Frances Burney (1752–1840) was the most successful female novelist of the eighteenth century. Her first novel *Evelina* was a publishing sensation; her follow-up novels *Cecilia* and *Camilla* were regarded as among the best fiction of the time and were much admired by Jane Austen. Burney’s life was equally remarkable: a protégée of Samuel Johnson, lady-in-waiting at the Court of George III, later wife of an emigré aristocrat and stranded in France during the Napoleonic Wars, she lived on into the reign of Queen Victoria. Her journals and letters are now widely read as a rich source of information about the Court, social conditions and cultural changes over her long lifetime. This Companion is the first volume to cover all her works, including her novels, plays, journals and letters, in a comprehensive and accessible way. It also includes critical discussion of her reputation, and a guide to further reading.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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CHRONOLOGY

1752: 13 June Frances (‘Fanny’) Burney, the third of six children of Charles Burney, musicologist, and Esther Sleepe Burney, born in King’s Lynn, Norfolk. Siblings are James and Esther.

1755: 4 January Sister Susanna (‘Susan’) born.

1757: 4 December Brother Charles born.

1760: c. April Burney family moves to Poland Street, Westminster, where Charles Burney becomes a fashionable music master.


1762: 27 September Death of mother.

1763: Samuel Crisp becomes a close friend of the Burney family.


1769: 23 June Father receives degree of Doctor of Music, Oxford; Burney writes commemorative verses ‘To Doctor Last’.

1770: 20 September Esther marries her cousin Charles Rousseau Burney. November Burney family moves to Queen Square, Bloomsbury.

1771: 30 June Plays Lady Easy and Lady Graveairs in family performance of scenes from Colley Cibber’s comedy The Careless Husband.
CHRONOLOGY

29 September Plays Lady Truman in family performance of Addison’s comedy The Drummer.

1772: 16 May Step-sister Maria Allen secretly marries Martin Rishton in Ypres. 29 August Half-sister Sarah Harriet born.

1774: 8 October Burney family moves to Isaac Newton’s former house, St Martin’s Street, Leicester Square.

1777: 13 January Epilogue, probably by Burney, to John Jackson’s tragedy Gerilda: or the Siege of Harlecb, spoken by Jane Barsanti at Crow Street Theatre, Dublin and published in Walker’s Hibernian Magazine.

7 April Plays Mrs Lovemore in elaborate family performance of Arthur Murphy’s The Way to Keep Him, including an additional scene probably written by herself; and Huncamunca in Henry Fielding’s Tom Thumb.

12 October Step-sister Elizabeth Allen secretly marries Samuel Meeke in Ypres.

Late October Brother Charles expelled from Caius College, Cambridge, for stealing library books.


August Begins friendships with Samuel Johnson, members of the Johnson circle and Hester Thrale.

1779: 4 May Completes first draft of The Witlings, encouraged by dramatists Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Arthur Murphy, as well as by Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds and Hester Thrale.

2 August After reading a revised draft of The Witlings, her father and family friend Samuel Crisp urge her to suppress it, for fear of offending the London Bluestockings.

1780: January Revises Act IV of The Witlings, with a view to showing the whole play to Sheridan. Plans further revisions, but is persuaded by Dr Burney and Crisp to abandon it.

March–June Visits Bath with Hester and Henry Thrale.

10 June When Gordon Riots reach Bath, Burney and the Thrales flee to Brighton.

1782: 10 January Susanna Burney marries Molesworth Phillips.
CHRONOLOGY

12 July Publishes second novel, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*.

1783: 24 April Death of Samuel Crisp.

1784: 23 July Rupture of friendship with Hester Thrale over her marriage to Gabriel Piozzi.

1786: 17 July Begins five years of service at Court, as Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte, with an annual salary of £200.

1788: October Begins writing her first tragedy, *Edwy and Elgiva*, during a period of insanity of King George III.

1790: August Completes first draft of *Edwy and Elgiva*; begins writing two more tragedies, *Hubert De Vere* and *The Siege of Pevensey*.

1791: June Completes first draft of *Hubert De Vere*; begins writing fourth tragedy, *Elberta*, which will remain incomplete.

