

# Introduction

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“But for my Pen,” the twenty-two-year-old Frances Burney wrote in 1774, “all the Adventures of this Noble family might sink to oblivion! I am amazed when I consider the greatness of my Importance, the dignity of my Task, & the Novelty of my pursuit!”<sup>1</sup> Inflected by the irony that often characterizes Burney’s reflections on her own authorship, this remark might seem self-deprecating or even dismissive. There is, though, a serious side to the mock-heroic manifesto. Burney was constantly mindful - as is demonstrated repeatedly in her letters, journals and prefatory matter - of her talented family’s reputation. She wrote, in part, to promote it; but she also censored, erased and burned in the service of its protection and preservation.<sup>2</sup> Thematically and formally, her family’s pursuits and aspirations shaped her fictions, her dramatic compositions, and her vast mass of life writing.

If Burney recognized this, then so did other contemporary commentators. An anonymous poem published in the *Morning Chronicle* almost fifty years later, attributed to Charles or Mary Lamb, provides a neat counterpoint to the youthful Burney’s recognition that her “Pen” worked in the service of her “Noble family”.

## Sonnet

To Miss Burney, on her Character of Blanch in “Country Neighbours,” a Tale

Bright spirits have arisen to grace the BURNEY name,

And some in letters, some in tasteful arts,

In learning some have borne distinguished parts;

Or sought through science of sweet sounds their fame:

And foremost *she*, renowned for many a tale  
Of faithful love perplexed, and of that good  
Old man, who, as CAMILLA's guardian, stood  
In obstinate virtue clad like coat of mail.  
Nor dost thou, SARAH, with unequal pace  
Her steps pursue. The pure romantic vein  
No gentler creature ever knew to feign  
Than thy fine Blanch, young with an elder grace,  
In all respects without rebuke or blame,  
Answering the antique freshness of her name.<sup>3</sup>

At the zenith of the Romantic period, then, Lamb was moved to celebrate the “Bright spirits” that “grace the BURNEY name” - which was, by 1820, prominent in “letters”, “tasteful arts”, “learning”, and “science of sweet sounds”. The Burney family boasted among its achievements not only Frances's novels but also the works of her father Charles (historian of music), the performances of her sisters Esther and Susanna (musicians), the seafaring accounts of her brother James (sailor), the publications of her brother Charles (collector, critic and classicist), the fiction of her half-sister Sarah Harriet (author of five works of fiction 1796-1839) and of her stepsister Elizabeth (better known as “Mrs. Meeke,” author of 24 novels 1795-1823), and the art of her cousin Edward Francisco Burney (painter and illustrator). The poem places Frances Burney as the “foremost” member of the family, citing her popular “tale[s] of faithful love perplexed” and giving special mention to her novel *Camilla: or, a Picture of Youth* (1796), the story of an unconventional family (emblemized by the popular character Sir Hugh Tyrold). But it is careful also to note the “equal pace” with which Sarah Harriet Burney, today a lesser-known writer, “pursue'd her sister's steps”, with her character Blanch from “Country Neighbours” acting as an implicit parallel to Sir Hugh in terms of vividness and popular appeal. The poem therefore carefully diffuses its praise, with

Sarah's actual novel meriting more extensive analysis than her sister's, as well as the honour of the titular dedication.

Between them, then, by 1820, the Burneys had excelled in most popular arts of the day, and garnered a considerable degree of celebrity. They were acquainted with most British luminaries working in the fields of literature, art, music, politics, botany, exploration, and court and Church circles, and their sociability played an important role in their professional success (Charles Lamb's personal friendship with James Burney probably had something to do with this sonnet's composition). They were also organized and self-important enough to keep voluminous amounts of correspondence (albeit riddled with significant ellipses), and they were famous enough to be the subject of numerous public and private anecdotes, homages, and reviews. Their lives and achievements are therefore exhaustively – perhaps uniquely – well-documented.

