FANNY BURNEY’S EPISTOLARY ROMANTICISM AND BLOGGING

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ABSTRACT

Fanny Burney at 15 wrote in her diary addressing her thoughts to ‘Nobody’, to her silent ‘self’ and interlocutor. Nobody learnt about this fact until her diaries were published. She became famous with her first epistolary novel about a young lady entering the world, though in the Preface to the novel the author pretended to be an editor of the letters. Her writing could be compared to contemporary blogs. Novelty and variety of subjects, personally coloured irony and wit, acute eyesight, ability to entertain a reader with an unusual insight of the ordinary event or situation (e.g., ‘Directions for Coughing, Sneezing, or Moving Before the King and Queen’), a dramatist talent to create dialogues and remember speaker’s intonation and other speech parameters, a lot of short fragments imprinting emotions and restoring the epoch in diaries and letters, - everything features her style and specifies her as a Romanticism writer. Some of the subjects could be accepted as obsolete though regarding different situations, circumstances and the performance the given descriptions of the royal household politely discussed by the Keeper of the Robe to Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, and a close acquaintance of British famous actor David Garrick (1717-1779) and even world-known painter Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) some of the episodes described in diaries could be praised for their author’s dramatic playwright talent. Blogging in its well-written form, the one possessing style and distinguishing good literature characteristics, could be compared to diaries reflecting every instant of modern life and becoming immediately public. Freedom of female voice in Romantic era and freedom of mass-media writer and reader on the verge of Millennium are manifested in both epochs.

Keywords: Romanticism prose, epistolary genre, blogging, university curriculum, journalism

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary blogging possesses multiplicity of forms (online journals, weblogs, personal pages, public profiles) and infinite topicality (from politics to weather, from inner-self impressions to public issues, etc.). Blogging has already formed its own culture (groups, sub-groups, communities, circles, etc.). Blogging has its own character (timeliness, immediate response and popularity, reflective nature, momentous feedback, any author’s background is transparent). Juxtaposition of the two chronologically incomparable kinds of writing art, the nineteenth-century epistolary prose and contemporary phenomena of blog-writing, is hardly possible to justify. Nevertheless, Fanny Burney’s voice in
a Romanticism literature does not sound regularly similar to those who imitated, parodied, mocked and sometimes inherited Samuel Richardson’s popular manner. Fanny Burney could become a proper illustration for those bloggers who are also trying to find their own voices and express opinions of and for many silent readers and subscribers.

According to G.F. Singer (1963), in the period of ‘formulation of the novel’[1] from 1740 to 1770 only 595 published novels were known to be epistolary; in contrast, among 1341 novels published in the last third of the 18th century 361 were the epistolary ones, the genre was very popular. Outstanding Fanny Burney’s entrance into the prose world was noticed and selected by the reading audience of the time and the readers accepted her writing as inimitable and distinct. Her works were compared to the most eminent epistolary novel writings of the preceding epoch, Clara Reeve, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Richardson’s best inheritors and examples for the descendants. Diaries, letters, memoirs and autobiographies were common for any historical period in literature, though in Romanticism the utmost subjectivity, personal attitude, rebellious spirit, and opposing opinions, as well as civil, social, economic, and cultural involvement turn out to be specific features of the epoch and the epistolary heritage is marked with the features.

Contemporary blogging pretends to log on the World Wide Web some discrete fragments of thoughts, emotionally, philosophically, politically, economically, psychologically, anyhow inspired and engaged any diary-similar text entries posted onto the web. Everyone could present the inner-self or personal opinion publicly; the same categories are regarded to be approved by many readers. Nowadays incessant lines of bloggers create the infinite variety of approaches, frequently praised for their style and sometimes even comparable to the personalities of Romantic literature. To what extent Fanny Burney’s epistolary art could be discussed in terms of present-day blogging is the question set for the present paper.

Apparently, a few words should be devoted to Fanny Burney (1752-1841) who, although is very well-known to the reading public and even more to the literary critics as a novelist and diaries and letters author, should be presented as a Romanticism author. She was a Romanticism female writer, among many ‘sisters of the quill’ and the person who against 18th century norms and regulations in 1778 dared to become a woman-writer, who published her four novels, who first supported and then became disappointed in French Revolution. Continuing brief relation of her biography, it should be mentioned that she was a Second Keeper to Queen Charlotte’s robes, she married French General and refugee d’Arblay, she had outlived her only son, she published her last novel “The Wanderer” in 1814 when Jane Austen and Walter Scott published their first ones. She raised a lot of female gender problems when they could hardly have been discussed.

