

“The Middle State”: Italian Opera in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*

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In 1787 Frances Burney wrote to her sister, Susan Burney Phillips, recounting a trip to the theatre with the royal party to see Thomas Holcroft’s play *Seduction*. Burney described the drama as “a very clever piece, but containing a dreadful picture of vice and dissipation in high life.”¹ The performance concluded with an epilogue, written by Miles Andrews, which contained a couplet that startled and discomfited Burney with its unexpected praise of her second novel, *Cecilia* (1782):

O such an Epilogue! I was listening to it with uncommon attention, from a Compliment paid in it to Mrs Montague, among other female Writers—but imagine what became of my attention, when I suddenly was struck with these lines—or something like them—

Let sweet Cecilia gain your just applause,

Whose every passion yields to Reason’s Laws—

To hear, wholly unprepared and unsuspecting, such lines in a Theatre,—seated in a Royal Box,—and with the whole Royal family and their Suite opposite

1 Frances Burney to Susan Burney Phillips, 1 March 1787, Frances Burney D’Arbly, *Diary and Letters*, MSS, Berg Collection, 3:2644–45, cited in *A Known Scribbler: Frances Burney on Literary Life*, ed. Justine Crump (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002), 242. References are to this edition, hereafter cited as *KS*.

me,—was it not a singular circumstance? To describe its embarrassment would be impossible. (KS, 242)²

Burney's anguish at her exposure in a public arena is a reaction appropriate to her status and reputation as a self-effacing female author; the emotive language that expresses her embarrassment—an effect of such modesty—illustrates the tension (and balance) between passion and restraint that Andrews's epilogue identified as Burney's laudable achievement in *Cecilia*.

This tension is played out in this scene in visual and spatial terms. A series of specular exchanges frame the reference on stage relating to *Cecilia*; Burney describes how her reaction to the evocation of her novel is scrutinized through the crisscrossing perspectives of different opera glasses:

—my whole Head was leaning forward, with my Opera Glass in my Hand, examining Miss Farren, who spoke the Epilogue:—instantly I shrunk back,—so astonished, and so ashamed of my public situation that I was almost ready *to take to my Heels and run*,—for it seemed as if I were there purposely,—in that conspicuous place,—“To sit attentive to my own applause—”

The King immediately raised his Opera Glass to look at me, laughing heartily,—the Queen's presently took the same direction. (KS, 242–43)

The response of the royal party exacerbates Burney's self-consciousness and fear of seeming narcissistically complicit in the epilogue's praise. Spatially, the performance of the epilogue occupies a middle point between the intersecting glances that so disturb Burney; the variously agonized and amused exchanges of looks taking place in the royal boxes frame the reference to her literary achievement. At the same time, the words uttered on stage suggest a different sense of occupying a place between two opposing positions: the message conveyed in the couplet—that Burney evokes passion but exercises restraint through reason—praises a stance that moderates extremes. In defending the conclusion to *Cecilia*, in response to Samuel “Daddy” Crisp's remarks on the manuscript, Burney wrote: “Besides, I think the book in its present conclusion, somewhat *original*, for the Hero and Heroine are neither plunged in the depths of misery, nor exalted to *unhuman* happiness,—is not such a middle state more natural?”³ In rejecting criticism of the conclusion, and in other comments regarding the

2 Andrews's epilogue contains the couplet: “And oft let soft *Cecilia* win your praise; / While Reason guides the clue, in Fancy's maze.”

3 Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 6 April 1782, in KS, 211.

composition of *Cecilia*, Burney returns repeatedly—both in the novel and in her private correspondence—to this image of the “middle state” as a defining model and principle for her writing.

In Burney’s letter to Susan, the opera glasses that mediate—and intensify—her self-consciousness in the theatre literalize the perspective through which she frequently chooses to explore particular themes and literary concerns. Beth Kowaleski Wallace has pointed out that “in Burney’s own work, the opera is a recurring image, one to which she returns often and one which is central to the problem of self-definition for both Burney and her heroines.”⁴ In this article, I will argue that Burney’s deployment of Italian opera conveys more than a concern with female self-definition; I suggest that, apart from affording the occasion for the expression of pure sentiment, the opera also provided Burney with a model for the middle state that she advocated in her letters and journals, regarding—among other things—the writing of fiction, the nature of the public and private, and the relations between genre and urban space.

The following discussion will also demonstrate that, despite overriding evidence pointing to her enthusiasm for all things relating to opera, at times Burney also conveyed an uneasiness and dissatisfaction with it. This uneasiness is partly related to the public nature of the opera house itself and the implications for women associated with it. Burney’s relationship with novelist Frances Brooke, who co-managed the King’s Theatre during the mid-1770s, is an example of this and illustrates a rather more ambivalent attitude towards opera: a middle state that represents less an ideal position than an uncertainty about its propriety for a respectable writer. Burney had a high regard for Frances Brooke, the author of well-received and respected sentimental novels; indeed, this article will argue that Burney’s representations of opera in *Cecilia* closely resemble Frances Brooke’s own portrayal of the opera scene in her London novel *The Excursion* (1777). Yet Burney’s rather lukewarm friendship with Frances Brooke appeared to stem from the latter’s time as manager of the King’s Theatre together with the scandalous actress Mary Ann Yates: a relationship that, in Burney’s eyes, had compromised Frances Brooke’s public reputation.⁵ This ambivalence plays itself out spatially in Burney’s

4 Beth Kowaleski Wallace, “A Night at the Opera,” in *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 143.

5 In 1774 Burney wrote in her journal: “It is very disagreeable that the Yates are half managers with the Brookes, nor can I understand how a woman of Character and reputation,

different writings: the discomfort that Burney conveyed in her letters and private journal, in her description of the proximity of Frances Brooke's house to the opera house, jarred with the more public depiction of the King's Theatre in *Cecilia*; the former registers a narrow route to private quarters, while the latter depicts absolute public space. This disjunction—representation caught between public and private space—indicates an anxiety on Burney's part about the use of London's cultural spaces.

The main focus of this article, however, is on the correlation between the sentiment and structure of Italian opera and Burney's own opinions on writing fiction. In establishing this connection, the significance of the middle state to Burney's ideas will become clear. After tracing briefly the development of Italian opera in London from the beginning of the eighteenth century, where it was mercilessly lampooned by satirists, to its more sympathetic treatment by later eighteenth-century novels, most notably sentimental fiction, I consider its significance in Burney's *Cecilia*. In Burney's second novel, the extended descriptions of impassioned arias arouse responses of exquisite sensibility in the sensitive listener; the shared register of extreme feeling in these scenes seems to connect the pathos of arias, taken mostly from *opera seria*, with the language of sensibility.

Although *Cecilia* cannot be described as a sentimental novel, the heroine's sensibility is clearly delineated in her reaction to the performance of opera arias. Instead of rendering Cecilia either the immobile object or spectator of pity typical of sentimental fiction, Burney establishes what Jane Spencer has described, in the context of late eighteenth-century fiction, as a more "active sensibility" for her heroine, a sensibility that acts as "the model for a new kind of engagement with public issues."⁶ Cecilia's sensibility manifests itself in her active response to narratives of distress; she is frequently stirred by

such as Mrs Brooke, can have reconcil'd herself to becoming intimate with one whose fame bears no scrutiny." Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney: Volume 2, 1774–1777*, ed. Lars E. Troide (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 55. Burney is probably referring to Yates's early life. In *Records of My Life*, John Taylor records how she had once lived "together about two years" with a friend of his, a Mr "Donaldson." Taylor, *Records of My Life* (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1833), 148, cited in Lorraine McMullen, *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* (Vancouver: University of Washington Press, 1983), 156.

6 Jane Spencer, "Women Writers and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 227; Spencer adds: "this process was occurring throughout the late eighteenth century, with Burney's *Cecilia* (1782) one of the most important contributors."

stories of social injustice and sufficiently moved to give financial and personal aid to its victims. Significantly, her compassion and generosity are set in a recognizable aesthetic and cultural context; a context that, crucially, both motivates and influences her actions: Cecilia's conflicting impulses between social benevolence—her compulsion to dispense her fortune to charity—and a disgusted withdrawal from London society are framed in the novel by visits to the opera house in the Haymarket. The shift between the urban public and private, to find what Burney calls "the golden mean," becomes less an attempt to distinguish vaguely between overlapping theoretical spheres than an effort to map this movement on to the social topography of late eighteenth-century London itself. As a public venue, in a paradoxically semi-secluded part of town, on the southwest side of the Haymarket, the opera house is more than simply a backdrop to the expression of the heroine's sensibility; it becomes equally important as sentimental *space*, an example of "feminized public space in which political issues could be discussed."⁷

