PETER SABOR

Introduction

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 dimunitive, 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

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 their 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:

> This Year was ushered in by a grand & most important Event, – for . . . the Literary World was favoured with the first publication of the ingenious, learned, & most profound Fanny Burney! – I doubt not but this memorable

> affair will, in future Times, mark the period whence chronologers will date the Zenith of the polite arts in this Island! (*EJL* 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.

1

KATE CHISHOLM

The Burney family

A few weeks before he died in December 1784, the great lexicographer and essayist Samuel Johnson wrote a short note to his friend Charles Burney which he ends by sending his respects 'to dear Doctor Burney, and all the dear Burneys little and great'.[1] Johnson, without a family himself, was intrigued by and enamoured of the Burneys, 'little and great'. By 1784, the family comprised Charles Burney, the musician and scholar, and his second wife Elizabeth, along with their combined household of six children from Charles's first marriage and the two much younger children from his second. The second Mrs Burney also had three children from her first marriage. Such a blended family of siblings, half-siblings and step-siblings was not unusual, but the Burneys appear to have been peculiarly close-knit, drawn together by the powerful personality of their father. Johnson declared of them, 'I love all of that breed whom I can be said to know, and one or two whom I hardly know I love upon credit, and love them because they love each other.'[2]

The Burneys were a talented clan of musicians, writers, scholars, geographers and artists. And their shared habit of 'journalising', recording their encounters in vivid, as-they-happened letters and diaries that were written for each other but with an awareness, too, of their potential historical significance, has ensured that they will never be forgotten. Between them, the Burneys left behind more than 10,000 items of correspondence.[3] Reading through this enormous written record is to be entertained by an everyday saga of family life that is not so very different from our own: Dr Burney is mugged, his house is burgled, and his daughters fall out with their stepmother. His younger son is expelled from Cambridge for petty theft, another is reprimanded by the Admiralty for insubordination. One daughter dies tragically after enduring for years an unhappy marriage, two stepdaughters waste themselves on unsuitable men, while a third is destined for penurious spinsterdom.

We discover that there is nothing new about vegetarian diets, share the excitement of Fanny and her sisters as they prepare for their first masquerade,

and marvel at a ballgown trimmed with grebe feathers and gold ribbon. But these quotidian concerns are transformed by the stage on which the Burneys lived out their lives. They shared a knack for being in the right place at the right time so that between them they knew many of the remarkable characters of their age. Dr Burney calls on Voltaire at his home in Ferney in Switzerland; his son James travels to the South Seas with Captain Cook; Susan befriends Pacchierotti, the leading Italian castrato of his time; Charles junior swaps Latin epigrams with William Hazlitt; and Sarah Harriet winters in Rome with the poet Walter Savage Landor and Henry Crabb Robinson, friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Richard, too, has his own intriguing tale, setting up a school for orphan children in Calcutta.

But it was Frances (or 'Fanny') Burney who most successfully cultivated her life-chances as one of the daughters of the sociable Dr Burney. Her novels, best-sellers in their time, are read and enjoyed now not for the elegance of her prose style or her ingenious plotting, but for the range and depth of her characters – Captain Mirvan, Elinor Joddrel, Sir Sedley Clarendel, Mr Dubster – inspired by the rich variety of her father's circle of acquaintance. When her diaries were eventually published after her death by her niece and great-niece, she earned a new wave of admirers, among them the novelist William Thackeray, who based his account of the battle of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair* on Fanny's gripping version of the events as she had witnessed them. The historian Macaulay, too, remarked on the extraordinary role which her father had played in London society in the 1770s and 1780s: 'few nobles could assemble in the most stately mansions of Grosvenor Square or Saint James's Square, a society so various and so brilliant as was sometime to be found in Dr Burney's cabin'.[4] Fanny, from an early age, flexed her skills as a writer to capture this 'brilliant' world in word-portraits that are as compelling today as when she first penned them.

