

Memorializing Sorrow in Frances Burney's "Consolatory Extracts"

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January 6, 1800 was a day Frances Burney would remember for the rest of her life. It ended, as she declared, "the last period...of my perfect Happiness on Earth,"¹ with the unexpected death of her beloved sister Susan Burney Phillips. Burney's initial responses to Susan's loss are agonizing; in a letter of *post* 9 January 1800, she wrote to her close friend Frederica Locke of "that dreadful — harrowing — never to be forgotten moment of horror that made me wish to be mad."² Her letter reveals the thin line between grief and madness, and her later responses exhibit an unusual turn to religion that would reappear in her subsequent writings: "But the Catastrophe has been so timed as to make resignation nearly impossible — I must pray to God for new lights! pray for me, my Fredy! — my dear Amelia — —"³ Yet these immediate, distraught responses belie her unusual dearth of journal and epistolary material from the year 1800. In her semi-autobiographical memoirs of her father, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832), Burney confirms "Of the rest of this melancholy year no vestige remains, either from the Doctor or his Biographer. The beginning of the new century to them was the closing of hope, not the opening of joy! and the pocket-book memorandums of both are sterile and blank."⁴ Burney expressed her grief later and elsewhere, particularly in her little-known commonplace book,

¹ Frances Burney, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* [JL], gen. ed. Joyce Hemlow, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972-84), 4:382.

² Burney, JL, 4:386. See also Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 286.

³ Burney to Frederica Locke, 13 January [1800], JL, 4:390. Stuart Sim is one of many critics who has taken up the general view that Burney eschewed religion as a solution to women's troubles ("Despair, Melancholy and the Novel," in Allan Ingram, Stuart Sim, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker, and Leigh Wetherall-Dickson, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 114-41, on p. 128).

⁴ Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 3:297.

“Consolatory Extracts occasioned by the tragic death of her sister Susan Phillips in January 1800,” which reveals her protracted process of mourning and its connections to her fictional works.

Sorrow in the eighteenth century was a fertile topic for advice writers, who wrote at length on how to deal with the loss of loved ones.⁵ Perhaps the most celebrated is Samuel Johnson’s meditation on the nature of grief and its irremediable quality in *The Rambler* 47 of 28 August 1750: “for sorrow there is no remedy provided by nature; it is often occasioned by accidents irreparable, and dwells upon objects that have lost or changed their existence; it requires what it cannot hope, that the laws of the universe should be repealed; that the dead should return, or the past should be recalled.”⁶ The only cures for sorrow, aptly described as “rust of the soul” by Johnson, are new ideas, “exercise and motion.”⁷ Yet Burney’s sorrow seemed to deepen and increase with time, though she was able to find consolation in a religious conception of the afterlife. In her letter written before 4 March 1800 to Marianne Waddington, Burney anticipates her reunion with Susan (and Waddington’s aunt Mary Delany) in death: “May the Almighty — who had fitted as well as taken her to himself but teach my sorrow to yield to Her joy!...And when my own Hour comes — ah my dear Marianne — what a blessed idea — & hope that then I may be purified to join them...Thoughts such as these are the only soothers of agony —”⁸ Religion here is her only comfort, and she is unable to follow Johnson’s

⁵ See Richard Terry, “Philosophical Melancholy,” in Allan Ingram, Stuart Sim, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker, and Leigh Wetherall-Dickson, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 54-82, on pp. 64-65.

⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, Vols. 3-5 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 3:254.

⁷ Johnson, *The Rambler*, 3:258. See also Terry, “Philosophical Melancholy,” pp. 62-63.

⁸ Burney, *JL*, 4:398.

prescriptions of “exercise and motion” because, as she writes in a letter of [10]-11 March 1800 to her sister Esther, “I have found my sadness so extreme — so depressing to all exertion — so mischievous to all the purposes of social-cheerful life.”⁹ But Burney’s grief retained its intensity even in the following years. In a letter of 23 May 1801 to Charlotte Broome, she describes her loss as “a piercing pain for the rest of my earthly career.” Her letters to Frederica Locke continue to reference Susan’s loss: around 20-21 April 1802, she exclaims “what a constant — a gnawing — an endless drawback to all perfect enjoyment — is that fatal separation! —”; and more than six years after Susan’s death, in a rare letter of 10 October 1806 that she was able to send while in Paris, she mentions “that dread period which has robbed this remnant of all the gay sunshine of thoughtless confidence!”¹⁰ The other salient feature of Burney’s grief is that some of her most emotional and personal expressions of grief were written in French. In a letter to her husband, Alexandre d’Arblay of 20 May 1800, she wrote, “Oh non — d’Elle je ne me passerai jamais — d’Elle — de vous — de mon Petit —” [“Oh no – I could never do without her – her – you – my son –”].¹¹ Burney’s impassioned declaration of loss anticipates the composition of her “Consolatory Extracts,” which contains long expressive passages in French and was written – as with some of her sorrowful letters – years after Susan’s death, the two significant aspects of Burney’s mourning and memorializing.

