantly" (317). These oscillations—which characterize brevity as both positive and negative—reveal the extent to which the material letter presented a pliant surface onto which letter writers and readers projected their own epistolary

judgments. Jonathan Gibson's study of significant space in early modern manuscript letters argues for the recognition of blank space as an intentional honorary gesture made from sender to recipient. For Waddington, however, the opposite is true. A "wide margin" (*JL* 3: 317), it is implied, would be abhorrent to her. She would see this as a great offence and a punishment. Her private correspondence with Burney, therefore, becomes an inversion of Gibson's theory. Contradicting the epistolary trends now identified by modern scholars in which blank space is a positive convention, Waddington constructs a new protocol particular to this single epistolary thread.

From the early nineteenth century, Burney answered Waddington's charges of inattentiveness with a new personal justification. After the death of her sister Susanna in 1800, Burney excused herself more frequently from her epistolary responsibilities, arguing that "Letter writing—beyond even any other species of writing, will probably be the last to which I shall be able to return" (18 Feb. 1801, *JL* 4: 469). In answer to a communication in which Waddington is "offended at a breach of punctuality in writing" (15 May 1813, *JL* 7: 125) she retorts sharply. "It is 13 years now that all Letter WRITING is oppression to me! My nearest family, and dearest Friends all make allowance for me; YOU, hitherto, have seemed to make it beyond all others: Retrograde, retrograde!" (126). In this and in other letters, Burney's prolonged justifications move far beyond what Alan T. McKenzie argued was one of the central burdens of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century letters—"that of contracting or accounting for the interval between it and its predecessor." (4) Her arguments are more than a continuation of this modesty topos, and her reply reveals a genuine and sustained frustration with Waddington's now insensitive expectations.

Their epistolary incompatibility caused, at last, a final alienating argument over their shared correspondence, which resulted in Burney and Waddington halting communications for almost a year. In 1816, Waddington demanded that her letters be returned to her for burning. The response to this request was

less solemn than perhaps wished for: “You again desire me to burn all your Letters: You know I will not deceive you; but many of them are so entertaining, so interesting, & so original, I should think such a *brulerie a foolish sin*” (17–19 Aug. 1816, *JL* 9: 181). Burney’s use of the word “again” suggests that this is not the first time Waddington had requested this, nor the first time that Burney herself had attempted to persuade her otherwise. A teasing reprimand follows Burney’s evasive reply: “What a billet is this last! that neither mentions *yours*, nor names their names! and in a tone so unlike your own—Were you determined to write me such a letter as there would be no danger I should resist destroying?—Is this Accident? Hurry? or Naughtiness?” (182) Though Burney would burn a vast amount of her and her family’s archive in the 1830s, in 1816 she seemed less than willing to enter into such projects. It is clear that Burney found the precautionary idea of destroying her correspondence with Waddington unnecessary. Her letter concludes with a list of flippant opposites. “Adio, cara Mary &, whether for our Bureaus, or for the Flames, whether for our children, or for oblivion, always write with invariable trust & kindness to your invariably Amica—F d’A” (182).

This response was, evidently, rather too irreverent for Waddington’s liking: her reply was to cease written communication with Burney immediately. They only reconciled in July 1817, as a result of a conciliatory letter sent from Burney to her old friend. To her husband, Burney writes, “I had a letter to Day from Mrs. Waddington. She writes, she says, the instant she had read my Letter. My not promising to burn all her Letters is the given cause of her silence: her friendship she protests is immoveable” (16 July 1817, *JL* 10: 568). After their reconciliation, Burney finally obeyed Waddington’s wishes—“Your re-iterated demand shall be opposed no longer. I will not keep a line upon compulsion. As soon, therefore, as I can assemble my papers, I will commit all that are Memorials of your long friendship for me, to the flames” (22 Aug. 1817, *JL* 10: 613). This assembly was not finished until 1821, but once completed, Waddington burned them all. This episode neatly encapsulates the opposing values held by the two

letter writers. Whilst Waddington regularly found significance in the physical properties of letters and considered it necessary to protect one's correspondence through destruction, Burney (at this time, in this case) recognized neither of these concepts. Thus, both correspondents found themselves engaged in a correspondence in which neither easily agreed with the other about the value or treatment of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century material letter.