But if Burney favours the opera house in her fiction—although not in her private writings—as an urban site that successfully mediates women's engagement with public issues, she is more ambivalent about the formal features of opera itself, particularly its structure, in relation to her own ideas about narrative. Despite overlapping in certain respects with the literature of sensibility—most notably in sharing moments of heightened feeling—the structure of *Cecilia* differs from the more formulaic, fragmented shape of contemporary sentimental fiction. The final part of this article demonstrates that, although Burney privileges the emotional tone of Italian opera in isolated passages, she is more ambivalent about the notion of *structural* kinship between the composite pasticcio form that Italian opera had adopted since Handel abandoned opera, and the shape and organization of her narratives. The remarks she notes in her letters and journal, from friends and acquaintances who had enjoyed the novel, seem to imply that *Cecilia* comprised a collection of favourite sections—in particular, the more affecting and pathetic parts of the novel. In this sense, they resembled the pasticcios, which could be said to represent the ultimate "middling" state, mediating between the musical pieces that were the most popular with the London audience, the abilities of individual singers, and the financial motivation of the theatre

7 Spencer, 227.

impresarios. At times, Burney's account of the reception of *Cecilia* verges on a similar sense of an author gratifying the tastes of her readers. As the final section shows, however, Burney's later comments on her works of fiction, especially in relation to their endings, indicate an anxiety to avoid the more contrived form of pasticcio that went too far in pandering to popular taste. Her firm rejection of a more pleasing and publicly acceptable denouement to *Cecilia*, where the heroine is made to forfeit her inheritance upon her marriage to Mortimer Delvile, is expressed through an explicit *repudiation* of Italian opera as both a thematically and structurally composite medium that bears no resemblance to what she called the "middle state" of narrative verisimilitude: a view shared by critics of the pasticcio, this position would have broader ramifications for the status of the novel in the late eighteenth century.



Burney's biographers and critics have frequently pointed to her novels and private journals as proof of her enthusiasm for Italian opera.⁸ Although her beloved sister Susan was actually the greater expert on contemporary London opera, Frances's journal and letters record her many visits to opera rehearsals and public performances—including rapturous praise for individual performances and singers—while her first two novels, *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia*, include extended literary representations of contemporary productions.⁹ Although this appreciation was not shared unequivocally by contemporary arbiters of taste, whose indifference and occasional hostility to Italian opera echoed attitudes displayed by satirists and arbiters of taste earlier in the century, Burney frequently enjoyed performances with her family in London, at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket. Through her father, music historian Dr Charles Burney,¹⁰ she became acquainted

8 Wallace, for example, writes that "one need not search far ... to find evidence of her own deep and passionate attachment to the opera and of her occasional defensiveness about the art in the presence of sceptics" ("A Night at the Opera," 142).

9 Susan Burney's letter-journal is in the British Library, BL Egerton MS 3691. Her coverage of the 1779–80 season gives a unique insight into opera performances at this time, and reveals a "remarkably independent voice, sometimes out of tune with her father and her more famous sister Fanny." Curtis Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995–2001), 1:23.

10 Interestingly, the pressure exerted on Frances by her father to finish writing *Cecilia* implicitly bound the novel, through the circumstances of its publication, to a work of music scholarship, the second of four volumes of his *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the*

with an inner circle of artists and managers associated with the opera house: they included Frances Brooke and her successor, playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan; she also knew many of the librettists and composers, and developed a close if unconventional friendship and correspondence with one of the last great castrati, Gasparo Pacchierotti.¹¹

Although Italian opera clearly receives a sympathetic treatment in the Burneys' various writings, this by no means implies that everyone in their cultural circle was equally well disposed to it in the late eighteenth century.¹² In his *Life of John Hughes* (1779), Samuel Johnson declared that Italian opera was "an exotic and irrational entertainment which has always been combated, and always has prevailed."¹³ Johnson was part of a group that met at Hester Thrale's home, in Streatham. Valerie Rumbold has written about the "awkward position which music occupied in the Streatham circle" and describes Hester Thrale as someone who always "sought to appropriate the non-verbal by turning it into the verbal."¹⁴ Even setting aside Johnson's apparent tone-deafness, it is impossible to overlook how writers on music shared his opinions. In his "Remarks on Music," in a section of his *Essays* published in 1776, Scottish poet and philosopher James Beattie wrote: "I allow [music] to be a fine art, and to have great influence on the human soul," and declared that "the foundation of all true music, and the most perfect of all music instruments, is the human voice."¹⁵ Beattie's comments on the emotive force of music—in particular the human voice—are followed immediately in this volume of the *Essays* by a section entitled "Of Sympathy"; both are incorporated into the long

Present. Dr Burney saw his daughter's new work-in-progress as a marketing opportunity: in theory, a chance for father and daughter to profit mutually from the simultaneous publication of novel and scholarly tome, in practice a calculated prediction that Frances's greater popularity would, by association, promote his own *History of Music*. Vol. 2 of *A General History of Music* was published on 29 May; *Cecilia* appeared on 12 June. See Roger Lonsdale, *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 268.

- 11 For a theoretical analysis of this friendship, see Wallace, "Shunning the Bearded Kiss: Castrati and the Definition of Female Sexuality," *Prose Studies* 15, no. 2 (1992): 153–70.
- 12 Charles Burney's account of the "Origin of the Italian Opera in England, and its Progress There during the Present Century," which appeared in vol. 4 (1789) of *A General History of Music*, is the longest chapter in the entire work.
- 13 Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets*, 3 vols. (1779–81; New York: Octagon Books, 1967), 2:160.
- 14 Valerie Rumbold, "Music Aspires to Letters: Charles Burney, Queeney Thrale and the Streatham Circle," *Music and Letters* 74, no. 1 (1993): 31, 30.
- 15 James Beattie, "Essay on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind," in *Essays* (Edinburgh, 1776), 129, 131.

“Essay on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind.” He asserts that the representation of sympathy in poetry and music “may certainly be useful in a moral view, by cherishing passions, that, while they improve the heart, can hardly be indulged to excess.” Where finer, more rarefied feelings are concerned, a surfeit of emotion through the consumption of music and literature is deemed almost impossible. Although this suggests that an aria from Italian opera might have the power to arouse and inspire the human mind to the noblest thoughts and most sublime passion, Beattie strikes a sudden discordant note in his reflections on literature and music:

I deny not, that the preternatural screams of an Italian singer may on occasion surprise, and [*sic*] momentary amusement: but those screams are not music; they are admired, not for their propriety or pathos, but, like rope-dancing, and the eating of fire, merely because they are uncommon or difficult. Besides, the end of all genuine music is, to introduce into the human mind certain affections, or susceptibilities of affection.¹⁶

Within the space of a few sentences, Italian opera is detached from the impassioned sound of native oratorio and other kinds of indigent music and demoted to a freakish display of vocal technique. For Beattie, Italian opera is not authentic music; it belongs, instead, to the more popular category of vulgar urban entertainments, together with the spectacles of fire-eating and rope-dancing.

Beattie’s *Essays* were published only two years before Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), in which the sensitive heroine records her first impressions of the London opera:

The music and the singing were charming; they soothed me into a pleasure the most grateful, the best suited to my disposition in the world ... I wish the opera was every night. It is, of all the entertainments, the sweetest, and most delightful. Some of the songs seem to melt my soul.¹⁷

Beattie does not share *Evelina*’s pleasure; his complaints about the “preternatural screams of an Italian singer” reprised a common accusation in anti-opera writings from earlier in the century: the domination of sound over sense and reason.¹⁸ This sentiment runs

16 Beattie, 201, 132.

17 Frances Burney, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance to the World*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (1778; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 36–37. References are to this edition.

18 See Pat Rogers, “Noise and Non-sense: The Critique of Opera in *The Dunciad*,” in *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1985), 102–19.

like a refrain throughout John Dennis's 1706 essay on opera: "Musick, that is not subservient to Reason, especially if it be soft and effeminate, is a mere Delight of Sense."¹⁹ In 1709 Swift wrote to Ambrose Philips: "the Town is run mad after a new Opera. Poetry and good Sense are dwindling like echo into Repetition and Voice"; in number 5 of the *Spectator*, Addison describes how "an Opera may be allowed to be extravagantly lavish in its Decorations, as its only Design is to gratify the Senses, and keep up an indolent Attention in the Audience"; and in 1720 Richard Steele wrote an essay for *Theatre*, in which he remarked that "pleasure of later Years [has] improv'd to a most exquisite Softness, and the Delight of Sound has prevail'd over the Pain of Sense."²⁰ In the epilogue to the play *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734), Henry Fielding casts Italian opera, through the figure of the castrato, as an impotent cultural form, powerless to withstand the deadly jab that satire is able to inflict.²¹ In all these satirical pieces, intelligibility and sense are made subordinate to sound, while sound itself becomes associated with effeminate or effeminized pleasures.

