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Scissors, Paper, Cloth: A Poor Gentlewoman's Economy of Composition

BETTY RIZZO

Frances Burney had two virtually ineluctable occupations, the first imposed by nurture, a product of her complex station in life, the second by nature. Both occupations were of enormous significance to her; both were largely a question of self-presentation. The first was her work on her clothing; the second was her writing; and both may be said to have clothed her nakedness. In both projects her creativity reflected her taste; in both she employed some of the same tools and techniques—scissors, pins, and thread. Often, quite unconsciously, she transferred her refined technique from one to the other.

First in terms of the results of nurture: Burney belonged to a large middling-sort family of restricted means. But the women of her family had dress requirements beyond their station and means. Somewhat like Evelina, who “hung suspended between the elegant connexions of her mother, and the vulgar ones of her grandmother,”¹ Burney hung suspended between the modest world of the music master and the polite and fashionable world of the opera and concert-loving elite, swinging between one and the other. As Dr. Burney’s family they went to public places as semi-public personages, regularly attended concerts, the opera, and the theater—where they sat in Garrick’s box—and habitually entertained aristocrats at their concerts at home. Their dress was prescribed by these circumstances: neat, clean, modest of

fabric and color, never conspicuous, extravagant, or socially ambitious, but similar in style to the dress of a lady of the *beau monde*, and up-to-date, bespeaking their breadwinner's successful social and financial exertions. Their clothing had to be at once serviceable and fashionable, reflecting simultaneously their knowledgeable politeness but their lack of social aspiration and recognition of their own unassuming lot. It had to proclaim their position, modestly quite at home in the great world while not foolishly aspiring to be of it. When, after the publication of *Evelina*, Burney joined the great world on more equal terms, her dress exigencies became less equivocal, but more expensive and painful to produce, and when she went to court, her exigencies at times almost certainly provoked agonies.

Almost no question but that Burney was a seamstress from her tender years, learning to sew before she learned, belatedly, to read, as was the societal priority for girls. Fancy work was required of polite ladies of leisure, plain sewing was an essential activity for girls of the middling and lower ranks, who contributed to the family economy by sewing shirts, shifts, and children's clothing, as well as their own small clothes and caps. Well-to-do girls of the middling sort who mingled with their social superiors sewed caps and ruffles, shifts, neck and pocket kerchiefs, aprons, and bed gowns, learned to tie ribbons to good effect, and to turn their gowns. No question but that Burney very early became conscious of dress style, learned to collect, to trade, and to use paper patterns and to collaborate with dressmakers, and invented items of wardrobe in her head, items both attainable and unattainable, just as in her head, perhaps even as she sewed, she invented stories of Carolyn Evelyn and her daughter Evelina. Like Jane Austen she probably understood the social necessity of attending to her domestic duties first and took it seriously; in those early days she studied and copied down a number of rules of conduct, moral and social.²

Having tardily learned to read, as it were by herself, Burney began writing at the age of ten, but she was making up stories long before that. By the age of eight, unable yet to read, when she saw a play, said her father, she "would take the actors off, and compose speeches for their characters" (*Memoirs*, 2:168). The difference for her between the two occupations was that the first, sewing, was taught her openly and sanctioned by the female community. It was a semi-public activity for which a young woman demonstrating ability would be commended.

Writing, the occupation that came to her by nature, was, however, for the young Burney, an undervalued, suspicious, and, as she noted, clandestine activity. It early was borne in on her that sewing was a far more acceptable occupation than writing, and enough guilt and pressure were put on her to produce that famous holocaust of manuscripts on her fifteenth birthday. When at sixteen, a year later, she was revealed to be a journal writer (the journal form chosen, surely, as innocuous and innocent enough, and her effort preceded with a famously ingratiating disclaimer), her stepmother considered it proper to bring in a family friend, Dorothy Young, to read excerpts and evaluate this dubious activity. This was not a frivolous test; Miss Young, who, importantly, now did authorize Burney's writing, was a considerably well published author herself and a most discreet one, publishing many translations—a proper genre for a woman—so anonymously that her profession as an author has scarcely been noted today. Nevertheless she represented to Burney a respectable published woman writer who earned money from her work, and Burney's own work was now tentatively authorized. Burney's courage and ingenuity, her craft at getting what she wanted, has perhaps never been sufficiently recognized. It might even be conjectured here that the youthful Burney, who had other less acceptable projects in train, and may have calculated this form and its content most likely to pass muster, had left a sheet lying about for her father to discover. Thereafter she could scribble anything she pleased under the guise of journal, as Austen did of letters, and like Austen doubtless kept it all well concealed. Writing, like clothing, she learned early, had to be carefully calculated to win public acceptance. But writing was her passion, almost her obsession. She used the same creativity for creating both, but she treasured the time she spent writing and fully resented the time spent clothing herself.