This particular epistolary atmosphere—of conflict and delicate harmony, apology, and forgiveness—affected the structural manner in which Burney composed letters. In Nigel Hall's essay on nineteenth-century epistolary materiality, he argues that choices in letter-writing equipment have "the potential to express something about the chooser" (87). For Burney, it is not her choice of materials, but rather the way in which she uses them that strives to construct a particular perception. Fully aware of her friend's disapproval of the "wide margin" (2 June 1797, *JL* 3: 317), when Burney wished to pacify Waddington's complaints on the subject, she wrote purposefully densely packed letters—and made sure to visually and linguistically draw attention to their full composition. In writing, her addressee is Burney's central consideration—and this focus, as Bernard Bray argues, "has an impact on ... the arrangement of the text on the paper" (552). When reading Burney's letters in a modern edition of her correspondence, we rely upon the editor's use of the annotation mark "|" to mark page divisions. Robert Halsband, editor of *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* argued that he did not "see any benefit in indicating the pages of the manuscript letter" because, in his opinion, the page becomes "disfigured, and the reader is burdened with useless information about the physical condition of the manuscript" (32). This may be an applicable judgment for many editions of correspondence and, indeed, for many of Burney's own letters, layout is not necessarily always a source of critical information. In Burney's correspondence with Waddington, however, this annotation is not "useless" but, rather, integral to a closer understanding of the text. If it is not used, readers remain

unaware of Burney's particular use of page space as an answer to Waddington's demands.

Reconsidering the significance of the page division follows a growing critical pattern in epistolary theory. Betty Rizzo's defense of dash punctuation in eighteenth-century letters reacts against "the widespread editorial practice cavalierly to remove this mark from the correspondence of those who utilised it" (82). She cites Burney's published journals and letters as the prime example of this (82). Arguing for the potential rhetorical significance of the dash, Rizzo believes that such formal characteristics of the letter should be preserved in editions for future assessment. As another formal element of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century letter, the page turn may benefit from a similar re-evaluation. Indeed, Burney often used it to guide and shape her written content. In a letter written to Waddington in 1801, she begins with a long lamentation over the loss of her sister Susanna, who had died the previous year. It concludes with:

The blow, my dear Friend—was so dreadfully  
tragic—the contrast of reality & expectation—the  
suddenness of horror, taking such abrupt place of  
Hope that seemed, at that moment certainty — — |

I am glad I have been obliged to turn over, for it shall  
turn me from this fatal theme—& I will answer your  
interesting Letters:—And with your Emily I must  
begin ... (18 Feb. 1801, *JL* 4: 469–70).

The page turn, which Hemlow annotates, becomes an intrinsic part of the letter's meaning as Burney, taking her cue from the material page, limits her "fatal theme" as the page end limits her handwriting. The action of turning the page, of starting afresh in a blank space, forces her to address other issues. As her repetition of the verb "turn" suggests, a turn of the page prompts a simultaneous turn in perspective. This is a single but potent instance in which the page turn and its editorial annotation

refute Halsband's editorial precept, becoming significant to our understanding of the letter.

Page space of all kinds catalyzed Burney into writing differently. The recycling of marginal spaces in particular is a frequent recurrence in her letters to Waddington, particularly in the placement of her postscripts. Rarely is Burney's signature an indicator of epistolary conclusion. Indeed, most of her missives to Waddington are unsigned, leaving many of her letters feeling unfinished—continually a work in progress. This sense is furthered by the overflow of multiple, lengthy postscripts which fill the page's unused spaces. A letter from 1816, for example, has seven postscripts, which append an additional fifteen sentences to the missive (1–11 July 1816, *JL* 9: 163–68). When Burney responds to Waddington's "reproaches upon my scraps of paper, & little Letters" (27 July 1802, *JL* 5: 377), her letter concludes with the declaration that "this crowded Sheet shall now be packed off" (381)—and then follows this with four further postscripts. Hemlow's consistent annotation of page divisions alerts the reader to the fact that the fourth postscript (preceded by the mark "|") is written by Burney in the margins of a previous page, or cross-written—crowding an already "crowded" document. Sometimes Hemlow is more explicit. One postscript is introduced by the annotation "[p. 1, top margin]" (11 Nov. 1806, *JL* 6: 567) to gesture obviously to the placement of surplus writing.<sup>12</sup> Whilst annotating manuscript characteristics might at first seem inconsequential and of little interpretative use, this is not the case with regard to this particular correspondence. Rather, such editorial annotation is instrumental in revealing Burney's small attempts to adjust her writing style, to erase the "wide margin[s]" (2 June 1797, *JL* 3: 317) of her letters to Waddington.