Although Fielding's criticism seems to have been partially motivated by professional concerns—the popularity of Italian opera in London, after all, rivalled his own drama on the London stage—attacks by other satirists were sometimes considered a failure in taste; in the preface to the first volume of his *General History*, Charles Burney noted, almost incidentally, that "Music and its admirers were ever contemned by Swift and Pope; but, having neither taste nor judgement in this art, they were surely unqualified to censure it."²² This accusation might equally have been levelled at Burney's friend Samuel Johnson, but while Johnson's ridiculing of opera in 1779 might be considered symptomatic of the great writer's general dislike of music, the persistence of similar anti-opera sentiments by contemporaries

- 19 John Dennis, *An Essay on the Opera's after the Italian Manner* (1706), in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, 2 vols., ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939, 1943), 1:387.
- 20 Jonathan Swift to Ambrose Philips, 8 March 1709, in *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 5 vols., ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–65), 1:129; *The Spectator*, 5 vols., ed. Donald Bond (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1:22–23; Richard Steele, *The Theatre*, ed. John Loftis (1720; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 79.
- 21 See Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 31–32, and, more generally, 19–60; see also Thomas McGeary, "'Warbling Eunuchs': Opera, Gender, and Sexuality on the London Stage, 1705–1742," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, 2nd ser., 7 (1992): 1–22.
- 22 Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, 1776–89*, 4 vols. (London, 1776), 1:xv–xvi.

such as Beattie, who clearly defended music and vocal performances in other forms, clarifies that Italian opera had not entirely shaken off the accusations of its earlier detractors.

Johnson's pronouncement on opera appeared only a year after the publication of *Evelina* and three years before *Cecilia* was completed. Interestingly, its aphoristic hostility—"an exotic and irrational entertainment which always has been combated, and always has prevailed"—condensed the criticism of earlier antagonists, obscuring the changing history of Italian opera during the course of the century by conflating it with its persistence and acceptance by pleasure-seekers in London. This pronouncement also runs counter to the contemporary sympathetic treatment of opera in later eighteenth-century fiction. Whereas earlier verse and prose satire opposed Italian opera in the first half of the century, later fiction—in particular novels of sensibility—proved more amenable to its particular features and idiosyncrasies.



The conflicting attitude to Italian opera in London at this time—the hostility of writers such as Johnson and Beattie, the Burneys' more favourable reception, and a sympathetic treatment in fiction—was reflected in its paradoxical status in the mid-1770s: on the one hand, "the Italian opera at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, had settled into a rut," but, on the other hand, "it retained tremendous social cachet."²³ Despite very few London opera premieres between Handel's *Alcina* (1735) and Weber's *Oberon* (1826) being "of historic importance," Frederick Petty remarks that "the King's Theatre was able to survive these periods of financial instability and managerial ineptitude for one important reason: Italian opera, notwithstanding occasional brief periods of decline, was an indispensable commodity in the beau monde of eighteenth-century London."²⁴ This financial instability had ironically been closely linked to the opera's aristocratic ties, particularly in the first part of the century: in 1719, five years after George I, a great supporter of Italian opera, acceded to the throne, subscribers drawn from the nobility set up the Royal Academy of Music; the King provided a £1000 subsidy, and the Royal Academy, in

23 Price, Milhous, and Hume, 1:52–53.

24 Price, Milhous, and Hume, 1:1; Frederick C. Petty, *Italian Opera in London 1760–1800* (1972; repr., Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 30.

its role as a joint-stock company, raised a further £20,000. It went bankrupt in 1728, confounding earlier predictions of enormous profits; yet at the same time, it had "firmly established a taste for Italian opera among upper-class Londoners."²⁵ A similar venture attempted in 1733 with the establishment of the "Opera of the Nobility" also ended in failure in 1738, not long before Handel left the King's Theatre without a major composer. After this, a succession of private impresarios managed the theatre, mostly inefficiently. It limped on until the 1770s, avoiding losses only through profits from masquerades. Frances Brooke managed the theatre with Mary Ann Yates for a period during the mid-1770s, and when Garrick retired in 1776, Richard Sheridan, who headed a consortium at Drury Lane, joined Thomas Harris, manager of Covent Garden, to buy out the King's Theatre as a joint investment, a project that ended in commercial failure.²⁶

When Burney began writing her novels in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the King's Theatre's monopoly on opera in London was simply taken for granted, even though it had never received a royal patent, despite early support for Italian opera by the king and the fact that land was leased from the Crown; the annual renewal of a temporary licence by private individuals resulted in the theatre's monopoly gradually evolving, through time, into an urban "matter of custom," rather than any legally authorized arrangement. Although the theatre remained the most exclusive playhouse in London and was able to attract the most popular—and highly paid—singers, its isolation and remoteness from the European Continent meant that it came to depend heavily on imported scores and pasticcios.²⁷

The emergence of *opera buffa* in the 1740s as a comic alternative to the more familiar, more melodramatic, and hitherto dominant *opera seria* gave London two forms of Italian opera. Although more aristocratic devotees of the Italian opera looked down on *opera buffa*, its absorption of disparate, contemporary trends made the genre more popular: its plots were drawn from sentimental dramas and best-selling literature, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and the more fantastic tales from *The Arabian Nights*. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, *opera seria* had departed from the more

25 Price, Milhous, and Hume, 1:4.

26 Price, Milhous, and Hume, 1:5–6; for a detailed analysis of Sheridan's management of the King's Theatre, see 1:182–248.

27 Price, Milhous, and Hume, 1:1.

moral rules of verisimilitude advocated by reforms established in the first two decades of the century by the Arcadian Academy of Rome and now included “murders, suicides, battles, gothic settings and supernatural events.” Although *opera buffa* used novels, contemporary histories, and newspaper stories to drive its plots, often engaging in social satire, it was also concerned with “the cultivation of the pathetic, where feminine characters ... [were] strongly imbued with sentimentalism.” This new focus on sentimentalism meant that *opera buffa* occasionally rivalled *opera seria*’s more consistent focus on “individual feelings,” a significant development for the representation and use of opera in sentimental writing.²⁸

The early eighteenth-century reform of Italian poetry and drama produced librettos driven by “spare, continuo-accompanied recitative” and limited to thirty arias; in performance, however, the theatres shrank the proportion of recitative, enclosing the cuts in quotation marks inside the text. The result was that while “the original text might thus be read in full ... only those lines essential to the understanding of the plot might survive in the setting.”²⁹ Unlike *opera buffa* “with its much longer and more complicated librettos and greater reliance on *secco* recitative and thoroughly composed finales,” *opera seria*—in performance more than in print—comprised mainly a succession of “self-contained” arias with little recitative.³⁰ The dominance of individual arias, performed at the expense of a strong narrative line, offers an interesting parallel to the structure of sentimental novels: two notable examples, Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, are characterized partly by a disintegrating narrative voice, a fragmented storyline, and a tendency to fall away or break off abruptly, rather than ending with a strong conclusion.

But it was not only in its more formal features that Italian opera afforded an interesting context in which to consider sentimental fiction: authors later in the century often included scenes and episodes relating to opera at particular moments in these works, in order to give fuller expression to a significant theme or mood. Italian opera features briefly in several mid-century novels, such as part 2 of Richardson’s *Pamela* (1741), *Clarissa* (1748–49), Francis Coventry’s

28 Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., 29 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18:433.

29 *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 18:485.

30 *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 19:215.

Pompey the Little (1751), and Eliza Haywood's London novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751); but it is in later, more overtly sentimental narratives that opera is selected deliberately as an artistic form, which has various characteristics and structural idiosyncrasies that seem collectively to correspond to particular features of these novels. Moreover, these literary representations of opera endorse John Mullan's distinction between "sentiment" and "sociability": an emphasis on the one hand on extreme feelings—sometimes publicly displayed and at other times privately experienced—of sensibility, and on the other hand, the kind of human contact and gregariousness that produces a more public form of sociability, which later evolves into theories about charity and benevolence.³¹

Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1766–70) is an early example of the more excessive extremes of sentimental fiction. The child-hero, Harry Clinton, is guided by his uncle and mentor, Mr Fenton, who supervises and directs his protegee's pedagogic and emotional development. In this lachrymose, loosely episodic narrative, the opera makes two significant appearances. On the first occasion, Harry conveys his sensibility through his aesthetic and emotional response to the performance: "That Evening they went to the Opera, where Harry was so captivated by the sentimental Meltings and Harmony of the Airs, that he requested Mr Fenton to be instructed on some instrument."³² In response, Mr Fenton discourages him from any practice in which he could not become an expert, for fear of producing, instead, "discordant and grateing" sound. Later in the narrative, an account of a visit to the opera house in Paris provides the occasion for an extravagant display of sensibility:

One Night, as I sat alone in a side Box at the Opera, gazing and hungering around for some Similitude of my Louisa; there entered One of the loveliest young Fellows I ever beheld. He carelessly threw himself beside me, looked around; withdrew his Eyes; and then looked at me with such a long and piercing

31 John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For an extended analysis of the political implications of charity, and more generally philanthropy, in the literature of sensibility, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see also Carolyn D. Williams, "The Luxury of Doing Good": Benevolence, Sensibility, and the Royal Humane Society," in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 77–107.

32 Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality: or, the History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, 5 vols. (London, 1766–70), 4:255.