Burney well knew the great gap between the polite world and the world of the seamstress, and despite her own labors, she is careful to position her heroines politely. *Evelina* has no objection to flourishing her pen with elegance, but in spite of her position's being much like Burney's—in fashionable society without either credentials or fortune—records little concern for her clothes. Note that in *Evelina*, though the two girls were constantly together at Howard Grove, only Miss Mirvan made those caps for herself that in London did not fit her fashionable big hair. Such comic touches did not suit a heroine. Heroines, if they

sew at all, do fancy work, not plain, but Evelina, to mark her superiority, herself does not even “work” in Mrs. Beaumont’s parlor, but reads. Burney’s heroines remain decidedly on the right side of the counter in her works—in *Evelina*, in *The Witlings*, in *Camilla*. Cecilia is too rich to sew, and Camilla, though straitened, employs a go-between to run up bills for her dress needs. It is Juliet of *The Wanderer* who, struggling for a living, is employed as a seamstress, which proclaims the depths to which she has descended. Though Evelina is fully aware of the dress proper for each section of the theater, it is the vulgar Miss Branghtons who discuss the apparently vulgar particulars: “‘Good gracious! only see!—why, Polly, all the people in the pit are without hats, dressed like any thing!’” and who inquire of Evelina’s costume, “‘This apron’s your own work, I suppose, Miss? But these sprigs a’n’t in fashion now. Pray, if it is not impertinent, what might you give a yard for this lutestring?—Do you make your own caps, Miss?’—and many other questions equally interesting and well-bred.” Moreover the Branghton sisters cannot control their clothing: Miss Branghton’s chamber, if not the family’s entire living quarters, is always littered and disordered, she is rarely ready in time, and when they make a visit they arrive with the necessity of brushing their coats, drying their shoes, and adjusting their headdresses.³ Finally, Evelina scarcely mentions her own clothing, not even when she dresses for a ball. Trimmings are an acceptable preoccupation: Evelina does visit a milliner’s shop with Mrs. Selwyn who becomes absorbed in examining them. So do Sir Clement Willoughby, who looks at lace ruffles and the Miss Watkins who inspect caps and ribbons, evidently a fashionable amusement (*Evelina*, 328-29, Letter 3:11). But fine clothes and pride in them, significantly, are assigned only to Madame Duval, who loudly laments the ruin of her Lyons silk, and to the fop Lovel, whose riding dress is bloodied by the punitive Captain Mirvan. Burney has a grudge against fine clothes—and their possessors.

As a woman, Burney is as backward about revealing herself in the writing process as she is about revealing herself in the process of sewing or refurbishing her clothes, but for different reasons. For Burney sewing one’s own clothing is degrading; writing is self-proclamatory. Burney’s heroines do write, notably Evelina, of course, but other heroines demonstrate that penning an elegant letter was no impediment to their reputations. Both dressing oneself and writing, however, present

grave problems of self-presentation. Both Burney's clothing and her writings had to meet proper standards of decorum. They had to convey the idea of modest and unassuming young ladyhood. They ought not, Dorothy Young would have told her, to convey any touch of wit, satire, or ridicule. (And this is probably why Burney was frightened to be known as the author of *Evelina*. How clever she was to let the world praise it fulsomely before she revealed her secret to her family.) Both dressing and authorship required much thought and preparation as well as creativity.

And there are other similarities that suggest an association of the two in Burney's mind. These are similarities of method. Early in life she began to employ the same technique for each. She almost certainly, like other children, began sewing on scraps of cloth, practicing and making small items like doll clothes and pin cushions. Her later work on her clothing consisted largely of the manipulation of trimmings—gauze, ribbons—much like her manipulation of paper, for her work on her "clandestine delight," writing, was accomplished only on "every scrap of white paper that could be seized upon without question or notice" (*Memoirs*, 2:124). The use of scraps for writing was to become for Burney an habitual method and demonstrably for the rest of her life she spent a notable amount of time saving used paper, particularly that in letters, and cutting it to convenient size or, sometimes, cutting out notes from a larger sheet.