A much clearer sense of this marginal recycling can, however, be gained from material transcriptions. Whilst a single material transcription can vividly convey Burney's use of space in one letter, the comparison of two or more can display the development of her compositional technique towards a single correspondent over time. Burney's letter of 18 March 1793

provides an early example of epistolary presentation in her letters to Waddington.<sup>13</sup> The brief letter, in which Burney responds to a plan proposed by Waddington to school themselves into epistolary punctuality, is written on a folded piece of quarto paper. Determining to “adopt your own plan, of contenting myself with sending, now and then, short Letters” (*JL* 2: 35) rather than long, delayed missives, Burney’s handwriting is evenly spaced, growing marginally smaller in an attempt to fit her words onto a single side. Unlike her older self, the young “Marianne” apparently prized punctuality over profuseness. Burney concludes with her abbreviated signature “FB.” (fol. 102r). The following two sides are blank (fol. 102v–103r) and the final side is the address leaf. Apart from Waddington’s address and the appropriate postal markings, this leaf is blank except for a final postscript of three lines, written on the lower third of the paper—an early example of Burney beginning to utilize marginal spaces for spillover comments. In the material transcription, readers can see Burney responding to Waddington’s suggestion by attempting to keep her letter, despite its abundance of available space, to one side of a four-sided sheet. Her postscript, therefore, becomes a minor, distanced interruption of the letter’s excessive blank space rather than an immediate continuation as presented in an edited text.

A letter written twenty-four years later, and dated 22 August 1817, shows the development of this practice into its most extreme arrangement, as Waddington now demands both punctuality and length.<sup>14</sup> Editor Warren Derry has indicated the page divisions, and from these it is obvious that as the letter develops Burney writes more and more words per page. For example, on the first side, Burney fits 179 words—but by the fourth side, she is writing 444 words per page (*JL* 10: 613–17). A quick glance at the manuscript confirms this. Her handwriting visibly shrinks and nears almost illegible at the close of the fourth page. More striking, however, is Burney’s use of marginal space—something which is made abundantly clear by the material transcription but is largely absent from the edited text. Though Derry does annotate page divisions, thus indicating that the final



postscript is not written on the last page but on one previous, there is, understandably, no editorial framework for transcribing the movement of lines within postscripts. We cannot see, as we can from the material transcription, that even the first postscript exceeds the edges of her paper. To continue, she moves first to a third of the address leaf, and writes a paragraph vertically, leaving space for the letter's seal but otherwise filling as much of the blank space as possible. Growing short of room once more, her signature "F. d'A." is cross-written, as are several of the words from her first postscript. This forces her to move again, reverting to the first side of paper to write her second long postscript in the margins. Her final words visually frame her first as they follow the square border of the paper. The only remaining area is that which is left necessarily blank for the practicalities of postage: to write the address, affix the seal, and allow the Post Office to stamp the date. This provides a stark contrast to the relatively white address leaf of Burney's 1793 letter. To read this letter, Waddington would have had to physically rotate it anticlockwise—the material transcription prompts readers to do the same, and thus we receive the letter in the same manner as the original intended recipient. This is truly an example of the "crowded Sheet" (27 July 1802, *JL* 5: 381) that Burney spoke of in 1802. Even before cracking the seal, Waddington would have been confronted visually with paper almost entirely covered in words and with as little blank space left as possible. As Waddington and Burney had only reconciled the month previous to this letter being written, Burney's composition demonstrates an attempt to meet Waddington's requirements in a tentative and new phase of their epistolary relationship.