Inquisition as alarmed me, and gave me Cause to think I was discovered

[H]e seemed at once backward and desirous of accosting me. At length he entered upon Converse touching the Drama and the Music, and spoke with Judgment and Elegance superior to the Matter

Between the Acts, he turned and cast his Eye suddenly on me. Sir, says he, do you believe that there is such a Thing as Sympathy? Occasionally, Sir, I think it may have its Effect, though I can't credit all the Wonders that are reported of it. I am sorry for that, said he, as I ardently wish that your Feelings were the same as mine at this Instant. I never saw you before, Sir, I have no Knowledge of you, and yet I declare that, were I to choose an Advocate in Love, a Second in Combat, or a Friend in Extremity, You, You are the very Man upon whom I would pitch.³³

In this scene, the absence of the original object of affection, Louisa, generates a homosocial exchange of masculine affection and sympathy; attraction—"One of the loveliest young Fellows"—gives way to conversation and subsequent impassioned declarations of constancy and friendship. But it is the discussion of opera—in a general, rather than particularized, sense of its power to arouse human feeling—that elicits further expressions of loyalty and brotherhood. Stirred by the music (an unnamed opera), the attractive stranger, immediately captivated by his new companion, presumes that the latter will prove to be a devoted friend in love or war; the fierce declarations of devotion and allegiance correspond to the traditional subjects of *opera seria*, and the episode at the opera house turns out to be a pivotal scene in this volume. In a melodramatic coincidence a few evenings later, Harry Clinton saves a man from being murdered by his assailants; upon returning with the gentleman, evidently an aristocrat, to his home, the lord, a grateful Lewis D'Aubigny, recognizes Harry as his chance companion at the opera house: D'Aubigny's sentimental intuition—evoked by the opera performance—about Harry's courage has been almost immediately validated. Moreover, in a further convoluted twist, after a misunderstanding during which Harry (whom D'Aubigny mistakenly believes to be a Mr Goodall) is forced to spend a night in prison, he is brought back to D'Aubigny's house, to the embarrassment of his host, who is revealed to be none other than the brother of Harry's beloved Louisa. D'Aubigny is now desperately eager for Clinton to marry his sister, and the homosocial exchange that took place at the opera house is echoed in D'Aubigny's declaration that he respects and loves Harry "more than ever Jonathan loved the son of Jesse."³⁴

33 Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality*, 5:163–64.

34 Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality*, 5:191.

No sense of the corrupt effeminizing of Italian opera appears in this opera scene, as had appeared earlier in the century: in this passage, any critical imputations of effeminacy disappear and are seemingly projected onto the praiseworthy feminine qualities of a powerful sentimental response to the emotion evoked by opera itself—a type of response which, this episode implies, is to be found inside the more exclusive environs of the opera house, and which prefigures Harry's subsequent demonstration of heroism on behalf of his fellow man. Excited by their conversation that touched on "the Drama and the Music," D'Aubigny is able to judge his new friend a suitable companion after eliciting a favourable answer to the question: "[is] there such a Thing as Sympathy?" The implicit congruity of opera and sympathy anticipates—and challenges—Beattie's judgment a few years later, that Italian opera and "Sympathy" were simply incompatible phenomena. It also seems significant that the narrative covers the period running approximately from 1688, over twenty-five years, through to the early part of the eighteenth century—roughly the time that Italian opera was suffering its most savage literary treatment at the hands of the satirists. In *The Fool of Quality*, the sentimental novel reclaims Italian opera from early eighteenth-century urban satirists by overwriting the first part of its history through generic difference, anachronistically reconstructing it in the form of a novel, as a perfect model for the articulation of sensibility.

Like Henry Brooke's novel, Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) includes several references to the opera. Perhaps one of the most memorable sentimental encounters in the narrative appears in the fragment entitled "The Pulse," where Yorick is shown luxuriating in the subtle, barely perceptible, sentient movements of nerve endings and fibres, as he grasps the hand of the beautiful shopkeeper after requesting directions to the opera. The *grisette* is forced to repeat her instructions, because her interlocutor is temporarily distracted by her beauty and is unable to retain any information. Although the focus of this particular episode is the physical manifestation of extreme sensibility, the choice of the opera house in *A Sentimental Journey*—as in *The Fool of Quality*—implies that the opera is a fitting cultural form for the refined sensibilities of a sentimental hero, either as the destination at the end of a sentimental detour or as an exclusive urban space shared by empathetic strangers.

The use of opera as a means of articulating a particular tone of sentiment is clear in these novels. In addition, however, the structural

design of both these sentimental narratives—their common tendency to break off suddenly, to digress and interpolate seemingly unrelated stories, and to include material from other works—also finds a correspondence with the most popular form of opera in London during this period: the pasticcio.³⁵ Markman Ellis has pointed out that, “according to the logic of the sentimental novel, material from [other, earlier] works may be inserted at virtually any moment, whether or not it is motivated by the narrative, and the disjunctions may be legitimated by the inclusivity of the digressive/fragmentary narrative model.”³⁶ Although the intertextual nature of *A Sentimental Journey* is “categorically satiric and bathetically humorous” and the digressive form of *The Fool of Quality* almost “casual,”³⁷ what both implicitly share with the pasticcio is an attention to sentiment that is particular to local detail and incident, at the expense of the broader structural cohesion of the whole work. The pasticcio was a composite opera “literally made up of bits and pieces of other works.”³⁸ Taking arias from earlier, already-existing works, it fitted them, with a fresh recitative, to a newly composed or old libretto to form a new plot. The text of the pasticcio, as Curtis Price points out, “is not fixed; its parts are interchangeable; character need not be developed; coherence of plot is an occasional bonus.”³⁹ In this sense, the pasticcio resembled the almost formulaic “logic” of many sentimental fictions, which “tend[ed] to be structured episodically or fragmentarily,” often featuring tableaux or “scenes” of those in “distress,” which themselves seem easy to extract and interchange with other, similar works.⁴⁰ Moreover, like many later eighteenth-century novels, which simulated—and, in the case of *Tristram Shandy*, literally produced—an effect of collective or uncertain authorship, the attempt to trace the original works from which the individual set pieces were taken proved difficult, and sometimes impossible.⁴¹

35 Although in most European theatres, the pasticcio was used “to round out the season,” in smaller theatres and in London especially, it was the dominant model (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 18:486).

36 Ellis, 132.

37 Ellis, 132.

38 Price, “Unity, Originality, and the London Pasticcio,” *Harvard Library Bulletin*, new ser., ii/4 (1991): 17.

39 Price, “Unity, Originality, and the London Pasticcio,” 24.

40 Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, introduction to *The Man of Feeling*, by Henry Mackenzie, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ix.

41 On the difficulty of tracing the original sources and versions of the pasticcio, see Gordana Lazarevich, “Eighteenth-Century Pasticcio: The Historian’s Gordian Knot,” *Analecta Musicologica* 17 (1976): 121–45.

The pasticcio could take one of several forms: the first was a "revival with substitutions," not a true pasticcio but a work where certain arias are removed and replaced with substitutions more suitable for individual singers. The four other basic types were 1) a "patchwork," in which an existing libretto was filled out with "suitcase" arias (*arie di bagaglio*), 2) a "composite original," where arias written by different composers are combined to form a new plot, 3) a "composer patchwork," where a composer uses another's score into which he fits his own arias, and 4) a "self-pastiche," in which a composer "borrows" his own arias to fashion a new plot.⁴² Although the improvised reworking of second-hand material suggests second-rate opportunist hackwork pandering to the unrefined tastes of a "middling" public—the impresario giving the audience what it wanted: in effect, a prolonged medley of its favourite arias—at various times, many major composers of the eighteenth century, including Handel, Vivaldi, Gluck, Hayden, and Mozart, either contributed to or produced pasticcios. Indeed, given Handel's tendency to borrow frequently from his own earlier works, differentiating between Handel's pasticcios and his true operas was often difficult. According to Price, little distinguishes *Rinaldo* (1711), Handel's first London opera, from *Oreste* (1734), a "self-pastiche": both were fitted to "heavily adapted librettos" and included arias from his own works. As Price remarks, "*Rinaldo* is far from an 'original creation,' for it was constructed much like a pasticcio: several arias were taken with little change from his earlier works; some of them were given parodied texts; and a few were borrowed from other composers. As in *Oreste*, the only part of *Rinaldo* which is entirely new is the *secco* recitative."⁴³

Unsurprisingly perhaps, an increasingly common analogy made with the pasticcio was the "patchwork," a metaphor frequently used in writings that disapproved of the form. One of the earliest critical commentaries to allude specifically to the pasticcio was the translation from French in 1709 of Francois Ragueneau's *A Comparison between the French and Italian Musick and Opera's*. This author claims that

the *Italian Opera's* are poor, incoherent, Rapsodies without any Connexion or Design: All their Pieces, properly speaking, are patched up with thin, insipid Scaps: Their Scenes consist of some trivial Dialogues or Soliloquy; at the end of

42 See *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 19:214.

43 Price, "Unity, Originality, and the London Pasticcio," 20. For a fuller account of Handel's pasticcios, see Reinhard Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 164–211.

which they foist in one of their best Airs, which concludes the Scene. These Airs are seldom of a Piece with the rest of the Opera, being usually written by other Poets, either occasionally, or in the Body of some other Work.⁴⁴