Fanny Burney as Madame D’Arblay left politically engaged recollections of Napoleonic France in her diaries, she was acquainted with the best representatives of London society among whom there was a lexicographer, editor and writer Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784); the First President of the Royal Academy of Arts, portrait painter Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792); an actor, playwright and theatre manager David Garric (1717-1779); a
philosopher and politician Edmund Burke (1730-1797); a playwright and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816); the royal family, nobility and aristocracy. She belonged to the intellectual Blue Stocking Society headed by an English aristocrat, letter writer, and poet, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762). The Blue Stocking was commemorated in G.G. Byron’s “Don Juan” (1824) with the following lines:

‘Oh! ye, who make the fortunes of all books!
Benign Ceruleans of the second sex!
Who advertise new poems by your looks,
Your “imprimatur” will ye not annex?’

Her father, Charles Burney (1726-1814), was a music historian, composer and musician. Oxford University honoured him with a Doctor’s degree. He was on the friendly terms with many of the London nobility. Fanny Burney grew in the atmosphere of arts, music, dancing, painting, writing, acting represented by many of her father’s guests. She was once a happy wife and mother, talented writer and dramatist, very experienced and observant in her letters and diaries which she had been writing all her life. Her letters undoubtedly were addressed to some relatives or acquaintances of hers, though her diaries were regarded to be personal writing, however, she frequently used them to support some episodes and plots for her novels. Finally, when lately her diaries were published in a collection of works they appeared to be addressed to some readers, at least her relatives and acquaintances. Fanny Burney’s diaries could be compared to nowadays blogs. The European idea of freedom emerged and was making first steps in Romanticism, in the beginning of the 21st century an impartial opinion, words ‘freedom’ and ‘self-determination’ once formulated by Kant shows ‘the beginning of maturity for the human race’ [3]. Publicity as a probing tool for mass information emerges in Romanticism; periodicals, quarterlies, reviews, magazines, gazettes were inaccessible to English readers’ majority in the XVIII and at the beginning of the XIX centuries due to the financial censorship policy in the country. In the beginning of the 19th century the institute of subscribers, first public libraries, group reading of the published periodicals in pubs could serve as evidence of the emerging mass culture. Due to the blogging ‘the power of publicity is in every one’s hands’. [3]

BACKGROUND AND STUDY

Fanny Burney’s Life and Diaries

As a literary background for the paper there have been taken “Diaries and Letters by Madame D’Arblay” (better known to the reading public as Frances or even Fanny Burney, 1752-1841). The diaries and letters are used for critical analysis, topic selection and direct quotations. The edition was published by Mme D’Arblay’s niece, Mrs Barrett, in seven volumes from 1842 to 1846. [4; 5; 6] To obtain a clear picture of blogging and bloggers, a collection of articles “Uses of Blogs” edited by Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (2006) [7] and the following university researches have been perused, “A Blogger’s Manifesto” (2007) by Erik Ringman [3] and “Say Everything” (2009) by Scott Rosenberg [8]; alongside, a lot of shorter forms, essays and articles, such as “weblogs: a history and perspective” by Rebecca Blood (2000) [9], “Exploratory Notes on Produsers and Prousage” by Axel Bruns (2005) [10], as well as, “Blogging and Uses of Blog Libraries” by Anil Kumar Dhiman and Hemant Sharma (2008) [11].

As a key point two developmental literature and media vectors are compared, one is forwarding Romantic writing to
wards journalism, mass communication, and, eventually, to blogging; and another one, taken as a back-perspective, from, contemporary journalism, unlimited blogging seeking for some distinct creative paradigm and returning back to writing. The first one is represented by Fanny Burney’s literary talent whereas the second one is built from the contemporary researches, facts and opinions.

Working out the topicality of blogs one can admit a lot of overwhelming points on social, political, economic, psychological, educational, business issues, and even much more than these ones. Blogs are commonly recognised to be infinite in their diversity, abundance and multi-multiplicity. Moreover, there is even a subcultural blogging in the form of Online Journals, fictional blogs or blogging from Inside the Ivory Tower [5]. Putting aside lots of highlighted topics and frequently described hypothetical and actual uses of blogs, it is important to get concentrated on the revolutionary character of the blog culture, its immediate popularity and timeliness, its discreetness and accessibility, its tout-de-suite and immediate publicity opportunities, and its reflective, mirroring ability to create a prompt feedback to everything happening, taking place, occurring around the blogger, with time turning into a Writer. It is also desirable to consider the educational background or literacy of the blogger, as in each particular instant it could not be justified though it is somehow noticeable through the word usage, formally preserved or informally violated grammar and ideas related.