Over the course of their correspondence, Burney's letters to Waddington are made purposefully lengthier by her plethora of extended postscripts, her highly visual practice of recycling marginal spaces, and the manner in which she drew attention to these in the content of her letters. We cannot say definitively that these were part of a deliberate compositional technique specifically engineered for Waddington's appeasement. Yet it is clear at least that they resulted from a subconscious effort to respond to an



epistolary discourse rife with physical allusions and unusually self-conscious of its own materiality. As Braunmuller argues, “space is a sign and part of the code-system” of manuscript texts (1). In Burney’s letters, epistolary space—used or unused—becomes part of an expressive communicative strategy of self-presentation, specifically encoded with meaning for a particular recipient. In those scholarly editions that consider annotating page divisions to be worthwhile, these patterns may become somewhat apparent after prolonged consideration by a careful reader. In a material transcription, however, patterns such as this are immediately identifiable. The materiality of Burney’s letters becomes as significant to our interpretation of them as the words themselves, and the modern reader of Burney and Waddington’s surviving correspondence benefits greatly from a full understanding of its material manifestation.

Though academic interest in the materiality of letter-writing has become established, we are still exploring what materiality meant then, what it can mean now, and how we read it today. In an archive as immense as Burney’s, this essay’s focus on the Burney-Waddington correspondence aims to provide a discrete case study in which the impact of materiality on interpretation can be studied in meticulous detail. The included material transcriptions work to encourage readers to *see* the letter, as well as to read it, just as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century letter writers would have done. This illuminates a largely unstudied epistolary exchange and provides insight into one of Burney’s seemingly conventional yet extraordinarily rich correspondences. Despite the relative scarcity of Waddington’s letters in the Burney archives, her voice is heard loudly and clearly in Burney’s replies. Theirs is a lively exchange, full of personality, and marked by an exceptional responsiveness to one another’s emotions and writing material. Moreover, their correspondence proves beyond doubt that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century letter writers were often deeply aware of, and influenced by, the physical aspects of their letters. Transcribing the words in a manuscript letter captures the thoughts and emotions articulated by Burney and her

correspondents. Transcribing the materiality of the page, however, captures a silent yet highly expressive mode of communication—a visual language which becomes essential to our understanding of Frances Burney as a letter writer.

### Appendices

Fig. 1 Material transcription of Egerton MS 3695 fol. 101. 18.6 cm x 11.4 cm. Half sheet 8vo, 1 p. No watermark.

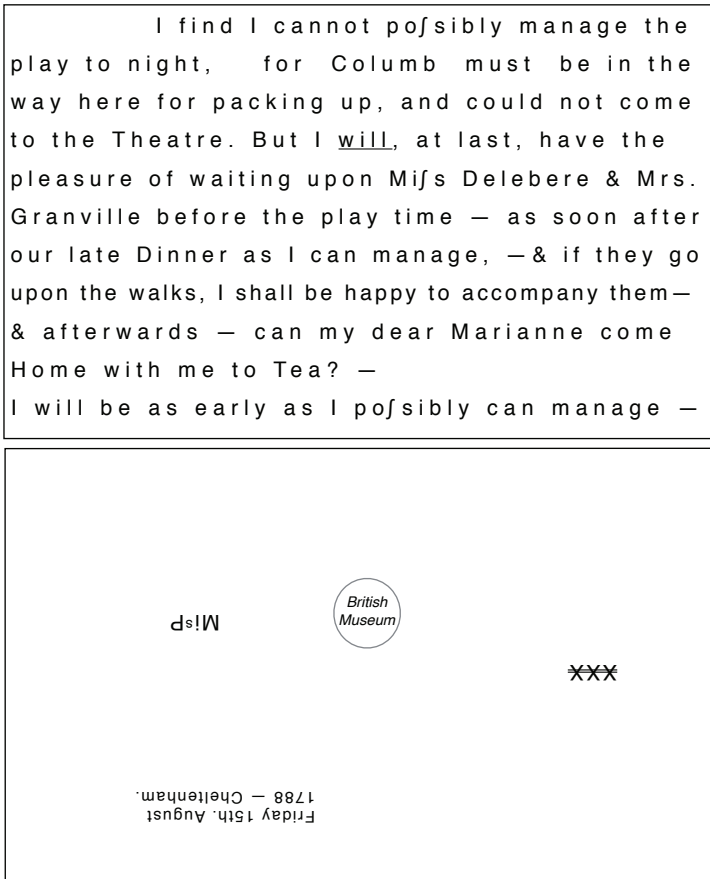


Fig. 2 Material transcription of Egerton MS 3698 fol. 519-20. 9 cm x 10.8 cm.