A little further on, commenting on Bononcini's *Xerxes*, he writes: "this Piece ... is no better than a Patch-Work, larded with the best Airs his Performers are acquainted with."⁴⁵ Appended to this work was another—English—commentary, entitled *A Critical Discourse on Opera's and Musick in England*, which, although by no means wholly critical of the pasticcio, similarly used the patchwork comparison to denote the texture and structure of the weakest examples: "Opera's patch'd up out of the Compositions of several different Masters are not likely to succeed, unless they are prepared by some Person that is capable of making an Opera himself."⁴⁶ This image was later reprised in Pope's disparaging portrayal of opera in the fourth book of *The Dunciad* as a "Harlot form" robed in "In patch-work flutt'ring, and her head aside" (book 4, lines 45–48), depicting its outer form as an ill-designed garment made up of different materials, ineptly sewn together. Pope's interpretive footnote to these lines explicitly mocks Italian opera's "affected airs, its effeminate sounds, and the practice of patching up these Operas with favourite Songs, incoherently put together."⁴⁷ The satire is extended in the parodic comment on the awkward and possibly incongruous position of the passage upon which the footnote is commenting: "Every Reader will see, that from this verse to the 68th is a detach'd piece. We suppose it rightly inserted here, from what is said of her casting a scornful look on the *prostrate Muses*: but if anyone can show us a properer place we shall be obliged to him." Like the pieced-together pasticcio, Pope mocks his own satire on Italian opera as the inorganic and ill-fitting interpolation of an autonomous passage, which might be better inserted elsewhere in the poem.⁴⁸ Pope could see that the pasticcio had become increasingly popular in London, mainly through pandering to public taste and the power of

44 François Raguenet, *A Comparison between the French and Italian Musick and Opera's, Translated from the French* (London, 1709), 3–5.

45 Raguenet, 5.

46 Raguenet, 81.

47 For evidence of a suppressed anti-opera theme in earlier versions of *The Dunciad*, see *The Last and Greatest Art: Some Unpublished Poetical Manuscripts of Alexander Pope*, ed. Maynard Mack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), 111–15.

48 To a certain extent, the supposed collective identity of Martin Scriblerus, the purported author of *The Dunciad*—particularly the three-volume *Dunciad Variorum*—corresponds to the collective "authorship" of many pasticcio operas.

the singers to dictate the repertoire that best suited their voices; his suggestion to the reader who might want to rearrange the parts of *The Dunciad* draws attention to the troubling question provoked by the pasticcio: “who was in charge?”⁴⁹ This was a question that would trouble Burney later in the century, in response to criticism of the ending of *Cecilia*.

Although the patchwork model suggested a high-minded hostility to the popular pasticcio opera, not all cultural commentators disapproved. In 1742, the year in which the final version of *The Dunciad* was published, Horace Walpole declared: “Our Operas begin tomorrow with a pasticcio, full of most of my favourite songs.”⁵⁰ Dr Burney frequently praised pasticcio operas in his *General History of Music*, criticizing only inferior examples.⁵¹ Although not as technically informed as her sister Susan, Frances Burney noted the variety of performances in her journal. On 30 October 1775, she recorded an anticipated visit to the opera: “The opera is to be Metastasio’s *Didone*, which is the very opera that Agujari sung to us 12 songs from”; she adds that it was “to be a *half* pasticcio”: all the recitatives would be “by Sacchini, as well as a Cantabile for Rauzzini, and *All the part* of la Gabrielli. This I very much rejoice at.”⁵² She relishes the substantial contribution made by Sacchini to a semi-collaborative production and is clearly not averse to a composite performance, although she seems to prefer a half pasticcio dominated by a favourite composer to a full pasticcio dominated by less talented writers. What Burney did object

49 Price, Milhous, and Hume, 1:29. Pacchierotti’s debut in London, in 1778, was the pasticcio *Demofonte* (“merely a warm-up for Pacchierotti and a pot-boiler for Bertoni”), arranged by Bertoni, with a libretto after Metastasio, which “afforded Pacchierotti ... several opportunities to display the anguished pathos for which he was famous” (1:205).

50 Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, 1 November 1742, in *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Horace Mann*, ed. W.S. Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith, and George L. Lam, II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 96.

51 For example, in a footnote to a comment on Gluck’s *Orfeo* in 1770, Burney remarks: “The unity, simplicity, and dramatic excellence of this opera, which had gained the composer so much credit on the Continent, were greatly diminished here by the heterogeneous mixture of Music, of other composers, in a quite different style.” *A General History of Music* (1789), 4:496.

52 Frances Burney, *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:160. In November 1775, Burney recorded how the celebration of Gabrielli soon turned sour as the singer began increasingly to make prima donna demands, frequently cancelling performances at the last minute; this led to the London public turning their back on Gabrielli and celebrating the return of English singer Cecilia Davies—known in Italy as “L’Inglesina”—whose performance of Sacchini’s *Lucio Verso* in 1773 Dr Burney noted with pleasure in vol. 4 of *A General History of Music*, 499–500. It is interesting to speculate on the connection between the name of this English singer, whom Burney would have known, and the heroine of her second novel.

to, however, was what she considered the vulgar concessions to popular taste that many composers and impresarios were willing to make to ensure the success of a new work. In March 1782, she recorded her disappointment with Rauzzini's new opera, *L'Eroe Cinese*, lamenting that many of the songs "were unworthy" of Pacchierotti, she concluded: "Yet I really expect this will be the favourite opera for the season as there are Scotticisms and oddities in it of all sorts, *to catch popularity*."⁵³ Although not opposed, in principle, to the patchwork nature of contemporary London opera if executed well, Burney disliked deliberate incongruities in style that interrupt the consistency and integrity of a new work and mask its poor quality.

Burney was acutely conscious of the coherence of her own narratives. When *Cecilia* was published, she included a lengthy description of a discussion among female admirers of her new novel. The Dowager Duchess of Portland describes the "sorrow" of *Cecilia*'s "pathetic" scenes and recalls "how we cried"; but she also counters the tears with praise of the comic sections of the novel: "so *much* Laughter to make us amends!"⁵⁴ Mrs Chapone recollects the suspense and agitation that "shook all my nerves"; the "*second* Time, however, when I knew the *sum total*, I cried at the distress ready to break my Heart!"⁵⁵ In Burney's recording of this scene, one reader's tears continually give way to amusement and back again; another has to wait for a second reading to allow the narrative to coalesce, in order to experience fully the pathos of the novel. In the same letter, Burney describes at length the extended discussion of the relationship between the novel's numerous parts and the effect of each on its readers: names, events, the Harrels, the status of the will, character, and the morals to be learned are all eagerly evoked, mused over, and praised separately; in Burney's account of this episode, narrative unity competes with heterogeneity of content, theme, and tone. This tension between narrative coherence and disaggregation is present in Crisp's judgment of Burney's revised manuscript of *Cecilia*. In July 1782, he wrote: "What was the Result of these, my meditations?—to enter into

53 *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay* (1778–1840), 6 vols., ed. Charlotte Barrett; preface and notes by Austin Dobson (London: Macmillan, 1904–5), 2:77 (emphasis added).

54 Terry Castle observes that the problem "with the view of *Cecilia* as a comedy [of manners]—is that it is insufficient, finally, to explain the psychic complexities of Burney's often painfully articulated fictional world . . . The emotional tone of the work is unpredictable." *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century Culture and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 268–69.

55 Frances Burney to Susan Burney Phillips, 4 January–post January 1783 (*KS*, 225).

particulars would be endless: but the *sum total* amounts to this—a full, unlimited Confirmation of my warm approbation of the whole Work together Many particulars, which I did not relish, are soften'd off to a degree.”⁵⁶ Employing the identical phrase, Crisp, like Mrs Chapone, also balances the parts—the “particulars”—of *Cecilia* against the “sum total”; he insists on subordinating the novel’s constituent components to the whole, while simultaneously drawing attention to the way it also resists singular summary. In planning her third novel, *Camilla*, Burney was concerned to establish her new work as better unified than *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. In a letter to her father in 1795, she outlined the structure and movement of her new book:

Now as to the NEW WORK—my dearest Father, I am most happy to let you into my secret, for I see it will be a *concord*; it is of the same species as *Evelina* and *Cecilia*: new *modified*, in being more multifarious in the Characters it brings into action,—but all *wove* into *one*, with a one *Heroine* shining conspicuous through the Group, and that in ... *the prose Epic style*, for so far is the Work from consisting of detached stories, that There is not, literally, one Episode in the whole plan.⁵⁷

The new novel does not differ absolutely from its predecessors: “it is of the same species—but it modifies the earlier works by weaving a more ‘multifarious’ group of characters into ‘one’; however, it also avoids deviation from the main storyline: it is to be a ‘concord.’”⁵⁸ Burney’s effort to create a tighter structure in *Camilla* is echoed in a comment made in the *Monthly Review* (October 1796), which singles out Mr Tyrold’s sermon as an example of Burney’s skill as a writer but is reluctant to select an extract from the work that might shatter the excellence of the whole:

The great merit of the work, however, consists in more important characteristics; and we may principally recommend it to the world as a *warning* “picture of youth” In this view, the truly *Reverend* Mr Tyrold’s *Sermon*, addressed to his daughter *Camilla*, deserves marked commendation: but were it not, as it is, too

56 Crisp to Frances Burney, July 1782 (*KS*, 212); emphasis added.

57 Frances Burney D’Arblay to Dr Charles Burney, 6 July 1795, *The Journal and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D’Arblay)*, 12 vols., ed. Joyce Hemlow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 3:128–29. On 3 July, Susan had written to Burney relaying a message from their father that Frances should “weave into one story of interest and length what you had yet to write—he thinks yr book consists of *detached stories*.” *The Journal and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 3:129n10.