**Fanny Burney’s ‘Blogs’**

Fanny Burney’s diaries and letters are comparable to blogs. They are as well, as diverse and abundant in their topics, as unpredictable and unique in the interpretations of the events. The lady writer witnessed History, revolutionary and naïve in their novelty, responsive and immediate in their postponed reaction. Novelty of the facts and her reaction to them are also in tune with some of her contemporary readers and as her subjective impression written by an educated woman and an accomplished lady.


Burney make notes on some politically engaged people, events and even on some historical periods, ‘A Party of French Fugitives’, ‘Burke’s Speech on the French Revolution’ [5], ‘The Emigrants at Juniper Hall Described’, ‘Severe Decrees against the Emigrants’, ‘Revolutionary Societies in Norfolk’, ‘English Feelings at the Revolutionary Excesses’, ‘In France during the Peace’, ‘A Nobleman during the Ancien Régime’, ‘Royal Contributions towards the War’, ‘Rumours of War’, ‘Rumours of Bonaparte’s near Approach’, etc. [6]. Writing her impressions about France where she expected to meet poverty, hunger and ruins after the Revolution and: “Beggars we saw not – no, not one, all the time we stayed or sauntered; and for civility and gentleness,
the poorest and most ordinary persons we met or passes might be compared with the best dressed and best looking walkers in the streets of our metropolis, and still to the disadvantage of the latter. I cannot say how much this surprised me, as I had conceived a horrific idea of the populace of this country, imagining em all transformed into bloody monsters” [6]. This description could be compared to the real blog impression of the contemporary after war spots, expectations and reality, and it is hardly in favour of the present day events and scenes.

In her diaries one can find reports on what happens at the Royal court (‘The Queen’s Summonds’, ‘Little Princess Amelia’s Birthday’). She dramatically restores Royal family members’ words or other people’s opinions on different occasions (‘Agitation of the Queen and Princesses’, ‘George III: On Plays and Players’ [4]; ‘Royal Concern for the Colonel’s Gout’ [5], ‘The King and Queen on “Camilla”’, ‘Interview with M.de Chateaubriand’ [6]).

In Fanny Burney’s letters and diaries travels and journeys are often mentioned. She travelled a lot throughout the country and even abroad and wrote about her journeys and trips: ‘The Journey to Nuneham: Ungracious Reception’, ‘The Colleges Visited: A Stealthy Collation’ [4], ‘Stonehenge, Wilton, and Milton Abbey’, ‘Bath Revisited’, ‘The Return to Windsor’ [5].

In the focus of her attention, a reader often finds some descriptions of manners and requirements dictated by etiquette (‘A Dinner Difficulty’, ‘Directions for a Private Encounter with the Royal Family’). Fanny Burney left a very specific description of the requirements or even rules of Visitor’s behaviour in the presence of the Royal family. She could find it useful, practical and probably important. The abstract is taken from the piece of diary text entitled “Directions for Coughing, Sneezing, or Moving Before the King and Queen”: “In the first place, you must not cough. If you find a cough tickling in your throat, you must arrest it from making any sound; if you find yourself choking with the forbearance, you must choke—but not cough. In the second place, you must not sneeze. If you have a vehement cold, you must take no notice of it; if your nose membranes feel a great irritation, you must hold your breath; if a sneeze still insists upon making its way, you must oppose it, by keeping your teeth grinding together; if the violence of the repulse breaks some blood-vessel, you must break the blood-vessel—but not sneeze.” [4] The description does not sound serious to the contemporary reader neither it did to Fanny Burney though the etiquette norms were very important to her she discusses the hypothetical cases of ‘sneezing’ or ‘coughing’ on the visitors’ side in a mocking manner.

There is a reference to the recent technical invention (‘Dr. Herschel’s Large Telescope’), and some instances of the literary criticism (‘A Writer of Romances’, ‘Literary Talk with the Queen’ [4]). Here is an example from her Diary about her meeting with “A Distinguished Astronomer” Dr. Herschel. Evidently, that was a great night to be of the party with the Royal Astronomer and a scientist; she had an opportunity to see first in her life comet through a new device with lenses, ‘telescope’: “We found him at his telescope, and I mounted some steps to look through it. The comet was very small, and had nothing grand or striking in its appearance; but it is the first lady’s comet, and I was very desirous to see it. Mr. Herschel then showed me some of his new-discovered universes, with all the good humour with which he would have taken the same trouble for a
brother or a sister-astronomer: there is no possibility of admiring his genius more than his gentleness" [4]