Over the last seventy years, some excellent scholarly use has been made of the thousands of pages of Burney-related archival material scattered throughout repositories around the world, which have been collected together in facsimile form at the Burney Centre (McGill University, Montreal). Frances Burney's own life and writings have generated biographies and critical editions, and the Burney Centre has labored tirelessly to bring editions of her journals and correspondence into the public domain.<sup>4</sup> In parallel with this, a psycho-biographical strain of literary criticism has emerged, spearheaded by Kristina Straub, Margaret Doody and Julia Epstein's important studies in the 1980s. These studies view Frances Burney's writings as heavily inflected by her family context – most importantly by her relationship with her father.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps as a result, in recent years much scholarly interest has moved beyond Frances Burney to encompass the activities of the rest of her family. The Burney Centre has recommenced work on a comprehensive edition of the letters of Charles Burney Sr., which was begun by Alvaro Ribeiro in 1991 and continues under the editorship of Peter Sabor. Lorna Clark's complete *Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney* uncovered the creative activity of the second family novelist.<sup>6</sup> Philip Olleson has published a selection of the letters of Susanna

Burney.<sup>7</sup> Simon MacDonald recently posed a convincing case for the identity of “Mrs. Meeke” - the most prolific novelist of the early nineteenth century - as Elizabeth Allen, later Elizabeth Meeke, half-sister of Frances Burney.<sup>8</sup>

There has been some recognition, too, that the Burney family was not just a collection of individuals who happened to be talented. In 1997, Catherine Gallagher influentially identified the Burneys as “a relatively new category of people...whom Pierre Bordieu has described as the holders and producers of ‘cultural capital’.”

They were conceived of as contributing to a collective property, a corporate fame. They puffed each other, sought patronage for each other, introduced each other to the right circles, negotiated each other’s contracts, and advertised each other’s subscriptions. Their accretion of cultural capital and the development of relationships that would make it grow was bound up with their most intimate sentiments and deepest sense of identity. The social significance of the family name, however, was not a given. The family was self-consciously engaged in the project of creating it. They had no rent roles, no pedigrees, no real or invented histories of military or public service; they had only talent and knowledge, copyrights and such “symbolic capital” as Dr Burney’s degree from Oxford and (much later) Frances’s place at court. The writings of other families might have been imagined as second-order realities, as accomplishments indicating a (past or present) economic independence, but the writings of the Burneys were the business of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

Gallagher’s astute characterization of the Burney family acts as a touchstone for this collection, and is cited more than once throughout these articles. But until now, no publication has specifically considered the family as a composite whole, addressing how its internal dynamics and external networks influenced the remarkable spate of cultural activity carried out by its polymath members. No publication has, in other words, considered how the

Burney family might help us to think differently about overlaps and intersections between kinship, professionalism and sociability.

This special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life*, which draws upon twelve papers presented at an international symposium held at Cardiff University in 2015, aims to do so.<sup>10</sup> At that symposium, we concluded that the interdisciplinary makeup of our programme provided a fitting way—perhaps the only sensible way—to understand a kinship network that was, itself, highly interdisciplinary. The literary endeavours of Frances Burney should not be seen in isolation from the artistic, critical, musical, scientific and commercial activities of other family members. As numerous papers pointed out, the creative partnerships facilitated within the family were crucial to securing any degree of literary success.

Three years later, we present this collection as a record of that symposium, and an advance upon its findings. These nine articles aspire to place Frances Burney and her writings firmly within the familial and sociable contexts that she saw as intrinsic to the exercise of her own creativity. They reveal archival discoveries, draw upon recently published biographical material, and use new methodologies to re-inscribe the contours of the Burney family's internal dynamics and sociable coteries. Consequently, they view Burney productions as texts stimulated by, and produced from within, a nexus of intellectual, professional and sociable networks.

To researchers working on Frances Burney, we issue a fresh challenge to consider her as an intensely networked writer who first and foremost wrote from, to and about her family. To scholars in the fields of literature, history, classics, music and art history who study the lives and works of “minor” Burneys, we aim to signpost the resources available for studying these figures, and proffer fresh ideas about how we might place them within their kinship and professional networks. We also hope, however, that this collection will be useful more broadly to scholars of the long eighteenth century who have not previously addressed the Burneys. Individual articles here will be of interest to those working on kinship, sociability, literature and science, women's writing, celebrity, professionalism, print culture, global

approaches, and the continued utility of biographical approaches to eighteenth-century literature.