7 July Ill health impels her to leave service of the Queen; granted annual pension of £100.

1793: January Visits the Lockes of Norbury Park, Surrey, where she meets Alexandre d’Arblay, exiled Adjutant-General of the Marquis de Lafayette; secret courtship follows.

5 July *Hubert De Vere* accepted by John Philip Kemble for production at Drury Lane; later withdrawn in favour of *Edwy and Elgiva*.

28 July Marries d’Arblay in Protestant ceremony, followed by Catholic rite two days later.

19 November Publishes pamphlet, *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy*; proceeds given to charity.

1794: December Revised version of *Edwy and Elgiva* accepted by Kemble and Sheridan for production at Drury Lane.

1795: 21 March *Edwy and Elgiva* produced at Drury Lane, with prologue by brother Charles; withdrawn after only one performance.

1796: 12 July Publishes by subscription third novel, *Camilla, or, A Picture of Youth*.

20 October Death of stepmother Elizabeth Allen Burney.
CHRONOLOGY

1797: ‘Camilla Cottage’ in Surrey built with the proceeds of *Camilla.*


1799: 30 March *Love and Fashion* accepted by Thomas Harris for March 1800 production at Covent Garden Theatre.

1800: 6 January Death of sister Susanna, upon her arrival in England from Ireland.


1802: 15 April Burney and Alexander follow General d’Arblay to France, arriving in Paris on 20 April.

1803: 12 May Outbreak of war between France and England; d’Arblays unable to return to England.

1811: 30 September Undergoes mastectomy for breast cancer, without anaesthetic, at home in Paris.

1812: 14 August Returns surreptitiously to England with Alexander, on an American ship that is seized by the English; disembarks at Deal.

1814: 28 March Publishes fourth novel, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties.*

12 April Death of father.

November Returns to France, leaving Alexander at Cambridge.

1815: 19 March Flees from France to Belgium, while General d’Arblay fights in army opposing Napoleon.

17 October Returns to England with wounded husband.

2 November Takes lodgings with husband in Bath.

16 December Partial reconciliation with Hester Piozzi at Bath.

1817: 24 September Narrowly escapes drowning when trapped by the tide at Ilfracombe.

28 December Death of brother Charles.

1818: 6 March Alexander elected Fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge.
**CHRONOLOGY**

3 May Death of General d’Arblay at home in Bath.
30 September Moves from Bath to London, settling in Bolton Street, Piccadilly.

1819:
- 11 April Alexander ordained priest in Church of England.

1821:
- 19 July Brother James appointed Rear-Admiral.
- 17 November Death of James.

1824:
- June Alexander presented as Perpetual Curate to a new chapel in Camden Town.

1832:
- 17 February Death of sister Esther.
- 6 November Death of closest friend, Frederica Locke.

1836:
- November Alexander presented as Perpetual Curate to the Chapel of Ely in High Holborn.

1837:
- 19 January Death of Alexander. His fiancée, Mary Ann Smith, comes to live with Burney.

1838:
- 12 September Death of sister Charlotte.

1840:

1842–46:
- Niece and literary executrix Charlotte Barrett edits *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay* (7 vols.).
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brief</td>
<td>Frances Burney, <em>Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy: Earnestly Submitted to the Humane Consideration of the Ladies of Great Britain, By the Author of Evelina and Cecilia</em> (1793).</td>
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<td>Memoirs</td>
<td><em>Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from His Own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections</em>, by his daughter, Madame d'Arblay, 3 vols. (London, 1832).</td>
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In 1991, the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* devoted a special issue to *Evelina*, Frances Burney’s first novel, with an introduction by Julia Epstein, four substantial essays, and an afterword by Margaret Anne Doody. It was a pivotal moment for Burney studies. Both Epstein and Doody had recently published major books on the author, and the special issue, the first that *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* had dedicated to any single novel, suggested that *Evelina* was a truly significant advance in the development of prose fiction, not merely a resting place on the long march from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen. Doody’s afterword, however, entitled ‘Beyond *Evelina*’, struck a cautionary note. While acknowledging that the collection was a timely recognition of Burney’s rapidly rising critical standing, Doody questioned why *Evelina* alone of her four novels was being awarded such attention, both here and in other literary journals. We need, she concluded, to consider Burney’s work as a whole, not to make of her ‘the one-book little novelist’ (371). Austen herself, after all, in her fine tribute to Burney in *Northanger Abbey* (I, ch. 5), singled out for particular mention not *Evelina* but Burney’s second and third novels, *Cecilia* and *Camilla*.