She was born on 13 June 1752 in the Norfolk river port of King's Lynn, the third child and second daughter of Charles Burney and his first wife Esther. Charles was the parish organist, supplementing his income by giving private lessons on the harpsichord to the sons and daughters of the local gentry. But life in a provincial town was too limiting for a man of his ambition and talent. 'It Shames me to think How little I knew my self, when I fancy'd I should be Happy in this Place', he told Esther. 'O God! I find it impossible I should ever be so … Nothing but the Hope of acquiring an independent Fortune in a Short Space of Time will keep me Here.'[5]

He was one of thirteen children to survive (seven, or perhaps as many as nine, of his siblings died in infancy, including his twin sister Susanna), and for most of his childhood he was sent away from home to board at school while his father struggled to make a living as a portrait painter and dancing master

of no fixed address. Charles Burney was determined to live a very different kind of life. He taught himself French and Italian, wrote letters to Dr Johnson and other leading scholars, and cultivated friendships with the 'ton', those with inherited wealth and genteel status. Ill health had forced him to leave London, where he had hoped to establish himself as a professional musician, and to retreat to the less polluted air of King's Lynn, but by September 1760 he was back in the capital with his young and growing family. In addition to his first child Esther, born rather shockingly before her parents were married (just one of many Burney family secrets that remained hidden for generations),[6] there were also James, Frances, Susan and Charles (two earlier babies named after their father had died in infancy). Charlotte, the youngest of Charles's six children with his first wife, arrived in November 1761.

They were a boisterous, playful and imaginative family, living first in Poland Street in the heart of the bustling West End, then in quieter Queen Square, in a large and elegant house that from its windows looked across fields to the hilltop villages of Hampstead and Highgate. Esther (also known as 'Hetty') excelled on the harpsichord, and by the age of ten was performing in front of a paying audience. Susan, too, had a fine ear for music and an ability to sing as if she were Italian-born (the Italians were then regarded as the finest musicians in London). Their father inspired in all of them a love of books; even James, who was more of a mathematician than a reader and who was sent away to sea at the age of ten, spent his boyhood pennies at the bookstall in the market on 'a pennyworth of *Roderick Random*' (at least if his proud father is to be believed).[7] Dr Burney had always been careful to nurture his contacts with playwrights, composers and actors (he was named after his godfather Charles Fleetwood, a leading theatre manager); in 1750 he had worked with David Garrick, the most prominent and charismatic actor–manager of his day, on a 'pantomime' version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He encouraged his children in their love of dressing up and play-acting, leading to the infamous occasion of 'Fanny and the Wig'.

Next door to the Burney home in Poland Street lived a wig-maker, or perruquier, also with young children, who often joined the Burneys in their amateur dramatics. On one occasion, talked about for years afterwards, they found some old wigs, which added greatly to their make-believe until one of them fell off and into a tub of rainwater. Only Fanny, aged ten, was prepared to challenge the irate wig-maker by declaring, 'What signifies talking so much about an accident. The wig is wet, to be sure; and the wig was a good wig, to be sure; but it's of no use to speak of it any more; because what's done cannot be undone.'[8] 'The wig is wet' became a standing joke in the family, a kind of secret code between them, while wigs often feature in Fanny's fictions, almost as a personal signature.

Dr Burney was preoccupied during these years with his flourishing career, giving as many as fifty-seven lessons a week, dashing from house to house in his private coach. The increasing wealth and leisure time of the burgeoning middle class from the 1760s onwards meant 'there was hardly a private family ... without its flute, its fiddle, its harpsichord, or guitar',[9] and Dr Burney was a remarkably successful tutor. He had devised his own technique of striking the keys of the harpsichord, which gave his performances, and those of his pupils, a distinctive quality.

His musical ability gave him the opportunity to better himself, becoming as socially mobile as if he had been born rich and well connected. But it was his determined self-education and energetic self-promotion, whether it be writing a history of the comets that had been seen in Britain or publishing an account of his travels in France and Italy or compiling his five-volume *General History of Music*, which ensured that in June 1769 he was awarded a doctorate of music by Oxford University and later was invited to join the most prestigious of all social and intellectual circles – Dr Johnson's Literary Club.