Burney first mentions compiling a commonplace book as a treatment for her grief shortly after Susan’s death, though it would be years later before she would compose her “Consolatory Extracts.” Commonplace books contain “‘commonplaces’ or passages important for

⁹ Burney, *JL*, 4:404. See also Burney’s letters to Charlotte Broome of 22 March 1800 and James Burney of 11 February 1800, *JL*, 4:408 and 4:396.

¹⁰ Burney, *JL* 4:492; 5:248; 6:538.

¹¹ Burney, *JL*, 4:419.

reference...usually under general heads;" they are "book[s] in which one records passages or matters to be especially remembered or referred to, with or without arrangement."¹² In a letter of 26 March 1800 to her sister Esther, Burney introduces her plan of writing such a book, "Did I tell you my plan of collecting *Texts* for every morning? – I am convinced it will be a means to better still my disordered mind & spirits into tranquility than any other I can adopt – but I have not yet had time for it."¹³ Burney frames the text as a curative for grief, though like other commonplace book compilers during the period, she assumed an active role as a critic in her selection and occasional adaptation of passages. David Allan argues that "Commonplacing...helped negotiate the developing relationship during the long eighteenth century between individual readers in their infinite variety and an emerging canon of texts whose precise implications remained largely and necessarily ambiguous."¹⁴ Through her commonplacing, then, Burney could edit familiar texts to fit her larger purpose; indeed her "Consolatory Extracts" contains passages from English and French texts on a variety of subjects including love, patience, duty, marriage, and death, all of which are framed within the context of Susan's death.¹⁵ A substantial portion of these passages are taken from *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the year 1741 to 1770* (1809), a sisterly correspondence between two members of the Bluestocking circle. Carter's and Talbot's close friendship may have reminded Burney of her relationship with Susan. Their *Series of Letters* mirrors the trajectory of Burney's grief,

¹² "common place-book, n.". OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press. [<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37247>, accessed March 21, 2018].

¹³ Burney, *JL*, 4:411. See also n. 1.

¹⁴ David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 211-12.

¹⁵ Margaret Anne Doody is the only previous critic to discuss the "Consolatory Extracts," and she does this only briefly. Doody contends that the book contains "a surprisingly large proportion of thoughts on anger" and erroneously assumes that it was written shortly after the death of Susan Burney Phillips (*Frances Burney*, p. 288). See below, from p. 000.

allowing us to date “Consolatory Extracts” and trace the progress and circulation of Burney’s public and private memorials to Susan.

Burney’s personal connections to the Bluestockings have long been documented in print, but her literary connections to Elizabeth Carter and Hester Chapone have not been previously explored, namely her appreciation of *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot* within her commonplace book. The *Series of Letters* was published in 1809: it commences in 1742 with Carter’s and Talbot’s close epistolary friendship and ends with Talbot’s death in 1770. Carter’s correspondence with Elizabeth Vesey occupies the remaining volume and a half.¹⁶ Carter and Talbot recommend and debate various texts; they exchange notes on historical events, like the Jacobite rising of 1745; they share their writings; and above all, they discuss their emotional lives with thoughtfulness and compassion.¹⁷ Both women were prone to low spirits, and Talbot was continually ill. Carter’s famous poem, “Ode to Melancholy,” personifies melancholy as a “Companion” and culminates in necrophiliac fantasy: “cold to Pleasure’s tempting Forms, / Consociate with my Sister-worms, / And mingle with the Dead.”¹⁸ In her work on the correspondence, Celia Barnes intriguingly suggests that “Talbot’s is always a voice from the past, from memory, from the margins, and that voice serves an important function: it becomes a way for Carter to represent the unrepresentable, death.”¹⁹ The pervasive concern with death and depression throughout the correspondence, along with their close sisterly

¹⁶ Critics have debated whether there are possible Sapphic undertones to Carter’s and Talbot’s relationship. Norma Clarke is one of many who subscribe to this view (*Dr Johnson’s Women*, p. 52), while Sylvia Harcstark Myers vigorously contests it (*The Bluestocking Circle*, p. 75).

¹⁷ See Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, p. 72; Celia Barnes Rasmussen, ““Speaking on the Edge of My Tomb’: The Epistolary Life and Death of Catherine Talbot,” *Partial Answers* 8.2 (2010): 255-75 [259].

¹⁸ Elizabeth Carter, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1762), p. 80.

