

Extract from Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxton, 1832), 3: 123-38.

FRANCES, the second daughter of Dr. Burney, was during her childhood the most backward of all his family in the faculty of receiving instruction. At eight years of age she was ignorant of the letters of the alphabet; though at ten, she began scribbling, almost incessantly, little works of invention; but always in private; and in scrawling characters, illegible, save to herself.

One of her most remote remembrances, previously to this writing mania, is that of hearing a neighbouring lady recommend to Mrs. Burney, her mother, to quicken the indolence, or stupidity, whichever it might be, of the little dunce, by the chastening ordinances of Solomon.¹ The alarm, however, of that little dunce, at a suggestion so wide from the maternal measures that had been practised in her childhood, was instantly superseded by a joy of gratitude and surprise that still rests upon her recollection, when she heard gently murmured in reply, "No, no,—I am not uneasy about her!"

But, alas! the soft music of those encouraging accents had already ceased to vibrate on human ears, before these scrambling pot-hooks had begun their operation of converting into Elegies, Odes, Plays, Songs, Stories, Farces, —nay, Tragedies and Epic Poems, every scrap of white paper that could be seized upon without question or notice; for she grew up, probably through the vanity-annihilating circumstances of this conscious intellectual disgrace, with so affrighted a persuasion that what she scribbled, if seen, would but expose her to ridicule, that her pen, though her greatest, was only her clandestine delight.

To one confidant, indeed, all was open; but the fond partiality of the juvenile Susanna² made her opinion of little weight; though the affection of her praise rendered the stolen moments of their secret readings the happiest of their adolescent lives.

From the time, however, that she attained her fifteenth year, she considered it her duty to combat this writing passion as illaudable, because fruitless. Seizing, therefore, an opportunity, when Dr. Burney was at Chesington, and the then Mrs. Burney, her mother-in-law,³ was in Norfolk, she made over to a bonfire, in a paved play-court, her whole stock of prose goods and chattels; with the sincere intention to extinguish for ever in their ashes her scribbling propensity. But *Hudibras*⁴ too well says—

¹ That is, a whipping.

² Burney's younger sister.

³ Burney here means her step-mother. Her mother, Esther Sleep, died in 1761 and her father remarried in 1769.

⁴ *Hudibras* is a mock heroic narrative poem written by Samuel Butler. It satirizes various factions involved in the English Civil War. It was published in three parts in 1663, 1664 and 1678, with the first edition encompassing all three parts in 1684.

"He who complies against his will,
Is of his own opinion still."

This grand feat, therefore, which consumed her productions, extirpated neither the invention nor the inclination that had given them birth; and, in defiance of all the projected heroism of the sacrifice, the last of the little works that was immolated, which was the History of Caroline Evelyn, the Mother of Evelina, left, upon the mind of the writer, so animated an impression of the singular situations to which that Caroline's infant daughter,—from the unequal birth by which she hung suspended between the elegant connexions of her mother, and the vulgar ones of her grandmother, —might be exposed; and presented contrasts and mixtures of society so unusual, yet, thus circumstanced, so natural, that irresistibly and almost unconsciously, the whole of *A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, was pent up in the inventor's memory, ere a paragraph was committed to paper.

Writing, indeed, was far more difficult to her than composing; for that demanded what she rarely found attainable secret opportunity: while composition, in that hey-day of imagination, called only for volition.

When the little narrative, however slowly, from the impediments that always annoy what requires secrecy, began to assume a "questionable shape;" a wish—as vague, at first, as it was fantastic—crossed the brain of the writer, to "see her work in print."

She communicated, under promise of inviolable silence, this idea to her sisters; who entered into it with much more amusement than surprise, as they well knew her taste for quaint sports; and were equally aware of the sensitive affright with which she shrunk from all personal remark.

She now copied the manuscript in a feigned hand; for as she was the Doctor's principal amanuensis,⁵ she feared her common writing might accidentally be seen by some compositor of the History of Music,⁶ and lead to detection.

She grew weary, however, ere long, of an exercise so merely manual; and had no sooner completed a copy of the first and second volumes, than she wrote a letter, without any signature, to offer the unfinished work to a bookseller; with a desire to have the two volumes immediately printed, if approved; and a promise to send the sequel in the following year.

This was forwarded by the London post, with a desire that the answer should be directed to a coffee-house.

Her younger brother the elder, Captain James,⁷ was 'over the hills and far away,'—her younger brother, afterwards the celebrated Greek scholar,⁸ gaily, and without reading a

⁵ Scribe.