Furthermore, this collection as a whole seeks to make a valuable contribution to several specific fields of enquiry. The first is the history of the family: with reference to Gallagher's "holders and producers of 'cultural capital'", we aspire to answer the call made by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall to consider the family as "the crucible from which more formal relations of work, politics and other institutions were forged".<sup>11</sup> The second is the history of the professions: by mobilising the Burney archive, we attempt to offer one solution to the problem, noted by Penelope Corfield in 1995, that generally "only fragmentary data" is available when attempting to "put successive generations of the entire professional population between 1700 and 1850 under the microscope".<sup>12</sup> The third – standing at the intersection of these two fields, though requiring a narrowing of focus and disciplinary shift – is the literary study of family-produced texts. Michelle Levy and Scott Krawczyk, in particular, have in recent years addressed family authorship as a "distinctive and influential cultural formation of the Romantic period", giving short case studies of the Wordsworths, Coleridges, Godwins, Shelleys, Edgeworths and Aikins.<sup>13</sup> The Burney family, as a uniquely celebrated, well-documented, intergenerational and interdisciplinary kinship network, both confirms and complicates the picture that Krawczyk and Levy have begun to map out. Studying the Burneys can provoke us to ask such questions as: Does the "literary family", as a phenomenon, emerge much earlier than (as Levy and Krawczyk's studies suggest) the 1790s? And, crucially, does the "literary" overlap in meaningful ways with other disciplines, bringing fresh impetus to Jon Klancher's work on the porousness of disciplinary categories during the eighteenth century?<sup>14</sup>

The articles in this collection seek to address these questions. They are ordered according to a loose chronological logic, for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the Burney family tree. However, we also wish to emphasize three distinct methodological approaches as we gesture towards some directions of travel for Burney studies in the future.

1. *Leveraging Life Writing; using recently published print editions of Burney journals and correspondence to perform or enable literary analysis:*

In “Recovery and Revisioning: The Literary Legacy of Sarah Harriet Burney”, Lorna Clark argues for the importance of Sarah Harriet Burney’s fiction, both as a creative imprint of the Burney family’s dynamics and as a body of work that foreshadows important preoccupations of the Victorian novel. In doing so, she draws upon not only her edition of Sarah Harriet’s correspondence, but also recent and forthcoming editions of her fiction.<sup>15</sup> Clark suggests that the “tectonic shift whereby women writers of the past began to reconnect with readers” still has a long way to settle before the landscape of eighteenth-century studies reflects the importance or the contemporary popularity of Sarah Harriet’s oeuvre.<sup>16</sup> That oeuvre, Clark notes, grew out of an odd mixture of Burney support and Burney indifference, relied heavily for its branding on the Burney name, and was sometimes appreciated more by readers than even her sister’s fiction. As Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow have recently noted, “The rationales for what and why we have chosen to remember when retelling women’s literary history are both instructive and sometimes unsettling.”<sup>17</sup>

In ‘Frances Burney and the Cantabs’, Stewart Cooke mines recently published volumes of Burney’s journals and letters in order to draw the most detailed picture to date of Frances Burney’s failed romance with George Cambridge - which may, in turn, enable new readings of her creative output during the 1780s and 1790s. He also re-inscribes the contours of this picture, suggesting that we may wish to tell the story of Burney’s relationship with a family instead of a man; with the “Cantabs” as a unit, rather than George Cambridge as an individual. During the mid-1780s, Cooke suggests, there was more than one kinship network open to Frances Burney. Her hypothetical status as an honorary “Cantab” was, by turns, enticing and the source of acute anxiety.

In my own article, “‘A Philosophical Gossip’: Science and Sociability in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*’, I draw on the final volume of Burney’s *Early Journals and Letters* in order to argue that her second novel is heavily coloured by the discourse of Linnaean

botany, with which she was familiar through the personal tutelage of the botanist Daniel Solander. Science and sociability are inextricably linked within Burney's novel, and her interest in science was enabled by the ardent sociability of the networks within which her family moved, and which they helped to create. Furthermore, taxonomic discourse supplied Burney with a vocabulary with which to express anxieties about her place within a newly hierarchized print marketplace. Her rejection of taxonomic sociability in *Cecilia* ultimately replicates her resistance to literary classification, and points towards a desire to be accounted, in her own words, "quelque chose extraordinaire".