¹⁹ Rasmussen, ““Speaking on the Edge of My Tomb,”” p. 257.

relationship, is perhaps what attracted and fascinated Burney after Susan's death. Burney's small commonplace book contains 105 pages or 53 leaves, though much of it is left blank. In the book, there are 58 discrete entries. Of those 58 entries, sixteen are from Carter's and Talbot's correspondence. In percentage terms, 28% of the works cited in "Consolatory Extracts" are by Carter and Talbot. It is not, then, an exaggeration to declare that the *Series of Letters* is a guiding influence on Burney's "Consolatory Extracts."

Burney's transcription of extracts from the correspondence can be divided into three roughly chronological sections – concern with present duties, death and the beyond, and self-improvement – reflecting her own mourning process. In the fourth entry of her book, Burney records Talbot's valuation of the present versus the distant: "the present scene has always too strong an influence upon my mind, & that, when various little avocations call upon me for my attention, distant objects grow fainter than they ought to do. Not that I love or value my distant Friends less than in the instant I parted with them; but I think of them seldomer than if I saw them every day – or than if I lived in solitude, & saw nobody." Burney comments – "If the so nearly perfect Miss Talbot acknowledges this – shall we be angry with others? however, in this Point, < differ but to ourselves >?"²⁰ – this is perhaps an allusion to her own distance from the deceased Susan. Four pages later, Burney records Carter's response: "It would be exacting a strangely extravagant proof of constancy & tenderness in our Friends to insist on their being deaf and blind to the objects which surround them, and to expect them to quit the realities of action, to

²⁰ Burney, "Consolatory Extracts," p. 12; cf. *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, From the Year 1741 to 1770*, 4 vols. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1809), 2:151, Talbot to Carter, 19 January 1754. Manuscript symbols used here correspond with those used in modern editions of Burney's journals and letters. < > indicates uncertain readings. <xxxxx 4-6 words> indicates material that has been crossed-out and not recovered, in this instance, 4-6 words. [] indicates editorial insertions, such as dates, names, or inadvertent omissions by Burney.

ramble after imaginary *entretiens*, and bewilder themselves in the land of romance, the country which properly belongs (poor souls!) to none but lovers.”²¹ Carter’s pragmatic concurrence serves as the final word on this subject, but the final word in Burney’s transcription, interestingly enough, is not Carter’s. In a rare act of alteration, Burney changes the original ending of the passage, removing the reference to “the realities of action,...imaginary *entretiens*, and...the land of romance” replacing it with a single infinitive phrase: “to bewilder themselves in the Land of reverie & introspection.”²² Burney’s alteration is more fitting, and her conscious turn to introspection marks a new focus of her commonplace book.

Burney’s meditations on Carter’s and Talbot’s attitudes towards death and especially self-improvement occupy the bulk of her commonplace book; these selections have the clearest applications to Burney’s loss following Susan’s death. The extracts dealing with death are often tinged with reflections on the present versus the future. In her forty-seventh entry entitled “*To-Morrow! & to morrow!*”, a reference to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Burney records Talbot’s view of the afterlife: “The world is filled with objects of beauty & delight, though, wrapped up in the wretched but necessary cares of every Day, we can scarcely cast a passing glance upon them, but get over one hour after another as well as we can, & seem to wait for some better time of enjoyment, when our capacity shall be improved, & our leisure uninterrupted,” concluding, “This is no resting place for Man.”²³ This shows a shift in Burney’s priorities from her early entries. She now privileges the distant over the present: “some better time of enjoyment, when our capacity shall be improved, & our leisure uninterrupted.” This corresponds with the turn to self-

²¹ *Series of Letters*, 2:155-56.

²² Burney, “Consolatory Extracts,” p. 16; cf. *Series of Letters*, 2:155-56, Carter to Talbot, 14 February 1754.

²³ Burney, “Consolatory Extracts,” p. 48; cf. *Series of Letters*, 1:169, Talbot to Carter, 31 October 1746.

improvement that the “Consolatory Extracts” ultimately takes, as well as the marked religious tone in her later entries and writings.

Burney fixates on Carter’s and Talbot’s self-improving strain as a solution for her grief and transcribes such passages frequently, from as early as the eleventh entry and encompassing two of the final three passages. Early extracts focus on specific behaviors. Burney initially cites “The admirable *Miss Talbot*”’s warning against bad humor: “I am convinced,...that bad nerves, as one is pleased to call the indulgence of humour, are little short of a mortal sin. They disgrace ones best principles, grieve ones best Friends, hurt ones companions, & make ones whole being ungrateful to God.”²⁴ Burney added the short phrase “to God” at the end of the passage, which is for her a rare turn to the divine, though she made numerous religious references in the wake of Susan’s death.²⁵ Burney’s allusion to God is a harbinger of the increasing religious tone her works adopted towards the end of her life. During her final decades, Burney returned to and revised her writings; her journal entry of May 1789 is an excellent example of this religious turn. According to her editor Geoffrey Sill, Burney’s revisions to the entry reveal “the personal and somewhat unconventional meditation on the relation between pain and religious belief.”²⁶ The entry had been divided and expanded in Burney’s revisions, but the original passage reads:

For all the early part of this Month, I was grievously ill with a pain in my Face, – I applied for it <Fredy’s remedy>, a blister, in vain; I had then recourse to Leeches: & one of them certainly bit a nerve, <or was, by mistake, a noxious leech>; for what I suffered surpasses <all> description, – it was torture, – it was agony! – I fully thought myself

²⁴ Burney, “Consolatory Extracts,” p. 17; cf. *Series of Letters*, 3:2, Talbot to Carter, 14 May 1762.