Evelina, for instance, was compiled first in a series of disjointed notes on small scraps, notes written at odd times often from ideas conceived while their author was otherwise engaged, for Charlotte Barrett has noted that Burney later "arranged and connected the disjointed scraps & fragments in which *Evelina* had been originally written."⁴

Similarly items of clothing too were sometimes compiled from scraps of left-over material—notably handkerchiefs, perhaps neckerchiefs. Clothes were first cut carefully from patterns into pieces that were then pinned, and sewed. With the same technique, Burney often joined her paper scraps too with pins and then sometimes sewed them into booklets comparable to finished garments. She arranged and rearranged her fragments of text and her fragments of ribbon and cloth to the best effect she could attain. A manuscript was created much as an

article of dress might have been. And in creating both, an important concern was always self-presentation. Burney's writing was in a sense, a less material method of dressing herself.

Similar as some aspects of their creation might have been, the importance to Burney of each was so great as to allow no doubt that she thought of the two occupations as rivaling one another for attention and preeminence. Her only method of working intensely on a novel or play was to retire from the world and scarcely to dress at all, one important reason why she could write only at Chessington, for her time at home was consumed by visiting and preparation of her costume.

One can understand the importance of dress to Burney. Even in early days, as one of the semi-anonymous daughters of Dr. Burney, she had to appear as a credit to him and a testament to his successful prosperity. One can imagine that in early days she and her sister Susan did a lot of sewing. Luckily for them their father had determined on bringing them up as young ladies rather than as proficient housekeepers, or they would have had to spend hours in the day under the tutelage of the cook or their despised stepmother. His decision may have been influenced by his need, like Milton's, for hours of their time each day as amanuenses for his own ambitious histories of music. As assistants, they were thus nimbly extracted from the supervision of his wife, who would have enjoyed defying their pretensions and converting them to upper servants. Her son was later, in 1775, assuming that young Charlotte, whom Mrs. Burney was now attempting to train as her right hand, "would soon follow her Sisters," would sneer that "he was sure D. Burney would never like any of his daughters to be brought up Notably."⁵ But as an additional motive, at least somewhat less selfish, Charles Burney had great respect for women of learning and early demonstrated that respect by sending two of his daughters to a convent abroad to study. In this way, by bringing up his daughters as young ladies, he subtly proclaimed the superiority of his family. But even so, had he not needed his elder daughters for other purposes—he could not have published without their services—he perhaps might have consigned them, like, temporarily, poor Charlotte, to mere domesticity. That he did not made Burney's dedication to the life of writing, once it was sanctioned by both Dorothy Young and her father, possible.

But the designation of the girls as young ladies made attention to dress all the more essential. The girls went to church, tea parties, balls, masquerades, concerts, the theater, and the opera, and frequently participated in entertainments at home. The requirement of dress intensified in Burney's Streatham years when she entered the great world on her own; and in the court years dress—plain for Kew, “very particular” for the numerous court days, and “new” on the frequent royal birthdays⁶—must have required much creative ingenuity, time, and expense.

The doctor's daughters had no lady's maid to wash out, clean, and mend their clothing. The family did employ a washerwoman. Burney had a shoemaker in Ryder Court who kept a last from which he could produce her shoes on order—a black calimanco pair in 1781 cost her about five shillings (equivalent today to £25)⁷—and it is probable that the sisters employed a dressmaker to produce dresses and cloaks; but they were habitually occupied, at the very least, in refurbishing their old dresses, cloaks, and bonnets.

As Burney was to inform her Daddy Crisp in January 1780, attention to her clothes took up so much time that she had none for working on her play,

for perpetual Dress requires perpetual replenishment, & that replenishment actually occupies almost every moment I spend out of Company. . . however paltry, ridiculous or inconceivable it may sound. Caps, Hats, & Ribbons make, indeed, no venerable appearance upon Paper;—no more do(es) Eating & Drinking;—yet the one can no more be worn without being made, than the other [can be swallowed] without being Cooked;—& those who can niether pay milliners, nor keep [servants] must either toil for themselves, or go Capless and Dinnerless...

Now instead of Furbelows & Gewgaws of this sort, my dear Daddy probably expected to hear of Duodecimos, Octavos, or Quartos!—Helas! I am sorry that is not the case. (7)

Burney must have shared her distress with other friends, for Dobson annotates this passage, “Costume was always a trouble to Miss Burney.

