

'what an insignificant wretch I am' : the Daily  
Discipline and Writing

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This paper examines Georgiana, Countess of Spencer (1736-1814), her letters, and the life described in them. She, at least in her determination and in various reports, is an epitome of virtues, especially a devotee to the well-regulated life of industry and intellect, quite different from the aristocratic stereotype of languor and luxury.

The remarkably frequent and intense practice of her letter-writing is part of the notable obsession with the will to restrain and regulate her style of life. Her enthusiastic commitment to writing letters allowed her to indulge in passions and emotions first and then to reflect and compose herself. It was necessary that she should give daily assurance to herself through writing that she was engaged in meaningful exertion of body and mind. Admitting that she was a vulnerable insignificant creature, in spite of the appearance of her steady uprightness, she strove to give sanction to discipline herself.