²⁵ See above, p. 000.

²⁶ Frances Burney, *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* [CJL], gen ed. Peter Sabor, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2011-), 5:291, n. 704.

poisoned, – & I am most thankful to add, that during that persuasion, I felt a freedom from what are called *the horrors of Death*, which, at my recovery, & *ever since*, has paid me for that exquisite suffering. All good, all patience with human infirmities, I painted to myself that Great Creator to whom I believed myself prematurely appearing, & the dread of his <power> was sunk in the hope of his <wisdom>. Whether I should feel this mental calm when not in such dire bodily pain, Heaven only knows. I am the happier that I have *ever* felt it, where I credited the end of all approaching. –²⁷

The language used in this passage is strikingly similar to that used in “Consolatory Extracts.” The fear of “*the horrors of Death*” and turn to the “Great Creator,” as well as the auto-didactic strain of the passage, are themes that Burney would adopt in “Consolatory Extracts.” Not only does this passage foreshadow Burney’s focus on self-improvement and pervasive Christian undertones in her writings after 1791, but the connection between religion and pain that is foregrounded in the passage is an important clue to the dating of the commonplace book.

In the final pages of “Consolatory Extracts,” Burney selects passages from Carter’s and Talbot’s letters that advocate a return to society and the living world and correspondingly signal the end of her collecting of extracts. Burney annotates a passage from Carter as “Useful life demands” that cautions against prolonged retirement:

Besides the particular inducement of quitting Home to see valuable people, & those we love, there are more general reasons to make us mix now & then in society, & keep up some kind of connexion with the universal community of Mankind; to enlarge, & vary, ones ideas, & thus become more agreeable & useful to those with whom we abide, than it

²⁷ Burney, *CJL*, 5:289, 291.

is possible to be in a clockwork kind of life, always moved by the same springs, & striking the same notes, & thus growing as tiresome as a pe[r]petually played old Tune.²⁸ Carter's advice could be interpreted as a warning against repetitive acts, like compiling and re-reading a commonplace book such as Burney's. Her enjoinder to "mix now & then in society, & keep up some kind of connexion with the universal community of Mankind" is advice Burney probably followed soon afterwards, considering that the passage is the fifty-sixth of fifty-eight entries in "Consolatory Extracts." The final entry reveals Talbot's views of retirement: "The use of *retirement* is to fit us for moving more beneficially in the World; & mixing in the *World* is of use to rub off the rust which the best & noblest minds will contract in long retirement."²⁹ That "retirement" is the final word written in Burney's commonplace book is telling. And that Burney's final copied passage urges her to shake off the "rust" of "retirement" alludes to Johnson's earlier and well-known advice about sorrow's "rust of the soul" and hints at her return to productivity after a prolonged period of grief.

While Burney's selections from Carter's and Talbot's *Series of Letters* provide an informal chronology of her mourning process, they even more significantly call into question the dating of her "Consolatory Extracts." Carter's and Talbot's *Series of Letters* was not published until 1809, nine years after Susan died on 6 January 1800. This begs the question, when did Burney write her "Consolatory Extracts"? The Huntington Library dates the book circa 1800, though it could not have been written before 1809.³⁰ Why then did Burney wait at least nine years to work through her grief after Susan's loss? The answer, I argue, doesn't lie in "when,"

²⁸ Burney, "Consolatory Extracts," p. 75; cf. *Series of Letters*, 2:23-24, Carter to Talbot, 12 April 1751.

²⁹ Burney, "Consolatory Extracts," p. 81; cf. *Series of Letters*, 2:98, Talbot to Carter, 13 November 1752.

³⁰ Doody also wrongly dates the "Consolatory Extracts" as 1800 (*Frances Burney*, p. 288).

but “where.” The probable reason why Burney wrote this book no earlier than 1809 is that she composed it during her ten-year residence in Napoleonic France (1802-12). According to Joyce Hemlow, “In the Napoleonic years when after May 1803 there was little opportunity of sending letters (much less Journals) to England, Madame d’Arblay began to record the events of the day (with summaries for the year of books read and visits made or received) in such commercially ruled and dated Memoranda Books or Pocket Diaries.”³¹ Cut off from her friends in England and not able to send very many letters, Burney likely wrote her “Consolatory Extracts” as an outlet for her lingering grief.