Mr. R. O. Cambridge of Twickenham affirmed that ‘Miss B. had no time to write, for she was always working at her clothes’” (Dobson 2:396). When she wanted to write in St. Martin’s Street, she had to live sequestered at home incognito, so as not to have to make or receive visits, or resume work on her clothing. But her stepmother, maliciously revealing her secret, did not allow her to live there incognito, and from Chessington in December 1781 she wrote to Susan, “I must instantly on my arrival prepare for Winter Dress & visitings, or risk affronts innumerable from voluntary & spiteful betrayments,—how happily, how immediately, I would fly Home, could I but be secure from these villainous draw backs to all comforts!” (530).

In London she had many invitations that required appropriate and varied dress. She was proud, and in 1780 provides some obfuscation as to how much Hester Thrale, who was taking her about, was of assistance in the assemblage of her wardrobe. In July 1781 Thrale noted that there was “not an Article of Dress, not a Ticket for Public Places, not a Thing in the World that She could not command from me,” and that she had given Burney “every Wearable, every Wishable, indeed.”⁸ Burney mentions nothing of these gifts, instead emphasizing that at Bath she refused Henry Thrale’s offer of *carte blanche* at the milliner’s, accepting only a set of gauze ruffles (39); minimizing Thrale’s gifts by noting only that once Thrale brought her a present of a new-fashioned ribbon from town (387); and that in 1780 when Thrale had a silk copied from the pattern of a cloth brought by James Burney from Tahiti, she kept twenty-three yards for her own gown and gave Burney twenty-two, which Burney protested truthfully was “much too good, too handsome, too *everything* for me” (254). Of *Cecilia*, on which Burney was then working, we read much; of the subsequent appearance and history of this gown, nothing. The Queen once presents Burney with a “gown”—that is the silk for one—probably a humiliating acknowledgment that she had noted the paucity of her handmaid’s wardrobe. Burney writes that she was loath to accept it but was forced to.

As for the paper scraps, there are more than a thousand surviving scraps among Burney’s papers, attesting to the fact that this was her habitual method of composition. Scraps were prepared, small bits like bills or trade cards used whole, large papers cut into smaller bits; the scraps were then used at odd times when an idea had developed

and there was a moment to note it down. They might contain a fragment of dialogue, a detail of plot, a list of characters. This method was economical of paper and, even more importantly, of time, for it made convenient a habit of thinking about her writing when, otherwise occupied, her thinking was undetectable. It was a method of composition well suited to a clandestine author. Only after she had her work virtually completed on the scraps, which she then rearranged in proper order, did she sit down to write what we now call, misleadingly, a first draft.

Often, as in the case of *Evelina*, when a work was properly finished, the scraps were destroyed; but the scraps of enough works remain to certify Burney's working method. Most notable, of course, are the scraps containing the play she left unfinished, *Elberta*, 303 of them. Generally considered until lately too fragmented even to reveal the plot, these notes have recently been brilliantly reconstructed by Stewart Cooke as virtually a complete play;⁹ they probably represent the last stage before the manuscript was written and they certainly represent a first draft. The notes for *Elberta* are on scraps of many different shapes and sizes. Some are cut or torn from larger sheets, some, on the backs of letters, are still intact. A favorite source was the sheets that served as envelopes; these bore only the name of the addressee and were often cut neatly into strips. The paper bits date from many different periods. Pinpricks attest to a habit, arising from the absence of staples and paper clips, of attaching some scraps to others with her straight pins, some of which still survive. The writing on the scraps, in earlier years small and neat, later changes to a heavier scrawl, certifying to Burney's having worked first on the play (as she avowed) in 1791, then returned to it in 1814. A tragedy begun in the desperately dark court days just before her relief from servitude, and continued after her father's death in 1814 (a sign, then, of renewed grief), she considered it the darkest of her works.

Burney herself testifies to having used the same method for the composition of her first tragedy, *Edwy and Elgiva*. Having put it once aside, she wrote, in 1788, she had returned to it in 1790, "when I found nothing but unconnected speeches, and hints, and ideas, though enough in quantity, perhaps, for a whole play. I have now begun planning and methodising, and have written three or four regular scenes."¹⁰ This play was unsatisfactorily produced in 1795, and an incomplete holograph in the Berg appears to be a subsequent revision, never completed. There

are textual interpolations on neat half sheets, usually cut from envelopes dating from around 1836, with an uncharacteristic attention to the uniformity of size. The envelopes date this late effort at revision. Still another collection titled "Edwy and Elgiva, Additional Notes and Dialogue for the Play," is on small scraps of various size. Burney never ceased her efforts to improve this play.