⁶ The first volume of Charles Burney's *A General History of Music* appeared in 1776. He had been planning and working on the *History* for nearly twenty years.

word of the work, accepted a share in so whimsical a frolic; and joyously undertook to be her agent at the coffee-house with her letters, and to the bookseller with the manuscript.

After some consultation upon the choice of a bookseller, Mr. Dodsley⁹ was fixed upon; for Dodsley, from his father's,—or perhaps grand-father's,—well chosen collection of fugitive poetry, stood foremost in the estimation of the juvenile set.

Mr. Dodsley, in answer to the proposition, declined looking at any thing that was anonymous. The party, half-amused, half-provoked, sat in full committee upon this lofty reply; and came to a resolution to forego the eclat of the west end of the town, and to try their fortune with the urbanity of the city.

Chance fixed them upon the name of Mr. Lowndes.¹⁰ The city of London here proved more courtly than that of Westminster; and, to their no small delight, Mr. Lowndes desired to see the manuscript. And what added a certain pride to the author's satisfaction in this assent, was, that the answer opened by

" Sir,"

which gave her an elevation to manly consequence, that had not been accorded to her by Mr. Dodsley, whose reply began

" Sir, or Madam."

The young agent was muffled up now by the laughing committee, in an old great coat, and a large old hat, to give him a somewhat antique as well as vulgar disguise; and was sent forth in the dark of the evening with the two first volumes to Fleet-street, where he left them to their fate.

In trances of impatience the party awaited the issue of the examination. But they were all let down into the very 'Slough of Despond,'¹¹ when the next coffee-house letter coolly declared, that Mr. Lowndes could not think of publishing an unfinished book; though he liked the work, and should be 'ready to purchase and print it when it should be finished.'

There was nothing in this unreasonable; yet the disappointed author, tired of what she deemed such priggish punctilio, gave up, for awhile, and in dudgeon, all thought of the scheme.

⁷ James Burney (1750-1821), a Rear-Admiral who accompanied Captain Cook in his last two voyages.

⁸ Charles Burney, Junior (1757-1817), classical scholar, schoolmaster and clergyman.

⁹ James Dodsley (1724-1797), publisher of Oliver Goldsmith, Laurence Sterne, and Samuel Johnson amongst others.

¹⁰ William Lowndes (1753?-1823), bookseller and publisher at 77 Fleet Street and Bedford Street, Covent Garden.

¹¹ The Slough of Despond is a deep bog in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, into which the character Christian sinks under the weight of his sins and sense of guilt.

Nevertheless, to be thwarted on the score of our inclination acts more frequently as a spur than as a bridle; the third volume, therefore, which finished *The young lady's entrance into the world*, was, ere another year could pass away, almost involuntarily completed and copied.

But while the scribe was yet wavering whether to abandon or to prosecute her enterprise, the chasm caused by this suspense to the workings of her imagination, left an opening from their vagaries to a mental interrogatory, whether it were right to allow herself such an amusement, with whatever precautions she might keep it from the world, unknown to her father?

She had never taken any step without the sanction of his permission; and had now refrained from requesting it, only through the confusion of acknowledging her authorship; and the apprehension, or, rather, the horror of his desiring to see her performance.

Nevertheless, reflection no sooner took place of action, than she found, in this case at least, the poet's maxim reversed, and that

‘The female who deliberates is sav'd,’

for she saw in its genuine light what was her duty; and seized, therefore, upon a happy moment of a kind *tete a tete* with her father, to avow, with more blushes than words, her secret little work; and her odd inclination to see it in print; hastily adding, while he looked at her, incredulous of what he heard, that her brother Charles would transact the business with a distant bookseller, who should never know her name. She only, therefore, entreated that he would not himself ask to see the manuscript.

His amazement was without parallel; yet it seemed surpassed by his amusement; and his laugh was so gay, that, revived by its cheering sound, she lost all her fears and embarrassment, and heartily joined in it; though somewhat at the expence of her new author-like dignity.

She was the last person, perhaps, in the world from whom Dr. Burney could have expected a similar scheme. He thought her project, however, as innocent as it was whimsical, and offered not the smallest objection; but, kindly embracing her, and calling himself *le pere confident*, he enjoined her to be watchful that Charles was discreet; and to be invariably strict in guarding her own incognita: and then, having tacitly granted her personal petition, he dropt the subject.

With fresh eagerness, now, and heightened spirits, the incipient author rolled up her packet for the bookseller; which was carried to him by a newly trusted agent,¹² her brother being then in the country.

¹² Edward Burney, Esq., of Clipstone-street.