58 Margaret Anne Doody comments that Burney is probably also recalling here Choderlos de Laclos’s criticism that the comic “*personages*” of *Cecilia* were “*épisodiques*” (Laclos’s three-part review of Burney’s novel was the most extended and flattering contemporary response to it). Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 215.

long for us to copy, we should think it scarcely fair to detach so large and lustrous a brilliant; and to break it into pieces would indeed be *diminishing* its value.⁵⁹

The reluctance to “detach so large and lustrous a brilliant,” albeit from a single sermon, recalls Pope’s parodic drawing attention to the lack of concord in his own work, offering to detach—and re-locate—the passage on Italian opera in his own epic poem if it will improve the effect of the whole. Unlike Pope’s poem, though, Burney’s concern with coherence and “detachable stories” in her letter shows little explicit connection with the predominant form of the pasticcio opera, being more overtly concerned with conventional neoclassical models of Greek epic and tragedy; moreover, the sense of discrete parts being drawn together to form a whole by no means implies the collective authorship that frequently characterized the pasticcio. The interplay between the popular “parts” of her novel and its realization as a whole work suggests a relationship—albeit a hesitant one—between author and readership that overlaps to some extent with the pasticcio’s mediating between audience, composer(s), and theatre impresario: a middle state, that is, modified for middle-class consumption. As I will show in the final section of this article, however, after an examination of the thematic significance of Italian opera and the opera house itself in *Cecilia*, elsewhere in her correspondence Burney deliberately evokes the model of the Italian opera, with its attendant associations of interchangeable parts by different authors, in order to defend her novel against criticism of its understated denouement.



Burney’s representation of opera continues the gradual reversal of its literary treatment earlier in the century. In *Evelina*, for example, perhaps the most significant aspect of the various responses to the heroine’s trip to the Haymarket with her uncouth relatives, the Branghtons, is how her unsophisticated cousins appear to echo the opinions of the anti-opera arbiters of public taste from the first quarter of the century. When Mr Branghton addresses the virtuous heroine with the sneer, “you’re quite in fashion, I see; so you like the Opera’s? Well, I’m not so polite; I can’t like nonsense,” he is recapitulating some of the main charges of writers such as Steele, Pope,

59 *Monthly Review*, ns, 21 (October 1796): 163.

and Swift. In a similar vein, he complains that “there isn’t one ounce of sense in the whole Opera, nothing but the continued squeaking and squalling from beginning to end” (93). The accusations of “non-sense” and “squeaking and squalling” are all familiar complaints, but these frames of reference have become socially inverted in the novel so as to become indicators of those who are unable to read London correctly.

In *Cecilia*, opera receives its fullest and most sophisticated treatment. In *Evelina*, Burney used the opera house as a known public cultural space, and she deployed opera itself as a cultural barometer to measure the respective taste and sensibilities of its listeners. By the time she was writing *Cecilia*, it was clear in her fiction that opera conferred on those who appreciated it a sense of moral clarity and judgment;⁶⁰ in her second novel, Burney succeeds in encompassing both the qualities of sociability located in the environs of the opera house and the sensibility evoked by opera itself as an art form.

Cecilia’s first visit to the opera in the Haymarket is to one of Pacchierotti’s rehearsals:⁶¹ “This was the first Opera she had ever heard, yet she was not wholly a stranger to Italian compositions, having assiduously studied music from a natural love of the art, attended all the best concerts her neighbourhood afforded, and regularly received from London the work of the best masters.”⁶² Cecilia’s previous encounter with opera, in a diluted form at provincial concerts and the study of written music with private tutors, resembles the experience of Maria Villiers, the heroine of Frances Brooke’s London novel *The Excursion* (1777). Maria has been in London for a month when Lady Hardy insists that she attend the opera: “‘There, my dear,’ said she, ‘You will hear Rauzinni in a new opera of Sacchini ... I am told it is a divine opera ... *all the world will be there.*’”⁶³ Like *Cecilia*, which, although

60 Laclos, whose *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was published in the same year as *Cecilia* (Burney affected to have not read Laclos’s book), used the opera house in the denouement of his own novel as the place where Mme de Merteuil is hissed and jeered in a final, collective moral repudiation of her actions.

61 Price, Milhous, and Hume state that the King’s Theatre “conducted basically two kinds of rehearsals, private and public. The first were held at the opera-house in various public rooms: the theatre had no dedicated rehearsal space, though the coffee-room was the usual venue ... The second type of rehearsal was a complete run-through with orchestra in the theatre itself” (1:187–88). The rehearsal that Cecilia attends is public, as is clear when her party takes a seat on the stage in a box.

62 Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, ed. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (1782; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 64. References are to this edition.

63 Frances Brooke, *The Excursion*, 2 vols. (London, 1777), 1:118.

it was published in 1782, assiduously follows the 1779 London season, Frances Brooke's *The Excursion* (published five years before *Cecilia*) reinforces its sense of urban verisimilitude by sticking closely to the dates of performances and events of a particular season: in this instance, September 1774 at the start of the novel until spring of 1775 when it ends.⁶⁴ Like *Cecilia*, "Maria adored music; the first passion of her heart was the theatre: she had never heard Italian music but at her own harpsichord; she had never seen any theatrical representation but in a country town."⁶⁵ The descriptions of the local, pale imitations of public performances of music closely resemble each other. As Burney was clearly familiar with Frances Brooke's works, it is worth speculating that a slightly earlier urban novel, written by an author whose writings—if not social and professional relationships—Burney admired, might have helped to shape the representation of the music education of a young female whose pedagogic and moral education has taken place away from the city.

Maria's response to the opera itself also prefigures Cecilia's reaction:

The music (worthy of Sacchini); the voice, the taste, the blooming youth, the animated action, of Rauzinni; the beauty of the theatre; the splendour of the decorations; the force, the execution, of the brilliant Bacelli; the grace of Vallyny; and let me add, what is not the least ornament of an opera, the striking *coup d'oeil* of the assembled audience; an audience which the world cannot parallel, composed of all that is great and lovely in the kingdom; struck her young mind with an extasy almost too great for words.⁶⁶

The overwhelming force of the singing and the magnificence of the theatre itself—which Frances Brooke had co-managed during this period—render Maria speechless. Cecilia avidly attends to Pacchierotti's performance, startled but pleasurably surprised by the "strength of these emotions" (64) that the singer excites in her. Her reaction to the opera itself, Bertoni's pasticcio reworking of Metastasio's *Artaserse*, which premiered 23 January 1779, is expressed in the idiom of a typical sentimental response:⁶⁷

The pleasure she received from the music was much augmented by her previous acquaintance with that interesting drama; yet, as to all noviciates in science,

64 See McMullen, 169.

65 Frances Brooke, *The Excursion*, 1:125.

66 Frances Brooke, *The Excursion*, 1:125–26.

67 Price, Milhous, and Hume note that the 1779–80 season "saw a noticeable increase in reliance on pasticcios" (1:221).

whatever is least complicated is most pleasing, she found herself by nothing so deeply impressed, as by the plaintive and beautiful simplicity with which Pacchierotti uttered the affecting repetition of *sono innocente!* His voice, always either sweet or impassioned, delivered those words in a tone of softness, pathos, and sensibility, that struck her with a sensation not more new than delightful. (65)

The "softness, pathos, and sensibility" aroused by the "impassioned" and "affecting repetition" are all redolent of sentimental experience. The impression made on the delicate, refined feelings of the sensitive heroine is evoked by the "pathos, and sensibility" of Pacchierotti's singing. The impassioned sound that he produces rather than the words themselves induces the sentimental response in Cecilia. Mullan has drawn attention to the way that literature of sensibility "makes particular creative uses out of the idealized possibility that human communication and fellow-feeling can transcend language"; he adds that "this ideal is often invoked in novels with an investment in the sentimental susceptibilities of their characters."⁶⁸ Where previously the notion of sound obliterating sense had produced pejorative associations, the inaccessibility of the Italian language means that sound is extracted from the mundaneness of speech and distilled into a purer form of expression.⁶⁹ The earlier imputation of senseless noise is transmuted into foreign sound, which has the emotional force to affect the listener.

Beyond Cecilia's immediate emotional response to opera, which associates the novel with other examples of sentimental fiction, the silent observation of another's reaction to the performance is sufficient to evoke an expression of feelings of sensibility in the person watching. In a quintessential urban scene, where an anonymous observer is unknowingly being watched by a hidden onlooker, Cecilia finds her attention drawn to the as yet unidentified mad prophet-figure, Albany: "during the songs of Pacchierotti he sighed so deeply that Cecilia, struck by his uncommon sensibility to the power of

68 Mullan, "Sentimental Novels," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 240. This perhaps explains, partly, why protagonists such as Laurence Sterne's Yorick and Henry Brooke's Harry Clinton are presented frequently as sentimental travellers abroad.