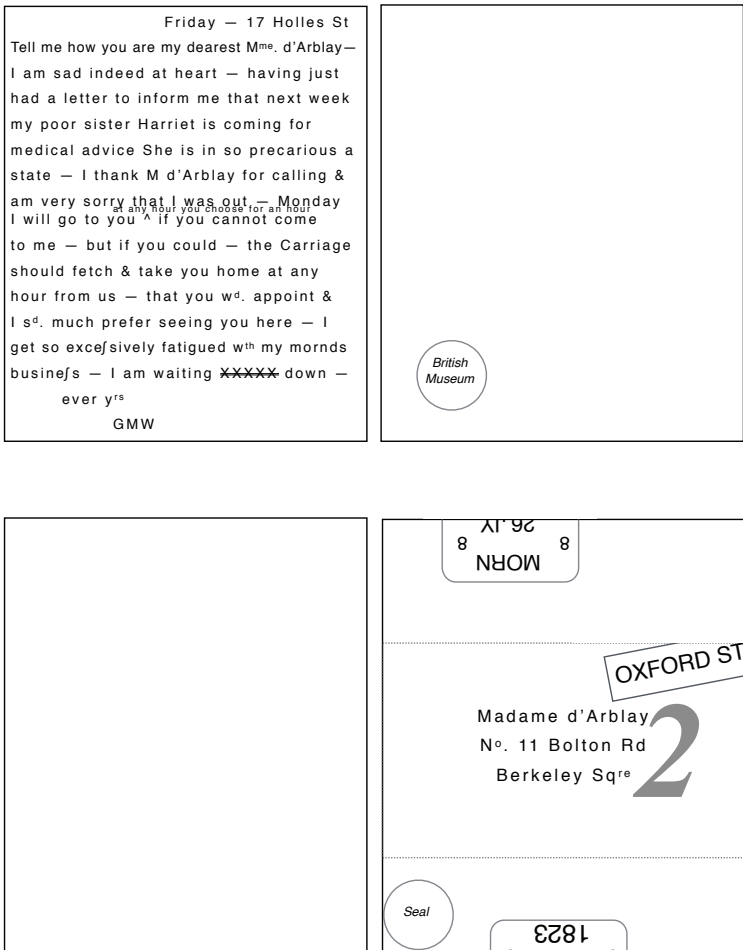


Fig. 3 Material transcription of Egerton MS 3698 fol. 321–22. 9 cm x 10.6 cm. Single sheet 12mo, 4 pp. No watermark.