In the years since the publication of the special issue, Burney studies – like studies of the eighteenth-century novel in general – have undergone radical change. No longer is one of her four novels privileged at the expense of its three more ambitious and demanding successors, and no longer is Burney regarded only as a novelist. Since 1995, when her eight plays – four comedies and four tragedies – were published in a collected edition for the first time, Burney has become increasingly well known to readers of drama and, most recently, to theatregoers: *A Busy Day*, the last of her comedies, enjoyed a three-month run at the Lyric Theatre in London’s West End in summer 2000. And with sixteen out of twenty-four projected volumes of her journals and letters now available in a modern scholarly edition, Burney’s importance as a chronicler of her age, from 1768 until the late 1830s, is becoming fully apparent. Another development is a better understanding of the roles, both
supportive and counterproductive, that the remarkably talented and productive Burney family played in the composition of her novels and plays, as well as her journals and letters. Recent work on her father Charles Burney, the music historian, on her journal-writing sister Susanna, and on her novelist half-sister, Sarah Harriet, as well as on other family members, has thrown new light on the nature of Frances Burney’s achievement.

No agreement, however, has been reached on the best way to name the author. For over half of her life, following her marriage to Alexandre d’Arblay in 1793, she was known as Madame d’Arblay, and although all of her novels were published anonymously, she signed the dedication to *Camilla* as ‘F. d’Arblay’ and that to *The Wanderer* as ‘F.B. d’Arblay’. Nineteenth-century critics referred to her as Madame d’Arblay or, occasionally, as Frances Burney, but, for most of the twentieth century, Fanny Burney was preferred. In the mid-1980s, however, feminist critics, led by Margaret Anne Doody and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, argued strongly in favour of ‘Frances’, on the grounds that the diminutive ‘Fanny’ belittled the author. Most contributors to this volume prefer the formal ‘Frances’ to ‘Fanny’, but discussions of Burney in her family setting, in which she was known by the diminutive, naturally adopt this usage. To avoid confusion, Burney is called by her maiden name, even after her marriage, unless she is named in conjunction with her husband; here ‘the d’Arblays’ is preferred to the anachronistic ‘Burney and d’Arblay’.

As the conflict over Burney’s naming shows, there are few aspects of her life unexplored by critical discourse. Thus, it is fitting that, drawing on the latest research, *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* deals with every aspect of her writing. The four novels are given the prominence they deserve, with substantial chapters devoted to the earlier pair – *Evelina* and *Cecilia* – and to the later, more complex *Camilla* and *The Wanderer*. But the *Companion* also gives full attention to Burney’s eight plays, her seventy years of journal and letter-writing, her polemical *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793), and her final publication, the much-criticised *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832). Chapters on the novels, plays and journals are complemented by two that consider her work in relation to political and gender issues. There are also chapters on the Burney family, on her fraught position in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English (and French) society, on the commercial fortunes and misfortunes of her authorial career, and on her critical reception from the 1840s to the present. Due attention is paid to *Evelina*, the novel that made Burney famous, and to some repeatedly anthologised pieces from her journals, such as the address ‘to Nobody’ with which her earliest surviving journal begins and the much later, appallingly vivid account of her mastectomy, performed without
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anaesthetic. But the Companion goes far beyond these familiar writings, presenting incisive discussions of Burney’s lesser-known later novels and her still neglected, unperformed tragedies, Hubert De Vere, The Siege of Pevensey and Elberta.