The physical appearance and the content of Burney’s “Consolatory Extracts” supports the contention that the text was written while Burney lived in Napoleonic France. The “Consolatory Extracts” shares an intriguing number of features with Burney’s French memorandum books and her French notebooks. These are some of the very few bilingual works that Burney produced. As far as we know, Burney’s French writings were either directed to her French husband, Alexandre D’Arblay, or written in France. The size is also unique: Burney’s “Consolatory Extracts” is quite small, measuring 2.625 by 3.25 inches in dimension. The French Memorandum books come in various sizes,³² and Burney’s commonplace book is roughly half their height, with a similar width. The memorandum books also contain records of some of the texts that Burney was reading, and one of those is Madame de Staël’s *MSS. of M. Necker* in March 1805.³³ Madame de Staël was the second-most cited author in Burney’s commonplace book. Even though Carter’s and Talbot’s *Series of Letters* is not listed in the memorandum books, that does not exclude the possibility that Burney read it while in France given the

³¹ Burney, *JL*, 6:735.

³² They range from 5.3” × 3.4” to 4.9” × 2.6-2.9” (Burney, *JL*, 6:735, 792, 806).

³³ Burney, *JL*, 6:747.

incomplete nature of her surviving records. And finally, though there is not much text in the extant memorandum books, of the text that remains, a considerable portion focuses on Susan. Burney continually evokes the “— sweet — sweet — Heart piercing — never dying remembrance!”³⁴ of Susan in entries for 1804, 1807, and 1812.³⁵ In her references to Susan, Burney employs pleading language very similar to that used within her commonplace book: “[d]ear, Angel Sister! — Sister of my Soul! [H]over ever around me with they blessed Spi[r]it — support by thy auspicious influence the [t]ender the incomparable — husband to whom [t]hou so joyed to see me united — inspire & guide our dear inexperienced Boy —”³⁶ The entreating and religious diction Burney employs in this passage is reminiscent of the language from the selected extracts that appear in her commonplace book.

Another perhaps more compelling reason why Burney’s “Consolatory Extracts” was written during her time in France is because the collection shares similarities with texts written shortly after her mastectomy on 30 September 1811. The handwriting, while unmistakably her own, is smaller and much more difficult to read than that in her other manuscripts. Doody suggests that “its appearance communicates agitation and distress”;³⁷ I believe instead that the irregular script indicates that the book was written around the time of her mastectomy. In an 1812 account written nine months after the operation, Burney chronicles the discovery of her tumor and her preparations for and details of the operation, which she underwent without anesthetic.³⁸ One of the first of its kind, the account is perhaps the most widely-known work of Burney’s, with indelible descriptions of trauma: “the Knife <rack>ling against the breast bone —

³⁴ Burney, *JL*, 6:736.

³⁵ Burney, *JL*, 6:743, 796, 806-7.

³⁶ Burney, *JL*, 6:806-7.

³⁷ Doody, *Frances Burney*, p. 418, n. 50.

³⁸ The account of Burney’s mastectomy appears in *JL*, 6:596-616.

scraping it!”³⁹ Burney’s handwriting after her mastectomy became noticeably erratic and unsteady,⁴⁰ comparable to the handwriting in “Consolatory Extracts,” allowing us to date the commonplace book to the period shortly after her mastectomy. Burney’s use of Christian themes and her ruminations on mortality evoke her religious turn in May 1789 after experiencing severe bodily pain at the court of Queen Charlotte.

Burney’s delayed writing of the mastectomy account also reflects her delayed mourning for her deceased sister. Her thoughts during the ordeal significantly turn to Susan: “my departed Angel! — how did I think of her!”⁴¹ Sangeeta Mediratta and Julia L. Epstein discuss Burney’s protracted process of composition and revision of the account. Mediratta observes that Burney wrote it in two periods over a span of nine months, while Epstein focuses on Burney’s post-circulation revisions that she argues were made between 1820 to 1835 “with an ear to style and with an intention to preserve as dramatic a record as she could.”⁴² While improved stylistics was likely one of the reasons Burney revised the mastectomy account, her sustained focus on her trauma undoubtedly had a therapeutic effect; John Wiltshire has argued that this composition should “be seen as a performance of recuperation.”⁴³ This has interesting and significant connections to Burney’s “Consolatory Extracts”; both texts demonstrate the restorative power of writing, though “Consolatory Extracts” addresses trauma in a more implicit manner. Burney’s

³⁹ Burney, *JL*, 6:612.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women’s Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 56; and Sangeeta Mediratta, “Beauty and the Breast: The Poetics of Physical Absence and Narrative Presence in Frances Burney’s Mastectomy Letter (1811),” *Women: A Cultural Review*, 19.2 (2008): 188-207 [195].