2. *Archival Innovation; turning to new or neglected archives to make fresh discoveries:*

In "Esther Sleepe, Fan-maker, and her Family", Amy Louise Erickson presents a groundbreaking discovery from the apprentice register of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers in the City of London, which casts the Burney family, and the writings of its most famous member, in a new light. We have previously known little about Frances Burney's mother Esther Sleepe; Erickson's research reveals that Esther, her mother and her two sisters were in fact successful businesswomen who operated fan shops along the length of Cheapside. Erickson restores Frances Burney to her maternal kinship network of City businesswomen, suggesting that her mother's career had a formative impact on her professional identity.

Mascha Hansen's article, "A Bluestocking Friendship: The Correspondence Between Marianne Francis and Hester Lynch Piozzi", provides an overview of a fascinating archive held in the John Rylands Library. In biographies of Frances Burney and her father, Frances's nieces and nephews are often given short shrift in comparison with their famous forebears. But Hansen argues that this generation contained a formidable "third-generation Bluestocking", Marianne Francis, who excelled in musical and academic talents. Marianne's gifts, however, were not nurtured by the older generation of the Burneys, but were rather encouraged by the elderly Hester Piozzi (by turns a passionate friend and an implacable enemy of several members of that older



generation). Marianne's case thus encourages us to consider how, when familial networks failed an aspiring intellectual, they might have sought lines of figurative kinship elsewhere.

In "Authoring the 'Author of my Being' in the Memoirs of Dr. Burney", Cassandra Ulph locates Frances Burney's *Memoirs* of her father within a wider field of "unstable" Romantic biography. This instability, Ulph argues, allows Burney to inscribe her own literary authority above and beyond her domestic role as Dr. Burney's daughter. Ulph brings evidence to light, from the archives of the Burney Centre and elsewhere, which offers fresh insights into how, in the *Memoirs*, Frances Burney re-works her father's notes to consolidate her own professional identity. Careful attention to manuscripts has resulted in some of the most incisive recent criticism on Frances Burney's writing to date, and Ulph's article suggests that the manuscripts of her family members, too, might offer fruitful avenues for the tracing of composition processes.<sup>18</sup>

3. *Conceptual Creativity; using relatively new critical methodologies to re-inscribe the contours of the Burney family's internal dynamics and sociable coteries:*

In "The March of Intimacy: Dr. Burney and Dr. Johnson", Peter Sabor draws on Dustin Griffin's re-conceptualisation of eighteenth-century literary patronage, and the wider concerns of a recent critical interest in Romantic sociability, to offer a revisionist reading of Charles Burney Sr.'s extraordinary talent for networking. Sabor shows that Burney initiated and burnished a friendship with Samuel Johnson, who would play a crucial role in facilitating his transition from lowly musician to respected man of letters. Despite Johnson's own lack of interest in music, he was willing to aid his friend with his *magnum opus*: a history of music that would eventually extend to four volumes. And that assistance included ghost-writing: accepting credit for Johnson's work is, Sabor argues, the "final triumph of sociability".

In "'Bunny! O! Bunny!': The Burney family in Oceania", Ruth Scobie unites material approaches with the concerns of the "global eighteenth century" in order to

interrogate the numerous links of the Burney family with South Sea culture. The Burneys, she shows, had privileged access to Oceanic material through Frances's brother James. Scobie explains how "Jemm's Otaehitie *Merchandize*" was used by the family to create real and imagined costumes for self-promotion, and to assert expertise, fashionability, and cosmopolitanism. Ultimately, Scobie suggests that public displays of Tahitian "*Merchandize*" always involved careful navigation between contradictory perceptions of Oceania as a setting for pleasure and horror; a source of Enlightenment and of outrage.

In "Mrs Meeke and Minerva: The Mystery of the Marketplace", Anthony Mandal provides an innovative bibliographic overview of Elizabeth Meeke's literary output. Reflecting a recent interest in authorial attribution and self-fashioning, Mandal points out that Meeke employed a complex system of authorship: some works carried her name ("Mrs Meeke"); others were anonymous; a third strain employed the pseudonym "Gabielli". As an author of numerous fictions forced to adopt a multifaceted persona within the marketplace, Mandal thus argues that Meeke represents and was shaped by the culture created by William Lane's Minerva Press for its voracious patrons. He provides instructive comparisons, too, with the ways in which Meeke's sister novelists, Frances and Sarah Harriet, were branded, reviewed and patronized.