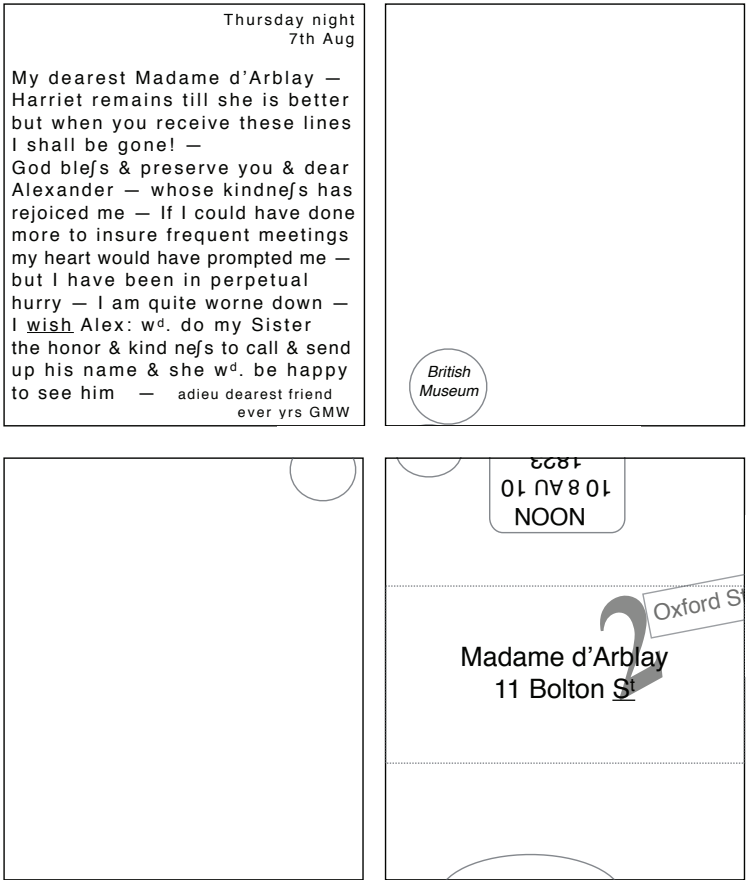


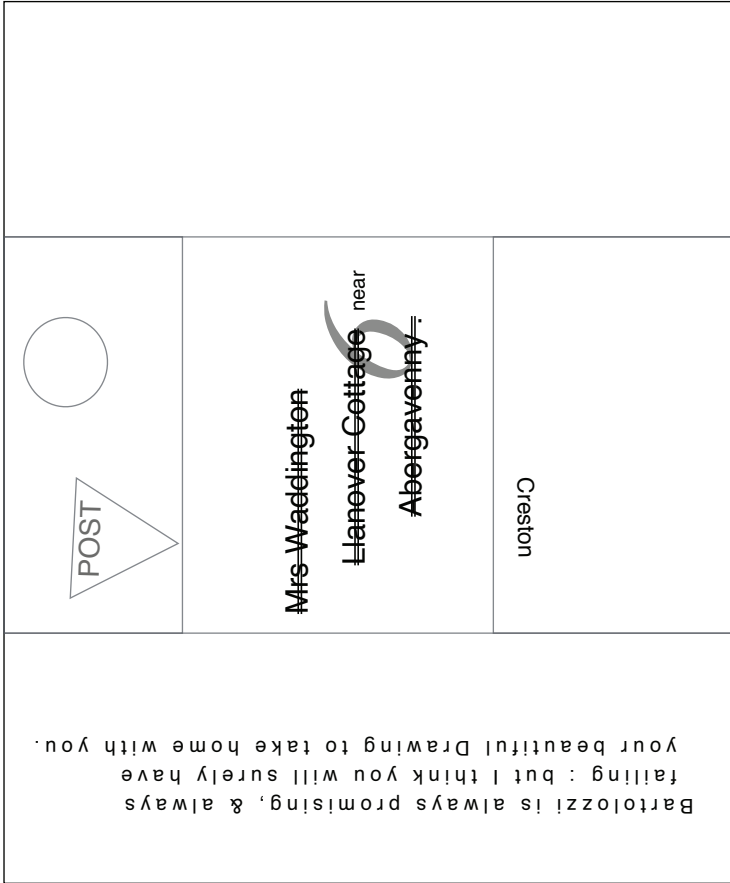
Fig. 4 Material transcription of Egerton MS 3695 fol. 102r and fol. 103v. 19 cm x 23 cm. Double sheet 4to, 4 pp. "G.R. crowned watermark.

March 18.

—93

How truly I shall rejoice to see my ever dear Marianne once more! — once do I say? — Heaven know how little that would satisfy me. Surely I shall do all in my power to facilitate our meetings. How completely you exprefs yourself for us both in what you say of our writing. Certainly want of punctuality in correspondence is no mark of want of warmth in affection : my Heart is yours as sincerely as if my Pen told you so Daily. I know & trust to your generous & kind reliance upon this truth : I should otherwise be cruelly distresed between my encreasing aversion to writing, & my fear of giving the smallest disturbance to my ever tender Friend. I will adopt your own plan, of contenting myself with sending, now & then, short Letters, & I may become a little more punctual. I rejoice I shall see your little ones. adieu, my sweet Marianne, ever & to all time yours  
FB.

Fig. 5 Material transcription of Egerton MS 3695 fol. 104-05. This letter is too large to be transcribed to scale, so it has been scaled to fit. Actual size 18.5 cm x 22.5 cm. 2 single sheets 4to, 4 pp. "MIDDLETON | HODGKINSONS | 1816" watermark.



Ilfracomb, Devonshire  
August 22<sup>d</sup>. 1817.

I have often—almost continually—nay, almost al-  
ways wanted Time to second my inclination for more  
<sup>frequently</sup> writing <sup>often</sup> to my ever-dear Mary ; but I want now  
something more — a something indefinable.— — —  
She is my ever—dear Mary, however — & must  
remain so, I feel , ever. —

But I will enter no more upon a subject on  
which I have so utterly failed : since my last long  
Letter has produced no effect, I relinquish the attempt  
as hopelefs. Your reiterated demand shall be opposed  
no longer. I will not keep a line upon compulsion.  
As soon, therefore, as I can assemble my papers, I  
will commit all that are memorials of your long friend  
ship for me, to the flames.