⁴¹ Burney, *JL*, 6:610-11.

⁴² Mediratta, “Beauty and the Breast,” p. 195; Julia L. Epstein, “Writing the Unspeakable: Fanny Burney’s Mastectomy and the Fictive Body,” *Representations* 16 (1986): 131-66 [139, 140].

⁴³ John Wiltshire, “Early Nineteenth-Century Pathography: The Case of Frances Burney,” *Literature and History* 2.2 (1993): 9-23 [16].

use of writing as a form of healing – both direct and indirect – suggests that her fictional works also contain important parallels.

Burney's response to Susan's death in her life-writing anticipates and reflects the ways in which her grief was manifested in her fictional writings: her immediate turn to comedy and later melancholy confirms the delayed nature of her public memorializing. Although Burney cancelled the planned staging of her second comedy *Love and Fashion* in the wake of Susan's death, she finished her final two comedies, *The Woman-Hater* and *A Busy Day*, shortly afterwards. *The Woman-Hater* is a light comedy that focuses on the eponymous protagonist, Sir Roderick, a man who was jilted long ago by Lady Smatter and now completely refuses to interact with women. One of his potential heirs, Waverley, has fallen for Sir Roderick's niece Sophia in spite of his relative's prohibition. The play ends predictably with their union, as well as the reunion of Sir Roderick and Lady Smatter, with Sir Roderick's false niece Joyce providing comic relief. The only sentimental undertones in the play are linked to Sir Roderick's sister Eleonora, who was wrongly accused of adultery, though she is also reunited with her estranged husband Wilmot at the end of the play. *A Busy Day* is similarly comedic, though it contains darker class and racial undertones. It focuses on Eliza Watts and Cleveland, two young English people who have fallen in love in India and have returned to England. They are from different backgrounds: Cleveland's family is well-established, while Eliza's is rich, but of low origin. Much of the comedy in the play comes from the conflict between their two families, especially the snobbishness of Cleveland's uncle Sir Marmaduke Tylney and the vulgarities of the Watts clan. Unlike the other members of her family, Eliza has received social refinement from her guardian, whose death has set in motion the events of the play: "The power which they [Eliza's parents] relinquished to my kind adopted Father may seem again, now I have lost him, to return

to its first channel”.⁴⁴ Eliza’s brief expression of loss is the play’s closest approximation to the elegiac strain. Doody contends that these plays show Burney “not succumbing” to the grief she experienced;⁴⁵ but these are not simply evidence of her stoicism, but a literary reflection of her delayed expression of grief.

Unlike Burney’s two comedies that were written around the time of Susan’s death, her tragic play *Elberta* – though begun when she was serving as Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte – does contain emotional outpourings of grief that were likely written after 1800. Burney never finished *Elberta*, but its manuscript pages have been used to date its composition from 1785 to 1814. Some of the play was written on the backs of letters dated between December 1785 and January 1811, and other parts are written on pages from Burney’s 1814 appointment book.⁴⁶ *Elberta* was inspired by historical events during the Saxon rule of England: Elberta, the daughter of the murdered king Ethelbert, is courted by his assassin Offa, though in Burney’s play, Elberta is already and secretly married with children to Arnulph, the nephew of Offa. Much of the play, which is incomplete and only exists in fragments, revolves around Elberta’s attempts to hide her marriage and her children from the murderous Offa. One of the final scenes, according to Stewart Cooke, contains Elberta’s response to the abduction of her children. The scene foreshadows a conclusion to the play in which Elberta is overcome by madness:

Where are my Children?

Are they all gone?

⁴⁴ Frances Burney, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney: Volume 1. Comedies*, ed. Peter Sabor, contrib. ed. Geoffrey M. Sill (London: William Pickering, 1995), p. 297, 1.1.78-80.

⁴⁵ Doody, *Frances Burney*, p. 299.

⁴⁶ Frances Burney, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney: Volume 2. Tragedies*, ed. Peter Sabor, assoc. ed. Stewart J. Cooke (London: William Pickering, 1995), p. 233.

And died he with his Children?
O yes! they are dead! they murdered –
Tell me but one thing more –
Tell me the grave that holds their sweet remains
Charge them they look not on their wretched mother
Taint not their pure joy
With such a sight of woe –
Ah yes ... I see them –
They mount the upper regions of the air
Ah See! – they beckon me! –
See you not that sweet smile?
How oft that charm'd me from
That loved, soft smile, that in this nether world
So oft has robb'd my Soul of bitterness,
Chac'd from my cares their power
I come, my gentle loves! –
I see your soft arms opening to entwine
Your happy mother's neck – see those sweet cheeks
On which my lips have dwelt till time and spa<ce>
And woe and all – but Arnulph – was forgot.⁴⁷