The great majority of Burney’s journals were addressed to members of her family, especially to her father Charles Burney and her sister Susanna Burney Phillips. Kate Chisholm’s chapter opens the Companion by studying Frances Burney in the context of her family, paying particular attention to her formative years in London. The Burneys, devoted to music, art, book-collecting and travel, as well as to literature, appear as a microcosm of eighteenth-century culture. Jane Spencer’s chapter on Evelina and Cecilia is also concerned with Burney’s early life, examining her relationship to her mentor Samuel Johnson and showing how, in her second novel, Burney moved beyond the Richardsonian epistolary model used in Evelina to blend the formal gravity of Johnson’s style with free indirect discourse. Sara Salih’s chapter on Camilla and The Wanderer considers how these two very long and complex novels can reward the reader today. While recognising their ostensibly conservative contribution to the war of ideas in the 1790s and early 1800s, Salih contends that they also give expression to a radical moral agenda. Tara Ghoshal Wallace examines Burney’s involvement with the eighteenth-century stage both through the disastrous production of her tragedy Edwy and Elgiva, performed at Drury Lane for a single night in 1795, and through her dealings with Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Arthur Murphy and other contemporary dramatists. Wallace gives as much attention to Burney’s tragedies as to her comedies, finding hitherto unrecognised links between her concerns in both forms of drama.

John Wiltshire’s chapter on Burney’s journals and letters takes in the full extent of her private writings: the early journals, when she was part of the Johnson circle; the Court journals, with their eyewitness insights into the madness of George III and the trial of Warren Hastings; and those written, after her marriage to the exiled French army officer Alexandre d’Arblay, during the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars and thereafter. Wiltshire also pays attention to Burney’s retrospective accounts of her life in Memoirs of Doctor Burney, comparing its embellished, amplified versions of events with their more spontaneous, vivacious originals. Margaret Anne Doody, in a chapter on Burney and politics, briefly considers Burney as a journal-writer and dramatist, but her primary concern is with the four novels and especially with The Wanderer, Burney’s most overtly political work. Doody’s analysis is complemented by Vivien Jones’s exploration of gender issues in Burney’s novels, and the ways in which her reputation was determined, in part, by contemporary critics insistent on depicting her as, in Hazlitt’s words, ‘a very woman’.
The last three chapters in the Companion are concerned with the vicissitudes of Burney’s place in society, in the literary marketplace, and (posthumously) in the literary canon. In Burney’s novels, as Betty Rizzo remarks, kindred spirits recognise one another through a cri de l’âme, or call of the soul: a mutual sympathy that recognises the claims of merit over those of rank. In Burney’s life, however, the social structure proved to be more intractable; like her close friend (before their estrangement) Hester Thrale, Burney was unable, finally, to transcend the social limitations placed on her at birth. In his chapter on Burney’s authorial career, George Justice examines her dealings with a series of hard-headed publishers, from Thomas Lowndes to Longman and Co., who proved to be as obdurate as the system of rank. Although Burney earned about £5,000 for her last three publications – Camilla, The Wanderer and Memoirs of Doctor Burney – her novels, representing many years of arduous composition under difficult circumstances, were more profitable for her publishers and for the proprietors of circulating libraries than they were for her author.

In her chapter on Burney’s afterlife, Lorna Clark examines the reception of her writings from the 1840s, when the posthumous Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay was first published, to the first years of the present century. The chapter, and the Companion, concludes on a positive note. Despite her inability to rise through the ranks of English society and despite the limited success of her arduous negotiations with the book-trade, Burney has achieved greater fame in the twenty-first century than she ever possessed during her lifetime. In June 2002, on the 250th anniversary of her birth, a memorial panel was dedicated to her in the East Window of Poet’s Corner, Westminster Abbey. Burney herself wrote the epitaph for a memorial to her father, placed in Westminster Abbey in 1817. It took almost two centuries for the two most famous of the Burneys to be memorialised together. Burney dedicated her first and her last novel to her father, and in her dedication of The Wanderer to Dr Burney she expressed the hope that, one day, prose fiction might stand on an equal footing with more exalted genres, such as epic poetry. Epic poets such as Virgil, Homer and Milton already have Cambridge Companions of their own. So too do the eighteenth-century authors whom Burney most admired, such as Swift and Johnson. With the publication of this volume, Burney joins their exalted ranks.

In her journal for March 1778, Burney wrote, with a self-mockery that is not entirely mocking:
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affair will, in future Times, mark the period whence chronologers will date the Zenith of the polite arts in this Island!  

(ELJ III, 1)

Burney’s novels, plays and journals have come to occupy a more central position in the English canon than their author, outside the confines of playful fantasies in her private communications, could ever have envisaged. This Cambridge Companion, with chapters by British, American, Canadian and Australian scholars, reflects the depth and range of interest in Frances Burney.