By October 1774 he had moved his family to an even more convenient and fashionable address in St Martin's Street, just around the corner from Leicester Fields, where Sir Joshua Reynolds lived, and conveniently close to the Opera House and the theatres on the Haymarket and Drury Lane. London in these years was at the heart of musical life, not just in England but also in Europe, singers from the Continent finding work in the theatres and assembly rooms of the West End and also at the pleasure gardens of Ranelagh, Marylebone and Vauxhall. The success of his book *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (published in 1771) meant that Dr Burney was well known throughout this musical community, and his home became a popular rendezvous, especially on Sunday evenings when he organised informal concerts in his 'music room', starring the latest operatic sensations to have arrived in the capital. Dr Burney and his guests were lampooned by the caricaturist Charles Loraine Smith in his *A Sunday Concert, 1782*, depicting an evening in June when the guests included the tall, gangly castrato Pacchierotti and the statuesque Lady Mary Duncan.

At first there was nothing to suggest that Fanny would become the most renowned of all the Burneys. On the contrary, it was Hetty who inherited her father's abilities on the harpsichord, while Susan could astonish her father by repeating a musical air after hearing it just once. Fanny had little or no musical talent, and was teased by her boisterous brothers for not being able to read until she was eight. She was the quiet and retiring middle child who allowed her siblings to shine rather than competing with them for attention and praise. 'I ... was so peculiarly backward', she wrote later to

Hetty, 'that even our Susan [who was three years younger than Fanny] stood before me. She could read when I knew not my Letters' (*JL* XI, 286).

Fanny, however, had two key weapons at her disposal: her 'gnat-like eyes' – as Virginia Woolf so memorably depicted them in her essay on the Burney family[10] – and her acutely tuned memory. Fanny was short-sighted, and without spectacles saw everything through a myopic blur. She taught herself instead to catch the nuances or quirks of behaviour that betray a person's true character. She was by nature highly-strung: 'What a slight piece of machinery is the terrestrial part of thee, our Fannikin!' wrote her father's friend, Samuel Crisp, who became a kind of adopted uncle to the Burney children. 'A mere nothing; a blast, a vapour disorders the spring of thy watch' (*ED* I, lxxxii). But all the time she was quietly absorbing every detail of the conversation as it ebbed and flowed, storing it up before retreating to her room to write down as much as she could remember. In this way she trained her mind to recall an entire evening of dialogue with such accuracy that reading her letters and diaries is to be there with her in the room, listening to Dr Johnson, laughing with David Garrick, marvelling at the exploits of the explorer James Bruce or the scandalous character of Count Aleksei Orlov, who had arrived in England from the court of Catherine the Great, tainted by his involvement in the plot to murder the Tsar.

Fanny discovered in writing down 'my opinion of people when I first see them, & *how* I alter, or *how* confirm myself in it' (*EJL* I, 14) that she had a talent for word-spinning and character assassination, and that this was an effective outlet for her stifled emotions. The Burney household had become a complicated family unit, and Fanny, as a hypersensitive teenager, needed a secret vice. (Letter-writing was approved of, but private journals and fictions were not deemed suitable for young women of imagination but without an inheritance, who might otherwise become distracted from the task in hand: to find a socially acceptable and wealthy husband.) 'Our way of life is prodigiously altered', wrote Fanny in 1773, 'our Family is now very large' (*EJL* I, 315).

Her much-beloved mother had died shortly after the birth of Charlotte, leaving Charles with six children, the eldest of whom was only thirteen and the youngest just ten months. James was already away at sea, but the other five were left at home with a father who was for a time so upset by the loss of his wife that he was unable to carry on teaching. After several months of this inertia, he decided to travel to Paris, taking Hetty and Susan with him so that he could arrange for them to be educated on the Continent. Concerned for their future (without the prospect of a marriage dowry), he wanted to ensure that they acquired a proper French accent, 'to enable them to shift for themselves, as *I* had done'.[11] Fanny stayed behind with just Charles and