Similar effort was expended years later on attempts to revise *The Witlings*. The scrap notes for that play include not only old envelopes addressed to Miss Burney—suggesting early labors—but also undated mathematics exercises written many years later by her son Alex indicating he may have been preparing an arithmetic text for schoolboys (a neat title page is included as scrap, indicating that the whole project was probably abandoned). Two manuscripts of *The Woman Hater* in the Berg, each act neatly sewn, are written on a great many leftover subscription proposals for *Camilla* (1796), among other papers, and are boxed with 99 preliminary scraps. A folder of "Miscellaneous Holograph Memoranda," includes 62 pieces, many pages cut from memorandum books, and—a further evidence of Burney's economy—includes pages from a 1768 memorandum book, the days of the week altered for use in 1814. The book originally had belonged to her father; some pages list his lessons for the year—121 in January, 195 in February, 219 in March! A memorandum book from 1802 had also been saved for use.

Many other scraps still survive, most of them in the Berg, 417 pieces alone in "Miscellaneous holographs, notes, suggestions for plots, dialogue, character—sketches for novels and plays." There are notes for *A Busy Day* and *Love and Fashion* (Hemlow, 496).

These bits of paper are informative. They show the care with which Burney conserved her paper and the method by which she composed, a method so associated in her mind with writing that Mr. Macartney in *Evelina* does the same: the Branghtons, who had found scraps of poetry in his room, "then produced some unfinished verses, written on small pieces of paper, unconnected" (177, 2:letter 11). They reveal how she could plot so carefully, as indeed she does, each new development, one realizes, is always preceded by unrecognized hints that presage it. And they show the effort with which she continued to labor over her unpublished works for years, in the same fashion, one

might note, that an economical seamstress conserves materials and trimmings and works over and refurbishes her wardrobe. There was a similar economy to both her projects.

In fact the used paper she employed helps to reveal her management of her clothing. Among the scraps are three millinery bills that illustrate the kind of labors she expended on dress. She probably employed a dressmaker to sew her gowns, nor are there any bills for the purchase of "gowns"—that is, material for them. The bills, rather, suggest the constant refurbishment she was obliged to make in order, as with her writing, to reutilize her assets.

The earliest of the bills, from a Leicester Fields haberdasher, William Crozier of The Rising Sun in Coventry Street, is dated October 3, 1782, and shows a typical need for a quantity of gauze and ribbons. These purchases reflect Burney's effort to prepare her wardrobe for a visit that month with Thrale to fashionable Brighton. She bought a chip hat for four shillings, four yards of gauze, four and a half yards of crape, some of it black, two yards of ribbon, and needles, purchases totaling 19.4 or nearly a pound,¹¹ equivalent today to a hundred pounds. These preparations were expensive but positively necessary as Burney was going out among persons of the highest fashion and had to avoid embarrassing Thrale and her father as well as herself.

Her frequent purchase of gauze and ribbons reinforces the notion that Burney's efforts were largely directed towards refreshing her old gowns and cloaks. A necessary set or "suit" of accessories in thin gauze, either silk or cotton, was sold by milliners and consisted of fichu or neckerchief, elaborate layered sleeve ruffles to be set inside the end of a sleeve, and a cap, and Burney's millinery bills suggest this kind of suit was often replaced. Contemporary illustrations show that additionally a gauze apron, like Evelina's, might be worn, and there might be gauze wound around a hat. Henry Thrale's gift, a "suit," had been of the less expensive "leno" or cotton gauze. Cloaks were also finished with gauze; in 1781 Burney wrote from Chesington requesting Charlotte to send black gauze with which to trim her cloak and the old trimming and some black sewing silk "that I may get it ready to put on." The old trimming was for pattern and (conversion to?) ribbons; and Charlotte might have her old cloak (273). The amount of gauze used in a lady's costume contributed a delicate, ethereal look to her appearance.