Or rather—for that will do me lefs violence—I will, if  
you will permit, seal them up in a packet that shall be  
delivered into your own hands when next we meet, or  
to your own orders before that period.


You cannot, however, wonder, my dear Mary, that,  
since our correspondence presents to you the constant

to my dear Augusta, also, for the loss—so sudden—of two such sweet companions! More than

How much you exert yourself with all your  
fortitude of maternally, how much you exert  
yourself on first returning to Llanover! How I pity you!

ever must you cherish your Puss now, for the sake of that sole remaining

— & lovely sprig. She will want you— prize you, and repay your cares!

image of Death, Executors, & posthumous larcenies, I should not leave my part of it to the chances from which yours is to be exempt. Lead the way, therefore, as to my share of this funereal prudence, & according to your decision & example, I will, now, silently follow. ### 



This long contested point settled, you must not be so unjust as to bewail my dryness; you cannot, deliberately, imagine I would thus have withstood or thwarted a wish of yours, had it not been repugnant to me.

You would not write me intelligence you were marrying Emily—nor going to marry Fanny, because I had not engaged to burn every intelligence of every sort you had ever written to me previously! And you had absolutely dropt, & meant to drop my Correspondence for this Offence!—Is it not a new one in the Annals of Friendship?—But Basta!—

Not dry am I, il s'en faut,— however, upon your separation from your two lovely Girls, I feel it for you to the bottom of my heart, though, since it has so completely your sanction, I join to my sympathising Condoleance my most cordial congratulations. Since each has thus professedly & openly the Partner of her choice, your generous maternal feelings will reap happiness from the fruition of your tender wishes for their fate. It is only by this reflection I am become somewhat



reconciled to it for you myself : at first , the Altogether was so marvellous I could not put it into Harmony.

The bright Augusta, now your sole care, & sole solace, will become to you every day more dear, I am very sure : & though she may not be Fanny, she will be a something that, ere long , will make Fanny less mis'd. This will seem to you almost blasphemy ;— but don't answer it for a few months! There is something in her piquante & spirituelle, yet attractively soft —almost coaxing : she put me more in mind of a certain young lady I know at he[r] age than either of the other two, whose excellences were of another sort. I feel persuaded she will soon have a great sway over your affections , & not a small one even over your actions. But as I have an idea that she is good, & highly honourable, her ambition will be so guided by intelligence , & so tempered by sweetness, that it will amuse even if it directs you . She is a charming young Creature , & I am glad to find her steady to the air of her birth. 'Twould have been terrible if all Three had played truant to Italian climes.

You have given, I trust, all my ardent & kind felicitations to sweet Emily; I beg you to repeat them with equal fervour & equal sincerity to dear accomplished Fanny. England has a loss in them both; but they are transplanted so young, & so completely by their own will, that I hope the Maladie du Paÿs will never attack them.

My General, who has been very suffering indeed, with the Jaundice, since

he saw you, is now at Paris, & will remain there some weeks longer. I could not accompany him without leaving Alexander again Homelefs; I came with him, therefore, hither, where we live together tête à tête. He is to take his Degree—de façon ou d'autre—in January; & he has here 8 fellow students, & occasional help from the tutor who has here assembled them. I have no very vain hopes, God knows, &...so little is he steady in any bidden pursuit, that I see every chance is against Distinction at his examination. I am prepared, therefore, for his taking his Degree in the Mob! for if he cannot be a wrangler —