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Much work remains to be done in the field of Burney studies. As well as the completion of the *Court Journals* of Frances and the *Letters* of Charles Sr., caches of important correspondence from "minor" members of the family (most notably Charles Jr., James and Charlotte) remain largely inaccessible. Very little synthesizing biographical and critical work has been done to provide detailed biographical portraits of these Burneys, or to consider their professional activities in the detail they deserve.

We should consider, too, how Burney material might most usefully be made accessible to researchers and to the public. Devoney Looser recently issued a call "to think

more creatively and collaboratively about new biographical practices that could emerge for Romantic women writers in concert with big data”, citing Macdonald’s “fascinating, even profound” discovery about Elizabeth Meeke as a trailblazing example of what might be achieved by such an approach: “Might adding yet another author-relative to the Burney family pantheon—and a highly productive one at that—mean that we ought to re-envision the pressures [Frances] Burney faced (or did not face) in her authorial career?”<sup>19</sup> Understanding of the Burney family would benefit – as Mandal’s paper here confirms - from further digital innovation. In particular, digital facsimiles of correspondence could enable social network analysis of the kind made possible by the Godwin’s Diary Project.<sup>20</sup> Serious attention might then be paid to sociable links including (but not limited to) Charles Burney Sr.’s involvement in astronomical circles; James Burney’s relationships with Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt; and Charles Parr Burney’s links with early Victorian artistic culture.

Nonetheless, as Looser points out - and as this volume confirms - the discovery of Meeke’s identity (enabled by a turn to “big data”) only takes on profundity in concert with information that has been garnered through other, more traditional methodologies: hard archival graft, painstakingly edited print editions, and thoughtful critical analysis of both life writing and published literary works. There are several paths ahead, then, for Burney studies, and it is likely that their crossroads will be the points where the view is most instructive. This collection highlights the likelihood that such intersections lie ahead. We hope that future Burney-related work will confirm their precise locations.

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Burney, Journal for 1774, February 20<sup>th</sup>, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, general ed. Lars Troide, 5 vols. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988-2012), 2:4.

<sup>2</sup> See Claire Harman, “My Immense Mass of Manuscripts: Fanny Burney as Archivist, Biographer and Autobiographer”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 90:2 (September 2014), 15-26.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13 July 1820; rpt., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas (London, 1903; rpt., New York: AMS Press, 1968), 5: 82-83.

<sup>4</sup> See the list of ‘Commonly Used Abbreviations’ for full bibliographical details of these publications.

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<sup>5</sup> Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987); Margaret Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Subsequent important multi-author studies that place Frances Burney in the context of literal and figurative kinship networks include Jane Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*, ed. Lorna Clark (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Philip Olleson (ed.), *The Journals and Letters of Susan Burney: Music and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Simon Macdonald, "Identifying Mrs. Meeke: Another Burney Family Novelist", *Review of English Studies* 64 (2013), 367-85.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 216-217.

<sup>10</sup> Other speakers at that symposium were Philip Olleson, Matthew Spencer and Christine Davies. I would like to thank the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University and the Burney Society (UK) for funding this symposium. Thanks are also due to my co-convenor, Dr. Catherine Han.

<sup>11</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (Bury St. Edmunds: Routledge, 2002), xxxix

<sup>12</sup> Penelope Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), 225.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2. See also Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 13-14).

<sup>15</sup> *The Romance of Private Life* was published in 2008 by Pickering & Chatto, under the Chawton House Women Writers imprint. Sarah Harriet Burney's remaining literary works will be published in four volumes by Routledge over the next five years.

<sup>16</sup> Isobel Grundy, "Preface", in *Women's Writing, 1660-1830: Feminisms and Futures*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow, "Introduction", in *Women's Writing, 1660-1830*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Hilary Havens "Revisions and Revelations in Frances Burney's *Cecilia* Manuscript," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55.3 (2015): 537-58.

<sup>19</sup> Devoney Looser (2015) "British Women Writers, Big Data and Big Biography, 171830", *Women's Writing*, 22:2 (2015), 165-171, 166-167.

<sup>20</sup> "William Godwin's Diary: Reconstructing a Social and Political Culture, 1788-1836", available at <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/index2.html>