The suspense was short; in a very few days Mr. Lowndes sent his approbation of the work, with an offer of 20*l.* for the manuscript an offer which was accepted with alacrity, and boundless surprise at its magnificence!!

The receipt for this settlement, signed simply by "*the Editor of Evelina*," was conveyed by the new agent to Fleet-street.

In the ensuing January, 1778, the work was published; a fact which only became known to its writer, who had dropped all correspondence with Mr. Lowndes, from hearing the following advertisement read, accidentally, aloud at breakfast-time, by Mrs. Burney, her mother-in-law.

This day was published,

EVELINA,
OR, A YOUNG LADY'S ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.

Printed for T. LOWNDES, Fleet-street.

Mrs. Burney, who read this unsuspectingly, went on immediately to other articles; but, had she lifted her eyes from the paper, something more than suspicion must have met them, from the conscious colouring of the scribbler, and the irresistible smiles of the two sisters, Susanna and Charlotte, who were present.

Dr. Burney probably read the same advertisement the same morning; but as he knew neither the name of the book, nor of the bookseller, nor the time of publication, he must have read it without comment, or thought.

In this projected and intended security from public notice, the author passed two or three months, during which the Doctor asked not a question; and perhaps had forgotten the secret with which he had been entrusted; for, besides the multiplicity of his affairs, his mind, just then, was deeply disturbed by rising dissension, from claims the most unwarrantable, with Mr. Greville.¹³

[...]

Evelina had now been published four or five months, though Dr. Burney still knew nothing of its existence; and the author herself had learnt it only by the chance-read advertisement already mentioned. Yet had that little book found its way abroad; fallen into general reading; gone through three editions, and been named with favour in sundry Reviews; till, at length, a sort of cry was excited amongst its readers for discovering its author.

¹³ Fulke Greville, Charles Burney's friend, patron, and erstwhile employer.

That author, it will naturally be imagined, would repose her secret, however sacred, in the breast of so confidential a counsellor as Mr. Crisp.¹⁴

And not trust, indeed, was there wanting! far otherwise ! But as she required no advice for what she never meant to avow, and had already done with, she had no motive of sufficient force to give her courage for encountering his critic eye. She never, therefore, ventured, and never purposed to venture revealing to him her anonymous exploit.

June came; and a sixth month was elapsing in the same silent concealment, when early one morning the Doctor, with great eagerness and hurry, began a search amongst the pamphlets in his study for a Monthly Review, which he demanded of his daughter Charlotte, who alone was in the room. After finding it, he earnestly examined its contents, and then looked out hastily for an article which he read with a countenance of so much emotion, that Charlotte stole softly behind him, to peep over his shoulder; and then saw, with surprise and joy, that he was perusing an account, which she knew to be most favourable, of Evelina, beginning, 'A great variety of natural characters—'

When he had finished the article, he put down the Review, and sat motionless, without raising his eyes, and looking in deep but charmed astonishment. Suddenly, then, he again snatched the Review, and again ran over the article, with an air yet more intensely occupied. Placing it afterwards on the chimney-piece, he walked about the room, as if to recover breath, and recollect himself; though always with looks of the most vivid pleasure.

Some minutes later, holding the Review in his hand, while inspecting the table of contents, he beckoned to Charlotte to approach; and pointing to "Evelina," 'you know,' he said, in a whisper, 'that book ? Send William for it to Lowndes', as if for yourself; and give it to me when we are alone.'

Charlotte obeyed; and, joyous in sanguine expectation, delivered to him the little volumes, tied up in brown paper, in his study, when, late at night, he came home from some engagement. He locked them up in his bureau, without speaking, and retired to his chamber.

The kindly impatient Charlotte was in his study the next morning with the lark, waiting the descent of the Doctor from his room. He, also, was early, and went straight to his desk, whence, taking out and untying the parcel, he opened the first volume upon the little ode to himself, "Oh author of my being ! far more dear," &c. He ejaculated a ' Good God!' and his eyes were suffused with tears.

Twice he read it, and then re-committed the book to his writing desk, as if his mind were too full for further perusal; and dressed, and went out, without uttering a syllable.

¹⁴ Samuel Crisp (1707-1783), playwright. Crisp was a close friends of the Burneys, who often stayed at his residence, Chesington Hall. Frances would call him 'Daddy' while he referred to her as his dear 'Fannikin'.

All this the affectionate Charlotte wrote to her sister; who read it with a perturbation inexpressible. It was clear that the Doctor had discovered the name of her book; and learned, also, that Charlotte was one of her cabal: but how, was inexplicable; though what would be his opinion of the work absorbed now all the thoughts and surmises of the clandestine author.