The language Burney uses in this scene evokes her immediate response to Susan's death and the delayed mourning documented in her commonplace book. Elberta's comforting view of her

⁴⁷ Burney, *Tragedies*, pp. 299-300 n.

presumably dead children in heaven, “mount[ing] the upper regions of the air,” has an earlier counterpart in Burney’s religiously-inflected solace. Elberta’s singular focus on their smiles indicates the potential of madness later in the play, just as Burney herself almost became overpowered by her grief upon the initial shock of Susan’s death. And finally, Elberta’s desire to join her children – “I come, my gentle loves!” – evokes Burney’s repeated expectation of solace and reunion after death that appears throughout her “Consolatory Extracts.” That Burney could not finish this scene is significant; it is her clearest response – in the dramatic genre – to Susan’s loss. This final scene, likely written fourteen years after Susan’s death, is thus one of the fictional counterparts to the delayed mourning expressed in her commonplace book.

Burney’s most significant fictional response to Susan’s death appears in her final novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), written concurrently with the final fragments from *Elberta* and building on the bilingual and philosophical depictions of grief in her commonplace book. Similar metaphysical and religious themes appear in the debates between the milquetoast hero Albert Harleigh and the dynamic anti-heroine Elinor Joddrel, who repeatedly attempts suicide upon Harleigh’s rejections of her love. Roughly a third into the novel, Harleigh warns Elinor about her dangerous view of death as “the termination of all, the extinguisher, the absorber of unaccounted life,” arguing instead that it is “the opening to spiritual being, and the period of retribution for our past terrestrial existence.”⁴⁸ His anticipation of reward after death evokes Burney’s response to Susan’s death in her initial letters and her commonplace book. Towards the end of *The Wanderer*, in chapter 85, Elinor and Harleigh debate whether there is life after death.⁴⁹ Amid his reflections regarding the separation of soul from body, Harleigh declares,

⁴⁸ Frances Burney, *The Wanderer*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 374.

⁴⁹ See Burney, *The Wanderer*, pp. 781-94.

“May not all air be peopled with our departed friends, hovering around us, as sensible as we are unconscious? May not the uncumbered soul watch over those it loves? find again those it had lost? be received in the Heaven of Heavens, where it is destined...to life, to joy, to sweetest reminiscence, to tenderest re-unions, to grateful adoration, to intelligence never ending!”⁵⁰ His language evokes Burney’s earlier idea that in death she “may be purified to join them [Susan and her departed friend, Mary Delany]” and her recording of Talbot’s view of the afterlife, “some better time of enjoyment, when our capacity shall be improved, & our leisure uninterrupted.”⁵¹ These parallels show both the delayed nature of Burney’s philosophical meditations on grief and hitherto unobserved connections between Burney’s fictions and life-writings.

The clearest parallel between *The Wanderer* and Burney’s own loss appears not in the debates between Harleigh and Elinor, but in the novel’s representation of the minor character Gabriella’s grief for her dead son, depicted in the French language. As in the commonplace book, significant and emotionally-charged passages are presented in French. Margaret Anne Doody argues that the Gabriella scenes demonstrate that “Burney associates emotional openness with the French language.” Burney’s aim in doing so, Doody argues, is to “to bring home to the reader the concept of another culture.”⁵² This may be part of Burney’s reasoning, but given her previous use of the French language in her correspondence and commonplace book, these passages show Burney’s willingness and even preference for voicing her grief publicly in another language. This scene contains some of the most emotional language found in any of Burney’s writings as Gabriella laments the loss of her young child. Gabriella articulates her

⁵⁰ Burney, *The Wanderer*, pp. 793-94.

⁵¹ Burney, *JL*, 4:398; Burney, “Consolatory Extracts,” p. 48; cf. *Series of Letters*, 1:169, Talbot to Carter, 31 October 1746.

⁵² Doody, *Frances Burney*, p. 330.

hope of reunion in the afterlife in an impassioned manner: “Que je te retrouve là – où ta félicité sera la mienne! Mais toi, prie pour ta malheureuse mère! que tes innocentes prières s'unissent à ses humbles supplications, pour que ta mère, ta pauvre mère, puisse se rendre digne de te rejoindre!” [“There, only, let me find thee, where thy felicity will be be mine! – but thou! O pray for thy unhappy mother! Let thy innocent prayers be united to her humble supplications, that thy mother, thy hapless mother, may become worthy to join thee!”]⁵³ Her description of the overpowering nature of loss – “le plus accablant des malheurs? Oh! ce sont des souffrances qui n’ont point de nom; des douleurs qui rendent nulles toutes autres” [“the most overwhelming of calamities! a suffering that admits of no description! a woe that makes all others seem null”]⁵⁴ – evokes Burney’s own initial poignant response to Susan’s death: “that dreadful — harrowing — never to be forgotten moment of horror that made me wish to be mad”.⁵⁵ As Gabrielle describes her inability to recover from her loss, “Comment ai-je pô te revoir, sans retrouver la félicité? Je me sens presque coupable de pouvoir t’embrasser, – et de pleurer encore!” [“How is it I can recover thee, and not recover happiness? I almost feel as if I were criminal, that I can embrace thee, – yet weep on!”], she recalls Burney’s continued suffering despite the passing of time, “a constant — a gnawing — an endless drawback to all perfect enjoyment”.⁵⁶ Thus, it is only within *The Wanderer* that Burney is able to publicly, though indirectly, express the grief she had harbored since Susan’s loss, anticipating her more public memorials of her husband and father.