As for ribbons, contemporary prints show a wide ribbon bow almost invariably worn on the neckline of the dress at the cleavage, and often bows variously displayed at the sleeve, on the skirt, on the bonnet or cap. Bands of ribbon might also decorate the bottom of the skirt. The choice of ribbon, the color and pattern, the making up, and the number and placement of the bows, would attest to the wearer's taste, and the quantity of ribbon Burney purchased indicates that these bows too were often applied as a matched set. Burney's attention to her dress, then, concentrated on sets of gauze and ribbons, can be likened to revision of an existing composition and, in fact, of course, dress is a form of composition.

A second bill, torn horizontally into three parts for three separate notes dates from the difficult court years and is from Elizabeth Snow of Windsor, showing a great number of purchases made in October, November, and December in 1787 and in 1788 March, May, and July. Burney bought a dress cap and two bonnets at fourteen shillings each, paid for the revamping of another bonnet at seven and six, made great and frequent purchases of ribbons and gauze as well as wire crowns and other wires including wire ribbon, probably for the construction of caps, a traditional test of a needlewoman's taste and skill. She bought papers of pins and thread. These purchases totaled £4.10.4, an equivalent today of £450 and by their number indicate a very great deal of sartorial composition to be accomplished.

A third undated bill is for ribbons, wire ribbon and skeins of silk, totally £3.10.7. The purchases provide not only evidence of the labor Burney expended on clothing but also suggest an unlucky shortage of new gowns. Great ladies gave away their gowns rather than refreshing them; less fortunate women kept their gowns and emended them for years.

Among the trade cards on which Burney wrote notes in her latter years (some indication of the tiny size of some of the scraps she employed) was one for a Milliner, Stay, and Dress Maker at 204 Sloane Street and another for a shop in Knightsbridge where challis Dresses, Lace, and Blondes were cleaned and dyed. Among the notes for *Edwy and Elgiva* is a list: a black worked apron, gloves, a ruff, Scotch gauze for ruffles, and nightcaps. Burney's labors over her clothes, like those over her manuscripts, were unremitting.

One might wear washable gowns by day but silk gowns for visiting and evening wear had to be cleaned and scoured by hand. Among the scraps is a printed advertisement from Mr. Weldon, the Prince Regent's chemist, of 97 New Bond Street, for his Weldon's true Scouring Drops, good for taking grease out of silks, stuffs, woollen cloth, &c. Instructions were to spread the silk or woollen on a table with a clean napkin under it, put a few drops on a piece of clean flannel, rub the spot till it "separated," then rub it with a napkin till quite dry. One shilling the bottle. For three shillings Weldon offered his Bleaching Liquid for removing vegetable stains, dyes, &c. At one shilling, Weldon's Chemical Liquid, much superior to salt of lemon, could be used for removing inkspots and ironmould. To our awareness of the effort expended by Burney to shop, sew, and revamp her clothes, we may imagine her removing spots and stains. Spots indeed must have been a great evil, and women would have had to take great care at table, in the street, or in crowds. (Imagine the practice it would take to elevate the gown from dirt without showing too vulgar a concern or too indecorous a glimpse of ankle.) One may again liken the revision of clothes to the revision of manuscripts, neither, though unsatisfactory, thrown away, but, so to speak, edited; the removal of spots as a form of erasure, the addition of ribbons a embellishing emendation, the originals, even when faulty, still a form of an incipient asset.

Washing too, was remarkably expensive. Even at Chessington, despite the presence there of a washerwoman, Burney sent her laundry home for washing—shifts, neck and pocket kerchiefs, stockings, an apron, bed gowns, for all of which cloth had to be bought and sewers procured (514,523,526). When she tried to calculate the yearly living expenses of Susan and Molesworth Phillips, should they marry, Burney estimated the cost of their washing at £20, almost ten percent of the income she thought they required (220).

Burney's romance with paper, however, was far more positive than her labors with cloth. But paper, like cloth, was money, to be used with great care. In 1764 Goldsmith paid his respectable Islington landlady five pence for ten sheets. In 1755 the bookseller William Strahan, who presumably enjoyed a discount, paid about three pence for eight sheets of ordinary paper and almost a penny a sheet for the best royal paper.¹² In our own terms, a penny then is equal now to eight

shillings, so paper was well worth conserving. For Burney paper like cloth was an investment to be carefully tended.