Nowadays the subject of searching for any comet is as attractive as it was two centuries ago but it occurs on the new technological level. Any contemporary blog reader can see an image of the comet or contribute to a blog with a new picture, message or piece of information. Anyone can read and learn about any recently spotted comet. Here is a message from the XXI century “Comet Hunters” blogs: "We’re in the home stretch for the project, we’ve got the last set of Suprime-Cam asteroid images on the site for review. These were in directories we had issues uploading onto the site. So, we waited until the end to go back and upload any remaining files we were missing. We need your help to complete this dataset. Once we’re completely finished, the science team can complete the full review of the Suprime-Cam images where the majority of classifiers thought the asteroids looked significantly different from the stars. We haven’t yet found a main belt comet, but we’ll be able to put constraints on how frequent asteroids exhibit this type of behavior". [13]

Some of her diary notes refer to the gender issues (‘Mrs. Fairly and the Learned Ladies’, ‘Learning in Women’ [5], ‘A Proposed Visit to Mme de Stael Disapproved of’ [6]). Fanny Burney herself in the diaries names her writing ‘journalising’, which in general hinted at further perspectives for the writing of the kind [4].

Contemporary Blogging

As epistolary art boosted in popularity at the turn of the 19th century [1] similarly to the blogging expansion which is accelerated nowadays. According to Rebecca Blood [9], in 1998 there were very few sites which could be identified as weblogs. In 1999 the word ‘we-e-blog’ was shortened to ‘blog’ as it became more frequently used and addressed to, the first link-driven sites appeared and were replaced by first free build-your-own-weblog tools.

Moreover, Erik Ringmar in his “Blogger’s Manifesto” illustrates the situation with blogging popularity. On the one hand, the statistics derived from the technological sources is presented, ‘As the internet revolution took off in the first years of the new millennium, the number of bloggers grew exponentially. Since 2002 the number of blogs has doubled every six months. In April 2007, about 120,000 new blogs were created every day, or on average 1.4 blogs per second. Technorati, one of the archivists of the blogosphere, tracked some 70 million individual blogs worldwide. If there are one billion internet users, this means that one in fifteen is a blogger’ [3]. On the other hand, information obtained directly from bloggers supports the statistics, ‘Interviews with bloggers describe the same revolution. The Pew Internet & American Life Survey found that in 2002 only 3 per cent of adult American internet users had a blog. Two years later the figure was 5 per cent, and in 2006 some 8 per cent, or 12 million Americans, kept a blog. In addition, a fifth of American teenagers said they had created a blog’ [3].

Blogs originate from ‘a mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays’ and accompanied by the editor’s commentary. It was the editor’s service or contribution to evaluate the accuracy or inaccuracy of the blog text, complete it with either some sufficient facts, additional remarks, or a personal opinion. In her short essay on the blogs’ history and perspectives published in the blog ‘Rebecca’s Pocket’ [9], Rebecca Blood emphasises the point that
any blogger has no limits and no restrictions to type anything, ‘a passing thought, an extended essay, or a childhood recollection’, however, the editors ‘provide a valuable filtering function for their readers. The web has been, in effect, pre-surfed for them. Out of the myriad web pages slung through cyberspace, weblog editors pick out the most mind-boggling, the most stupid, the most compelling.’ [9]

Rebecca shares her own experience of a blogger, who carefully collects her own opinions and ideas every day. She begins to feel that her perspective is unique and important. In conclusion, Rebecca builds back-perspective from a blogger to a writer, ‘We are being pummeled by a deluge of data and unless we create time and spaces in which to reflect, we will be left with only our reactions. I strongly believe in the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from “audience” to “public” and from “consumer” to “creator.” Weblogs are no panacea for the crippling effects of a media-saturated culture, but I believe they are one antidote.’ [9]

Referring to Fanny Burney’s diaries, which have been filtered with the time for us, contemporary readers, two long centuries sorted the Romanticism authors out and preserved them for a contemporary reader. She, herself, was the author and the editor to her opinions, instant impressions, unforgettable events or trifle circumstances imprinted first in her eyes and memory, and then, pensively, thoughtfully trusted to the paper. Fanny Burney exercised her writing ability in diaries, she was training and practicing her talent constantly and she could not help becoming a writer and did not even think that stood on the threshold of the new journalism era in Romanticism, and tuned even into XXI century blogging.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION
The first-half results showing one of the vectors, bridging contemporary blogging and Romanticism writing, include the following points:

– contemporary blogging represents ‘unedited voices of a person’ [8], number of ‘Nobodies’ who have grown up to become a blogger and found their own, singular and unique voice;