⁵³ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p. 386.

⁵⁴ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p. 387.

⁵⁵ Burney, *JL*, 4:386. See also Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 286.

⁵⁶ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p. 389; *JL*, 5:248.

Burney's little-studied "Consolatory Extracts" reveals important aspects of her memorializing practice, and its parallels with *The Wanderer* indicate the more public aspect her grief would assume in later years as she mourned her husband, Alexandre d'Arblay, and her father, Charles Burney. In 1820, almost two years after the death of her husband, Burney finished the "Narrative of the Last Illness and Death of General d'Arblay," set between February 1817 and 3 May 1818 and circulated among her family members.⁵⁷ She largely copies her memorandum notes to chronicle the gradual decline of her husband, and as with her response to Susan's death, her expression of grief is delayed and sustained: "It is now 17th of November, 1819 — A year & half have passed since I was blessed with his sight! — & though my Grief is divested of its poignancy, my heart has been uniformly & completely a stranger to All Happiness — all peace of Mind — all sensation of Gladness — ever since the dread separation!"⁵⁸ The protracted nature of Burney's grief is again emphasized, as is her brief loss of sanity following her husband's death: "I had certainly a partial derangement."⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, the "Narrative" alludes to Susan's death, returning to the familiar theme of reunion: "May my beloved Husband — my darling Sister — now in pure friendship associated in the realms of bliss, Pray for — plead for, await — receive me! —"⁶⁰

Burney's final public memorial is also her final publication, her *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832), published eighteen years after her father's death in 1814.⁶¹ It is significantly the first publication to which Burney affixes her name, and in its "Preface, or Apology," she explains

⁵⁷ Burney, *JL*, 10:842-910.

⁵⁸ Burney, *JL*, 10:843.

⁵⁹ Burney, *JL*, 10:908.

⁶⁰ Burney, *JL*, 10:844.

⁶¹ Her father Charles Burney died in 1814, and her husband Alexandre D'Arblay died in 1818. Neither of their deaths is mentioned within the text of "Consolatory Extracts" or on the title page, so this is another persuasive reason why the text was written before 1814 and in France.

the reasons for its delayed appearance: “the grief at his loss, which at first incapacitated her from such an effort, was soon afterwards followed by change of place, change of circumstances – almost of existence – with multiplied casualties that, eventually, separated her from all her manuscript materials.” Burney describes the ability of “Time” to “produc[e] a mental calm, though which life imperceptibly glides back to its customary operations; however powerless Time itself – earthly Time! – must still remain for restoring lost felicity.”⁶² The successive losses of her beloved sister, father, and husband affirm Burney’s inability to find “felicity” on earth. And the sustained nature of Burney’s grief for Susan is finally – explicitly – acknowledged in her description of her father’s response to the event. After relating the discovery of Susan’s death from her father’s perspective, Burney meditates at length on the nature of loss:

But for the fair hope that all the pungency of heart-riving separations such as these, from the objects of our purest affections, is left behind; — that their bitterness is not shared; that the void, cold! unsearchable! of such dire deprivations, is known only to the survivors — while to the gone all clouds are cleared away, all storms are calmed, all pangs are chased by bliss; but for this celestial Hope, and spiritual Belief,— how could the fragile human frame be strong enough to sustain the convulsed human mind, in the writhings of its first desolating experience of a woe, which, by one fatal stroke, seems, for the moment, to leave life without a charm? — For such is the first, instinctive, imperious sensation upon such dread catastrophes; whatever are the consolations with

⁶² Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 1:v-vi.

which remaining tender ties may speedily afterwards soothe and regenerate our feelings; and exchange our mortal grief for immortal aspirations.⁶³

This meditation unites Burney's metaphysical and religious musings with her sense of sustained emotional loss. It is the distillation of the material from her "Consolatory Extracts," particularly the passages borrowed from Carter's and Talbot's correspondence. In this sense, the delayed *Memoirs* appears as more than a tribute to Burney's father, but also as the inevitable consequence of Burney's protracted mourning process. Conversely, "Consolatory Extracts" should be read as a prefiguration of Burney's *Memoirs*, an important, though private memorial to her beloved sister Susan.

⁶³ Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3:295-96.