Her journals and letters, like everyone else's, were written usually on fresh new sheets, an inexpensive grade, though once Burney wrote a letter to Susan on a used sheet under a short message to Thrale from her sister-in-law (210). But she calculated her use of paper carefully: one cheaper grade of paper, "brown and rough edged," for Susan, another better grade for Hester Thrale. From Bath, not having packed nearly enough paper for her voluminous journals to her sister, Burney wrote, "Is it not a shocking thing, my dear Susette, that I am obliged to write to you upon this decent Paper?—I never bring half enough *rif raff* with me for the Volumes I write to you,—& yet it always goes to my Heart to treat you so *genteely!*" (88-89). Understanding the degrees of intimacy signaled by these choices, from Brighton in 1780 Thrale jealously demanded a letter on the same paper as Susan's and was unsatisfied till she got it, Burney concluding, "I hope I have used you ill enough with regard to Paper to satisfy your desire, & convince You of the true affection of your faithful & much obliged F.B." Thrale continued to demand this ill usage, scolding in a 1781 letter that it was not forthcoming (208,510). She knew that with Burney, paper quality had to be read as indicative of loving confidence but could not help it that Burney and Susan alone shared an understanding and could jest of the necessity of saving pennies.

As the proper clothing was required to intercede for her in society and to edit her self-projection, so paper also interceded for her, clothing her thoughts. Only on paper, she wrote in September 1780, was she able to refuse Thrale's request to go with her to Brighton: "my Heart consents so readily to whatever you propose, that it is only upon Paper I can say No" (234). Paper empowered her to express herself in ways she could not do with most people, even, on occasion, Susan, face to face. It was paper and not verbal confession she had employed to alert the family to the fact of her writing. Only on paper could she explain to her father her desire to leave the Thrales and return home (199). The empowerment of paper, where she alone controlled, was a large component of what it was that soothed her about writing—for she noted in 1790 that the composition of *Edwy and Elgiva*, her first tragedy, did soothe her (Dobson, 4:365). The empowerment of dress, when she felt properly accoutered, enabled her to venture into society.

Related as it was to her perpetual attention to dress—the assemblage of caps, for instance—Burney's was by today's standards, an unusual method of composition. Constrained as she always was by many other duties and thus for time (except for the blessed periods at Chessington), she must have thought almost perpetually about her writing, and jotted down ideas—plot developments, bits of dialogue, the names for characters—on the run and on the bits of paper which she had collected and often had cut to size. When the bits of paper were at last sufficient to provide a continuous narrative and shuffled into order, she was then able speedily to prepare a conventional manuscript. Preparation was at least half the work. Not to belabor the point too often, manuscripts were assembled as one might cut the pieces for a cap or a fichu and set them aside to be assembled later.

This method of composition would lead easily enough to the cut and paste method with which in later years both Burney and her niece Charlotte Barrett edited the journals and letters. Letters were sometimes dismembered, remaining incomplete. Promising paragraphs were cut from more piquant letters and pasted onto a less choice passage in another letter. This procedure was a continuation of that with which the fragments could be shuffled and rearranged, and in its insistence on revision indicates Burney's profound awareness of the *literary* and public quality of the letters, which were to be recycled and refurbished like clothing.

This whole method may not have been unusual at a time when to cut and paste was the only practical means of editing one's drafts. But it also represents, in its allowance for preliminary thought and the jotting down of bits as one went about one's duties, a special economy, a conserving of the resources of both time and money that signifies a constant consciousness in Burney of the narrowness of the family resources in both regards. In the same way that she made practical use of the least scraps of time and paper, she made use in her writing of scraps of conversation and of behavior heard and observed. Clothes and experience—all things—needed to be saved and reused.

The reverse side of her notes provides sometimes interesting information. Besides the milliners' bills and the advertisement for Weldon's Drops, attesting to her preoccupation with clothes, the address slips from *Elberta* inform us about Burney's visits and peregrinations.

Most of them are addressed to Miss Burney, St. Martin's Street, Leicester Fields or Queen's Lodge, Windsor, Queen's House, London, but others are variously addressed to Miss Burney at Mrs. Thrale's, at Mrs. Hamilton's (Chessington), and Mrs. Walsingham's, Richard Owen Cambridge's, Mr. Burney's in Tavistock Square (Esther's husband), and elsewhere. Indicating another brief application to *Elberta* is a letter to Mrs. D'Arbly of 1795.