– the most conspicuous feature of contemporary blogging is subject diversity, variety of original impulses, multifarious in interpretations;

– every blogger’s task or destiny is to portray the time, fix the momentum impression and extend it to the eternally rotating in public achievements;

– blogger could hardly admit that seeks for imprinting the most precious moments, though a kaleidoscope of logged instances is the evidence and the final picture of the initially subjective opinion turns into the landmark of the epoch;

– no blogger being isolated to their soliloquies gets surprised when crowds of supporters or enemies appear in his/her blog; bloggers are open to sharing personal experience with the audience and do not mind or even purposefully seek for any feedback;

– moving from blogger to a good writer, the first arranges everyday experience, gains motivation, self-development, and initiative, exercises in writing by putting into words different ideas, this way bloggers turn into experienced and skilful writers;

– a blog becomes a self-disciplinary instrument to writing practice, thus,
a blogger uses self-education as an eternal source for ideas to share;

- finally, the obscure and underdeveloped issues assist not only in life-long self-training but become the enlightening trends of the blogger’s style and in its turn reader’s curiosity makes the blogger a creative writer.

The second-half results should present the opposite vector originated in Romanticism writing and invisibly extended to the 21st century blogging. Speculating on the reverse direction vector from Romanticism epistolary art embodied by Fanny Burney’s Diaries and Letters to the contemporary blogging, it is necessary to note some similarity of her writing to blogs, and some trends unifying the historical periods and social evaluations:

- A singular Nobody managed to obtain her own voice on the widely recognised public platform though she possessed every possible opportunity to do it. The most noble and honoured society of the epoch were invited to the Burneys’ house. Her diaries are historically and factually precious.

- Writing diaries for F.Burney was like a specifically cherished habit that she was practicing from her childhood. The first lines in her diary appeared when she was eight.

- As a blogger F.Burney in her diaries not only witnessed the most precious and remarkable events of the time but also she participated in most of them and had a talent to portray every minute detail, valuable word and a flying moment of her life.

- Subjects related in F.Burney’s letters and diaries presented everything that she silently observed or heard, willingly witnessed or participated at, heartily devoted her life to or reluctantly tried to avoid, and then vividly responded to relating dialogues and settings as a skilful dramatist.

- A female of the circles she belonged to at that time was sentenced to a couple of destinies, either to become an actress or to exert her talents as a hostess of the noble salon, including the literary one; Fanny Burney had chosen the untrodden path of a writer and succeeded on the way.

- She moved further on the way of sharing her opinions and experience with the others, other readers, other generations, other women; her life served a good example for many of silent No-bodies;

- Her talented writing gives a clear image of the epoch, her wit and irony together with ability to create the atmosphere either with an appropriately quoted word or expression, or with a perfect comparison complete the picture.

As in the 18th century the idea of Enlightenment was supposed to throw light into the darkness, in the same way contemporary bloggers seek the obscure subjects to clarify them. As on the brink of the 19th century Romanticism poets, novelists, essayists, journalists and biographers created the inner-self (T.S.Coleridge, W.Hazlitt, Ch.Lamb, etc) attempted to represent subjective world (T.De Quincey, T.L.Peacock, F.Burney), constructed new historical, political and social background (W.Scott, J.Austen) the contemporary bloggers’ mosaic tend to re-store, re-construct and re-novate some of the far lost feelings, pictures and characters. Any moment of the past can inspire the bloggers today.
In favour of the possibility to juxtapose these different visions as versions of each other could serve Professor Martin Conboy’s conclusion in which he finds corresponding traits between remote epochs’ journalism and present-day web logging: ‘The regular posting of web logs on the Internet brings another radical and personalized slant to the news as the diarist/journalist of the twenty-first century is generically related to the observational journalistic tradition of Pepys and Dickens, yet privileging individual accounts for sub-sections of audiences in another example of a very contemporary fragmentation.’ [12]

To sum up, Fanny Burney obtained her own voice on a relatively widely recognized public platform. Her specifically cherished habit, diary and letters writing, she was practicing since her childhood. She both witnessed and participated in the most remarkable events of her time and left her ‘blog’ in a very precise, factual manner. Her ‘blogging’ has even voice and sound, as she was restoring whole dialogues or even conversations in her diaries to memorize important words of her interlocutors. She vividly recreated dialogues and settings as a skillful dramatist. In her short biography Lord Macaulay wrote: “‘No governess, no teacher of any art or of any language was provided for her. But one of her sisters showed her how to write; and when she was fourteen, she began to find pleasure in reading“ [14]. Blogging is a contemporary art where people who like reading and can write share their impressions and ‘imprint the momentum’.

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