69 Burney fails to clarify whether Cecilia understands Italian; she emphasizes that Cecilia can read music and is familiar with several opera plots, but nowhere suggests that her heroine is proficient in the language. While Cecilia is familiar with the "interesting drama," she may have read the translation for the English version of *Artaserse* produced by Thomas Arne, at Covent Garden in 1762. See Frances Burney, *Cecilia*, 962n. See also Pope's note in *The Dunciad* to the lines "Rolli the feather to his ear conveys, / Then his nice taste directs our Opera" (book 2, lines 203–4), where he mocks those who study Italian in order to understand—and then "affect" to direct—Italian Opera.

music, involuntarily watched him, whenever her mind was sufficiently at liberty to attend any emotions but its own" (65). The empathetic alignment of her own heightened sensibilities with Albany's deeply felt response to the singing creates a sympathetic identification of pure sentiment.

Burney's novel here differs crucially from *The Excursion*. In Frances Brooke's narrative, the frozen rapture of Maria is a local incident, a discrete episode that focuses on a visit to a particular urban venue, and that has as its only limited consequence that Maria, being "absorbed in pleasure, ... did all but *forget* Lord Melville," the rake competing for the heroine's malleable affections.⁷⁰ In *Cecilia*, however, the visit to the opera has more far-reaching thematic and narrative repercussions. What follows, as a consequence of the shared private moment between Cecilia and Albany, reads almost as a blueprint for sentimental fiction. One of the common personal traits of the sentimental character is a propensity towards acts of charity and benevolence. A few days after the rehearsal, Albany arrives at Cecilia's temporary London address in Portman Square with a letter telling a woeful tale of an unfortunate family's misfortunes and sickness. Cecilia responds by bestowing on him a generous gift: "Cecilia, 'open as day to melting charity,' having hastily perused it, took out the purse, and offering to him three guineas, said, 'You must direct me, Sir, what to give if this is insufficient'" (129). Although Cecilia's attraction to acts of benevolence has been established earlier in the novel, from this single act of charity, she determines to isolate herself from the excesses and pleasures of the beau monde, and "by the assistance of her new and very singular monitor, to extend her practice of doing good, by enlarging her knowledge of distress" (130). Benevolence, it seems, is incompatible with the sociability demanded by the constant round of urban pleasures; although, at first, private acts of charity provide considerable satisfaction, the self-abnegation begins to pall:

And thus in acts of goodness and charity, passed undisturbed another week in the life of Cecilia: but when the fervour of self-approbation lost its novelty, the pleasure with which her new plan was begun first subsided into tranquility, and then sunk into languor. To a heart formed for friendship and affection the charms of solitude are very short-lived; and though she had sickened of the turbulence of perpetual company, she now wearied of passing all her time by herself, and sighed for the company of society. (130)

70 Frances Brooke, *The Excursion*, 1:126.

At the heart of Cecilia’s social and ethical dilemma lies the inherent contradiction between private acts of benevolence and sensitivity fostered by a more secluded existence and the sociability generated by the “endless succession of diversions, the continual notation of assemblies, the numerousness of splendid engagements” (131). Mullan makes the point that the logic of sentimentalism suggests that “the capacity for sympathy could only be realized in the most private experience,” and that, in a way, the failure of sentimentalism is the inability of its protagonists to find a “social space in which their sympathies can operate.”⁷¹ In this sense, Cecilia’s conscious decision to mix sociability with continual acts of benevolence is an effort to overcome seemingly irreconcilable opposites and to maintain an unbroken continuum between private sentiment and public sociability:

Yet finding ... that a rigid seclusion from company was productive of a lassitude as little favourable to active virtue as dissipation itself, she resolved to soften her plan, and by mingling amusement with benevolence, to try, at least, to approach that golden mean

For this purpose she desired to attend Mrs Harrel to the next opera that should be presented. (131)

In *Cecilia*, Burney attempts to locate the golden mean between the potential excesses of urban sociability and the virtue associated with human charity, instead of the narrower definition of female chastity. That she chooses the opera house as the ideal London venue to test this “sentimental compromise” is significant because this formerly criticized locus is now represented as a partially approved urban space where the heroine can exercise and express her natural impulses through an appreciation of opera itself.

Interestingly, the King’s Theatre *spatially* represented this mediating between secluded retirement and public appearance. Despite its status as a premier playhouse in an exclusive part of London,

Vanbrugh had built his theatre on an awkwardly pieced-together site with corridor access to the theatre from the Haymarket on the east and Market Lane on the west, plus a special “royal” entrance from the “King’s Yard.” Because the opera-house was thus erected behind other building behind the street, the Haymarket frontage was small and unimposing.

The King’s Theatre was situated in a more secluded part of Westminster, on a site “pieced-together,” rather like the pasticcios

71 Mullan, “Sentimental Novels,” 244.

performed within its walls. Unlike the opera houses on the continent, which usually took the form of “a small elegant horseshoe auditorium ... in the midst of a grand free-standing civic temple, with a principal façade and public promenades,” the King’s Theatre was “cramped, utilitarian, practically invisible from the outside.”⁷² As one of London’s most exclusive urban sites, the King’s Theatre is paradoxically a public venue almost hidden from the public gaze, eliding the distinction between private and public.

Burney replicates this elision narratologically in her writings. In her novels, on the one hand, the opera house is clearly a public venue. The rehearsal that Cecilia attends earlier in the novel is a public event, where visitors are as much on display as the singers on stage. On her second visit to the opera, after her decision to mix solitude with some public pleasure, she is greeted by the wife one of her guardians, the profligate Mrs Harrel, with a breathless announcement: “You are quite in luck tonight, I assure you; it’s the best Opera we have had this season: there’s such a monstrous crowd there’s no stirring” (131). In this passage, the theatre is treated like the “civic temples” that characterize the continental opera houses; London’s most exclusive citizens—and those who wish to emulate them—flock to the theatre in a collective act of secular public devotion. The novel, then, treats the opera as a public event and the theatre itself as a purely public venue; there is no sense of the cramped conditions or its invisibility from adjoining streets. In her journal, on the other hand, Burney’s description of the passage to the theatre gives a different sense of intimate, private space. In 1774 she recorded a private visit to the King’s Theatre, after an invitation from Frances Brooke. Her response discloses a natural pull towards the city’s cultural spaces, and, despite her misgivings about Frances Brooke’s vulgarity and professional associations, she is unable to resist: “the managers of public places are the only people to whom I care to be obliged ... and we agreed to wait upon Mrs Brooke about seven.” Yet the “public place” of the opera house is partly obscured by the route they take from Frances Brooke’s house and by the invitation, which Burney tries to resist, to meet Mary Ann Yates in the private apartment above the playhouse:

Accordingly we went. Her house in Market Lane, by means of divers turnings and windings, has a passage to the Opera House. We intended to have sat in her Box and have seen only her, but when we went, we found she was upstairs with

Mrs Yates, and when she came down, she immediately asked us to go upstairs with her. This we declined, but she would not be refused, and we were obliged to follow her.⁷³

The brief passage from Frances Brooke's house in Market Lane to the opera house reveals a narrower city space, a path connected by "turning and windings," leading to a back staircase inside the King's Theatre and the private chambers of the infamous Mrs Yates. This movement enacts what Cynthia Wall has described in a different context as a "semiotic reversal of public-turned-private-turned-secret."⁷⁴ What is described in the wider narrative of a nine-hundred-page novel as an absolutely public space—a venue, moreover, which has been visited by many of the novel's readers—is, in Burney's private journal, a more obscure site, a place connected to the domestic home of Frances Brooke in Market Lane by a short series of narrow alleys. The privacy of domestic space is also connected to another kind of private space, away from the public arena of the auditorium. Burney describes Yates's exclusive quarters: "We were led up a noble staircase, that brought us to a most magnificent Apartment Here we saw Mrs Yates, seated like a stage Queen surrounded with gay Courtiers, and dressed with utmost elegance and brilliancy."⁷⁵ The "public place" of the opera house is erased and recast as an exclusive, scandalous space of courtly entertainment from an earlier period: the actress becomes the royal personage—a "stage Queen"—to be amused by her "gay Courtiers," her own private group of performers. Cecilia's visit to the opera in an attempt to find the golden mean between private sentiment and public sociability, somewhere along the continuum between theoretical private and public spheres, is replicated spatially as the King's Theatre shifts, within a brief sentence, in a reversible movement, from private domestic space to public playhouse—a public space, though, which retains traces of earlier forms of exclusive entertainment.

Generically, then, the private (urban) journal reproduces this sense of public space turned private. Writing about the city diary of the seventeenth century, Francis Barker suggests that "the boundaries of the outer context, designated as much by discourse as by a physical

73 Frances Burney, *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:55.

74 Cynthia Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 188.

75 Frances Burney, *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:55–56.

separation of space, are clearly defined.”⁷⁶ Urban space—the “outer context”—is defined through writing; generic difference—journal or novel—creates alternative, competing versions of a real city venue. Turning from Burney’s journal to her novels is to follow the same movement from private to public that defines Cecilia’s quest to locate the golden mean during her stay in London.