From this time, he frequently, though privately and confidentially, spoke with all the sisters upon the subject; and with the kindest approbation.

From this time, also, daily accounts of the progress made by the Doctor in reading the work; or of the progress made in the world by the work itself, were transmitted to recreate the Chesington invalid¹⁵ from the eagerly kind sisters; the eldest of which, soon afterwards, wrote a proposal to carry to Chesington, for reading to Mr. Crisp, 'an anonymous new work that was running about the town, called Evelina.'

¹⁵ That is, Crisp, who suffered from gout and rheumatism.

Extract from the preface to Frances Burney, *The Wanderer* (London: Longman et. al, 1814), pp. xix-xxiv.

[She is addressing her father]

The power of prejudice annexed to nomenclature is universal: the same being who, unnamed, passes unnoticed, if preceded by the title of a hero, or a potentate, catches every eye, and is pursued with clamorous praise, or---its common reverberator!---abuse: but in nothing is the force of denomination more striking than in the term Novel; a species of writing which, though never mentioned, even by its supporter, but with a look that fears contempt, is not more rigidly excommunicated, from its appellation, in theory, than sought and fostered, from its attractions, in practice.

So early was I impressed myself with ideas that fastened degradation to this class of composition, that at the age of adolescence, I struggled against the propensity which, even in childhood, even from the moment I could hold a pen, had impelled me into its toils; and on my fifteenth birth-day, I made so resolute a conquest over an inclination at which I blushed, and that I had always kept secret, that I committed to the flames whatever, up to that moment, I had committed to paper. And so enormous was the pile, that I thought it prudent to consume it in the garden.

You, dear Sir, knew nothing of its extinction, for you had never known of its existence. Our darling Susanna, to whom alone I had ever ventured to read its contents, alone witnessed the conflagration; and---well I remember!---wept, with tender partiality, over the imaginary ashes of Caroline Evelyn, the mother of Evelina.

The passion, however, though resisted, was not annihilated: my bureau was cleared; but my head was not emptied; and, in defiance of every self-effort, Evelina struggled herself into life.

If then, even in the season of youth, I felt ashamed of appearing to be a votary to a species of writing that by you, Sir, liberal as I knew you to be, I thought condemned; since your large library, of which I was then the principal librarian, contained only one work of that class; how much deeper must now be my blush,---now, when that spring of existence has so long taken its flight,---transferring, I must hope, its genial vigour upon your grandson!---if the work which I here present to you, may not shew, in the observations which it contains upon various characters, ways, or excentricities of human life, that an exterior the most frivolous may enwrap illustrations of conduct, that the most rigid preceptor need not deem dangerous to entrust to his pupils; for, if what is inculcated is right, it will not, I trust, be cast aside, merely because so conveyed as not to be received as a task. On the contrary, to make pleasant the path of propriety, is snatching from evil its most alluring mode of ascendancy. And your fortunate daughter, though past the period of chusing to write, or desiring to read, a merely romantic love-tale, or a story of improbable wonders, may still hope to retain,---if she has ever possessed it,---the power of interesting the affections, while

still awake to them herself, through the many much loved agents of sensibility, that still hold in their pristine energy her conjugal, maternal, fraternal, friendly, and,---dearest Sir!---her filial feelings.

Fiction, when animating the design of recommending right, has always been permitted and cultivated, not alone by the moral, but by the pious instructor; not alone to embellish what is prophane, but to promulgate even what is sacred, from the first era of tuition, to the present passing moment. Yet I am aware that all which, incidentally, is treated of in these volumes upon the most momentous of subjects, may HERE, in this favoured island, be deemed not merely superfluous, but, if indulgence be not shewn to its intention, impertinent; and HERE, had I always remained, the most solemn chapter of the work,---I will not anticipate its number,---might never have been traced; for, since my return to this country,¹⁶ I have been forcibly struck in remarking, that all sacred themes, far from being either neglected, or derided, are become almost common topics of common discourse; and rather, perhaps, from varying sects, and diversified opinions, too familiarly discussed, than defyingly set aside.

¹⁶ Frances's husband, General Alexandre Arblay (1754–1818) was a French exile (in the wake of the Revolution there were a large number of such aristocratic exiles in London). In 1802 the peace of Amiens suspended the conflict between Britain and France that had broken out in 1793, enabling Frances to join her husband who had returned to France a year earlier in order to settle his family's affairs. However, hostilities resumed a year later and the couple and their son were effectively trapped in France. D'Arblay was eventually awarded a small pension and took up a minor official post. The family spent the next ten years living in and around Paris.