For her second major application to the play, probably on her father's death in 1814 Burney went through Crisp's papers, which her father had inherited, and appropriated some of *his* envelopes. She appropriated one of her father's, from the Earl of Aylesbury (dated November 19, 1809). There are two sheets notifying her father in 1808 and 1810 of the payment into his account of his quarterly pension (£44.9.10). A note from the French Anthony LeTexier notifies of one of his lectures the next day. These sheets suggest that Burney had already gone through her father's correspondence, reaching the unfortunate conclusion that his surviving letters from the great did not after all justify a volume memorializing his social eminence.¹³ The latest of the scraps included letters addressed to her son Alex, mathematical exercises of his, and blank pages torn from an 1814 memorandum book. There are also utilized entire letters from Cassandra Cooke, wife of the Rev. Samuel Cooke of Great Bookham, the cousin of Jane Austen and the author of a historical novel in 1799, *Battleridge*, which may have been inspired by her connection with the two novelists.

But using scraps provided Burney with an additional advantage: a method of reviewing and disposing of unwanted correspondence, like that to her father, bearing information she had decided not to leave to us. In 1814 Burney was in possession of a number of letters from her friend Cassandra Cooke, and preserved several (now in the Barrett Collection or at Yale). Some of these letters were short and offered a blank obverse, a tempting source of useful scraps. Why then were three such letters cut as scrap, consigned (she thought) to eventual oblivion, and the rest preserved for us to read? On going through her papers, did Burney decide to rid the record of some correspondence because of its content? Did she, for instance, not care to leave for posterity details about the period of Alexander's birth when he suffered from thrush mouth and diarrhea and she had to cease nursing him and overflowed with milk? As the notes for many of her works

were destroyed, we cannot be sure, but it seems likely that such undesirable communications were thriftily set aside for use rather than simply thrown at once into the fire. And at the same time the letter from Mrs. Nesbit to Thrale may have been utilized in her 1781 journal, where it would survive, because of its elegance. Burney always had an eye towards the best self-representation. Careful editing of writing as well as careful editing of clothing, presented her—and her family—in the best possible edition.

Burney's *Economy of Writing*, like her *Economy of Dressing*, as they might have been labeled in her own time, has here been I think amply demonstrated. Her time, as well as her paper, had been conserved and utilized to the best effect. And her method was consistent with the method she used to clothe herself. Patterns were like plots, planned, cut, pinned, reconnected. And as required by members of the Burney family, in every way she carefully represented herself, whether she used one medium or the other.

NOTES:

¹ Madame d'Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 2:168. Further references to this work, will be by volume and page number in the text.

² In "Miscellaneous: about 417 pieces of MS (1772-1828)," Berg Collection; briefly excerpted in Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 21.

³ *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 68-69, 92, 173-74 (Vol. 1, Letter 17, 21; Vol. 2, Letter 11). Subsequent references to *Evelina* will be by page and letter number in the text.

⁴ Hemlow, p. 54, quotes Barrett's notes (BL, Barrett Collection) for a reply to Crocker's attacks on Burney in the *Quarterly Review* (April 1733).

⁵ Letter of Maria Allen Rishton to Frances Burney, Jan. 1, 1775 (Berg Collection).

⁶ Frances Burney, *Diaries and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, ed. Austin Dobson, 6 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1904-05), 4: 365. Subsequent references to this work will be by volume and page number in the text.

⁷ *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars Troide, vol.1 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002), volume 4, ed. Betty Rizzo, p. 379. Subsequent letters from this volume will be identified by page number in the text.

⁸ *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi) 1770-1809*, ed. Katherine Balderston, 2 vols.. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), 1: 443, 502. Subsequent references to *Thraliana* will be by volume and page number in the text.

⁹ Stewart J. Cooke, associate editor, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor, 2 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), 2:228-307.

¹⁰ Austin Dobson (London: Macmillan, 1905), 4:118-19, 155, 362, quoted by Peter Sabor, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, 2 vols., 2:7.

¹¹ The bill is not easy to decipher and some of the materials purchased are not clearly identified.

¹² James Prior, *The Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (London, 1837), 2-12-13, BL Add Mss 48803A, f. At that time a sheet measured variously (in inches) about from 12 ½ by 15 to 20 ¾ by 33 and was used folded double, providing four pages. Printers might use it folded once (quarto pages), twice (octavo pages) and so on. Strahan paid 5.5.0 for three and a half reams of royal paper, 9.4 for 13 reams of small paper. At the time a ream included 480 sheets.

¹³ *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)*, ed. Joyce Hemlow et al., 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972-84), 11: 184.