Realistically, however, this golden mean is never achieved. Cecilia’s first experience of Italian opera in London is an experience of exquisite sensibility, which leads naturally to a simple act of charity; yet her second visit is a dark parody of the first. On her second trip, Cecilia’s presence inside the theatre attracts the unwanted attentions of her would-be suitor, Sir Robert Floyer, and the visit ends in a duel between Sir Robert and the gallant but impoverished Belfield, who holds a grudge against Sir Robert and who tries to defend Cecilia’s honour. The consequences of this second trip reverberate throughout the narrative, and they serve to complicate and compromise the distinctions between charity, benevolence, and debt, which drive much of the plot. Sir Robert’s pursuit of Cecilia at the opera house and the subsequent duel he fights—and wins—in her name result in the assumption that she is engaged to him in marriage. Her protestations are met with public “proof”: her guardian, Mr Harrel, counters her protests with “What, then, ... could make you so frightened for him at the Opera-house? There has been but one opinion about town ever since your prepossession in his favour” (163); and later, when Cecilia refuses again: “‘I fancy,’ answered Mr Harrel, laughing, ‘you will not easily persuade him to think so; your behaviour at the Opera-house was ill calculated to give him that notion’” (233). Cecilia’s beloved, Mortimer Delvile, confesses he had held back from declaring his love: “I should have not disregarded, had I not, at the Opera, been deceived into a belief you were engaged” (511). If Cecilia married Sir Robert, her fortune would have been automatically transferred to his possession; what encourages him to pursue his plans are the assurances and promises of the bankrupt Mr Harrel, who hopes to cancel a debt of honour by affiancing Cecilia to his most distinguished creditor. In a parallel movement, Cecilia, again prompted by Albany, discovers that Belfield, who has sustained serious injuries from the duel he fought for her at the opera house, is lying ill in secret poverty, tended to only

76 Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 9.

by his sister. Her desire to help him is seriously hampered, though, by the mounting "loans" that she is paying Harrel; as Catherine Keohane points out: "debt inflects Cecilia's charity in ... subtle and insidious ways."⁷⁷ While marriage to Sir Robert, which is assumed after the incident in the opera house, would transfer her fortunes to an unwanted husband, she is similarly unable to exercise her natural charitable impulses regarding Belfield—to whom she owes a debt of sorts after the duel—because of the depletion of her fortune in her attempt to prevent the Harrels' bankruptcy. The second visit to the opera parodies the first in its muddying of the terms that define charity and benevolence: while Cecilia's first occasion at the opera generates a compromise between private benevolence and public sociability, her second visit lays bare the limitations of benevolence itself.



This sense of compromise and concession—a finding of the middle ground—characterizes *Cecilia*, and Burney uses it to defend the ending of her novel. Readers were disappointed to find that Cecilia does, indeed, lose her fortune after marrying Mortimer; many wished for a happier ending whereby the cruel codicil to the will, which stipulated that Cecilia would lose her inheritance should her husband refuse to take her surname, might somehow be circumvented. The *English Review*, which otherwise praised the novel, suggested: "had a flaw in the Dean's will enabled Miss Beverley to enter again into possession of her estate, perhaps the conclusion would have left a more pleasing impression on the mind."⁷⁸ The *Critical Review* concurred: "Cecilia's conduct, in sacrificing so large a fortune to gratify the pride of Delvile's family, is an example which we would by no means wish to propose as an object of imitation for the fair sex."⁷⁹ Burney herself reported that Edmund Burke had objected to the denouement: "He wished the conclusion either more happy or more miserable; 'for in a work of imagination,' said he, 'there is no medium.'"⁸⁰

Yet Burney defended this "medium" ground in her work. In a letter to her friend and mentor Crisp, she wrote: "Is not such a middle state

77 Catherine Keohane, "'Too Neat For a Beggar': Charity and Debt in Burney's *Cecilia*," *Studies in the Novel* 33, no. 4 (2001): 379.

78 *English Review* 1 (January 1783): 15–16.

79 *Critical Review* 54 (December 1782): 420.

80 Frances Burney to Susan Burney Phillips, 2 December 1782 (KS, 221).

more natural, more according to real life, and less resembling every other book of fiction?" She added, "if I am made to give up this point, my whole plan is rendered abortive, and the last page of any novel in Mr Noble's circulating library may serve for the last page of mine." Burney is expressing the idea that, like the pasticcio, the interchangeable parts of many contemporary novels render the role of the author more or less redundant; the particulars of an individual plot matter less than the recognizable, generic tone of a happy ending. What is particularly interesting about this letter is her explicit use of Italian opera as a *rejected* model for her writing: "I must frankly confess I shall think I have written a farce than a serious history, if the whole is to end, like the hack Italian operas, with a jolly chorus that makes all parties good and all parties happy!"⁸¹

Burney refers mainly to the unlikely denouements that characterized many operas and that Gay had satirized so effectively in *The Beggar's Opera*, but the temptation to compose an artificially dramatic ending was present also in tragic opera of the period. Intriguingly, in the same year that *Cecilia* was published, Ferdinando Bertoni's pasticcio tragedy *Giunio Bruto* (written specifically for Pacchierotti) was performed, and then cancelled after only three nights. Its plot revolved around the betrayal of the Roman consul Brutus by his son Titus (sung by Pacchierotti), who is involved in a Tarquinian rebellion against the state. In the final scene, Brutus condemns Titus to death, singing "Io perdo un figlio, ma salva è Roma"—in a spare, seemingly unprecedented, *secco* recitative ending. As with Burney's novel, reviewers were disappointed with the conclusion: "There is a great want of a new finale ... the conclusion as it stands at present being excessively bald and uninteresting."⁸² As Price points out, this reviewer had "missed the point. Bertoni was trying to make the music reflect the extreme austerity of the drama";⁸³ like Burney, Bertoni was trying to avoid an artificially dramatic ending that might please the audience but which, he believed, would compromise the integrity of the performance.

Burney's letter to Crisp, however, does more than simply reject the unlikely conclusions to Italian opera. Her reaction to the general "reader response" to the ending of *Cecilia*, which she expresses through a repudiation of "hack Italian operas" with their exchangeable

81 Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 6 April 1782 (*KS*, 210–11).

82 Ferdinando Bertoni, review of *Giunio Bruto*, *London Chronicle*, 12–15 January 1782; cited in Petty, 184.

83 Price, "Unity, Originality and the London Pasticcio," 22.

and transposable parts, implicitly poses the question asked of the pasticcio, who is in charge? This question clearly vexed Burney: to give in to people who criticized the ending of her novel would be to relinquish authorial control over her own writing; giving in would allow the common reader to dictate the plotting of a fictional work according to the current dictates of popular taste and whimsy. For Burney, the medium ground does not mean compromised hackwork aimed at gratifying the tastes of a "middling" London audience or readership. The golden mean, which the London opera house symbolizes early on in the novel for Cecilia as a halfway point between isolated sentiment and extreme sociability, the qualification of the golden mean itself as the second opera visit compromises the first, and the literal, topographical middle ground of the King's Theatre in Westminster, all correspond to a particular idea of the "middle state" that implies the delicate balancing and moderation of extremes that Burney advocates in her fiction, a balance acknowledged in the epilogue to Holcroft's *Seduction*. Although the exquisite sound of individual arias provided a perfect model and stimulus for sentimental feeling and benevolent response, the possible implications arising from the *structure* of Italian opera—the composite form of the pasticcio and its improbable conclusions whereby a final section might be taken from any other work of the period and inserted into another—was ultimately rejected in her fiction.

In 1748, Richardson wrote to Lady Bradshaigh that *Clarissa* had appeared "in the humble Guise of a *Novel* only by way of Accommodation to the Manners and Taste of an Age overwhelmed with a Torrent of Luxury, and abandoned to *Sound and Senselessness*."⁸⁴ The implication was that the mid-century novel should be considered a concession to the vulgar tastes of Londoners exposed to the desensitizing sight and sound of such popular spectacles as Italian opera. By the 1770s, it seemed that sentimental fiction, in works such as Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* and Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, had aligned the novel's sympathies with the emotional force of opera and the opera house itself as sentimental space. In Burney's writings, however, the deployment of opera creates an interesting tension: on the one hand, the pathos of individual arias acts as a perfect cultural correlative to the expressions of sentiment in her novels; on the other

84 Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, December 1748, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 177 (emphasis added).

hand, the popular pasticcio offers a structural model to be avoided if the author wishes to maintain the verisimilitude—the “middle state”—that the conclusion to *Cecilia* suggests. Perhaps, ultimately, the opera house itself offers the most to Burney and the women she writes about, in her fiction if not her private writings. In *Cecilia*, Burney suggests, the sympathies and benevolence, which characterize and motivate her fictional heroine, are mediated—even while revealing necessary compromises—through a real cultural space, recognizable to her readers, in late eighteenth-century London.

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