<p>2 o'CLOCK 2 o'SP 1817 ANIL</p>	<p>Tuesday Mornig. Sept 2d</p> <p>PAID</p> <p>Mrs Waddington Holles Street No:11 Cavendish Square</p> <p>found at my return —</p>	<p>Seal</p> <p>British [crown] Museum</p> <p>Play let me hear speedily of your safe arrival Poor Mrs de Staell Did you meet with Lord Byron? or gain the Ace? you wished of the Author of Glenarvon? You know I suppose of Mrs. L. who is at Brighton I have not seen her since she came to Health &amp; Happiness; &amp; to become her dear Mother's first blessing &amp; comfort— yours ever M. Bunsen</p>
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which I fear he has trifled away all probability, — he is so proud to be an optimist &c. The world now is all for Extremes. First, he is so sick when urged to a study that disgusts him, yet so eager & happy in application to what he likes, that the combat he some times makes, yet always too little for success, wears & tears his mind & his frame. I here see positively Nobody, except his own chosen favourite Cantab, Mr. Jacob. The others he contents himself to associate with elsewhere. I have, indeed, returned the visit of the clergyman & his wife & Daughter: but declined all other overtures. The Waves, the rough rocky shore, & the many pointed Hills & water falls, amuse me as much as chance society would fatigue me. How I rejoice in the enjoyment of existence you have re-experienced! I stumble, nevertheless, to ask how the ultimo addio passed— How happy you so entirely approve M. Bunsen! I always feared poor gentle Fanny would never find a companion

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These transcriptions attempt to foreground particular visual messages. They are composed to scale, transcribe contemporary writing conventions, and include editorial deletions and ink obliterations. They attempt to navigate and overcome some of the issues posed by offering facsimile reproduction as an effective editorial strategy. Producing a facsimile edition can be extraordinarily expensive; moreover, it often means sacrificing legibility and clarity for the sake of accurate duplication. Mark Storey (1992) has argued convincingly against the practical limitations of the automatic facsimile reproduction of eighteenth-century letters. The material transcription, on the other hand, tries to bridge the divide between readability and faithful representation. Reflecting on the possibility of editing texts as material objects, this essay hopes to present material transcriptions as a theoretical but potentially serviceable tool for future scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> This study draws its manuscript materials from Egerton MS 3690–3708, in the Barrett Collection of Burney Papers, Western Manuscripts, British Library.

<sup>3</sup> Augusta Waddington (1802–96) would later become Lady Llanover, the editor of Mary Delany's letters: *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (1861–62). In this she would ruthlessly discredit and dismiss Frances Burney's friendship with her great-great-aunt.

<sup>4</sup> These numbers were calculated from Joyce Hemlow's *A Catalogue of the Burney Family Correspondence 1749–1878*.

<sup>5</sup> Three letters to Waddington from Charles Burney also survive, as well as one letter from Waddington to Alexander d'Arblay. These four letters are also in the Barrett Collection.

<sup>6</sup> Citations for edited letters will include the following information: date, edition, volume, and page number. The edition will be noted by the following abbreviations:

CJ     *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*. Ed. Peter Sabor, *et al.* 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 2011–18.

- EJ*     *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*. Ed. Lars E. Troide, Stewart J. Cooke, and Betty Rizzo. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1988–2012.
- JL*     *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*. Ed. Joyce Hemlow, *et al.* 12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1972–84.

The volume number and page number will then follow. An example citation, “18 July 1819, *JL* 11: 278,” directs readers to page 278 of Hemlow’s eleventh volume to read a letter dated 18 July 1819.

<sup>7</sup> There are particular cases in which Burney also reads epistolary length as significant. To Waddington in 1816 she boasts about her correspondence with the recently married Princess Mary: “I have had a really delightful Letter, of 4 sides, from the Bride, pss M[ary] in answer to my felicitations” (17–19 Aug 1816, *JL* 9: 180).

<sup>8</sup> See fig. 1 for the material transcription.

<sup>9</sup> Burney, in her “Narrative of the Last Illness and Death of General d’Arblay” (1817–18), notes that her son “began February with composing a poetical badinage for my friend Mrs. Waddington, to triumph, playfully, over her evil predictions that Alexander never could succeed at Cambridge” (*JL* 10: 862).

<sup>10</sup> Egerton MS 3698 fol. 318 and Egerton MS 3701 A fol. 45 are written on octavo; Egerton MS 3698 fol. 319–20 and fol. 321–22 are both duodecimo.

<sup>11</sup> See fig. 2 and fig. 3 for the material transcriptions.

<sup>12</sup> This seems to be an unusually detailed editorial annotation on Hemlow’s part. In other letters across the series in which four or more postscripts are distributed amongst various pages of the manuscript, this annotation has not been used.

<sup>13</sup> See fig. 4 for the material transcription.

<sup>14</sup> See fig. 5 for the material transcription.

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