



BISHOP
GROSSETESTE
UNIVERSITY

[BG Research Online](#)

Ulph, C. (2018). Authoring the 'author of my being' in Memoirs of Doctor Burney. *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 42 (2), 152-169.

This accepted manuscript was published in its final form by Duke University Press on 1 April 2018 at <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-4384603>.

This version may differ slightly from the final published version.

Copyright is retained by the author/s and/or other copyright holders.

End users generally may reproduce, display or distribute single copies of content held within BG Research Online, in any format or medium, for personal research & study or for educational or other not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- The full bibliographic details and a hyperlink to (or the URL of) the item's record in BG Research Online are clearly displayed;
- No part of the content or metadata is further copied, reproduced, distributed, displayed or published, in any format or medium;
- The content and/or metadata is not used for commercial purposes;
- The content is not altered or adapted without written permission from the rights owner/s, unless expressly permitted by licence.

For other BG Research Online policies see <http://researchonline.bishopg.ac.uk/policies.html>.

For enquiries about BG Research Online email bgro@bishopg.ac.uk.

Authoring the ‘author of my being’ in *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*

Cassandra Ulph, Bishop Grosseteste University

In 1832, Frances Burney (1752-1840) finally published her three-volume *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, which she had begun after the death of her father Dr Charles Burney in 1814.¹ Burney had spent her career establishing carefully separated professional and domestic identities: but in her final published work, she would collapse this separation by using her specialist professional skills in combination with her own intimate, domestic experience. Burney’s claim to authority for *Memoirs* was that she was the subject’s daughter, and had access to that true familial privacy that I have argued elsewhere is valorised in her journals, her letters and particularly her final novel; yet in *Memoirs*, this promise of access to the privatised environment of the Burney household is disingenuous.² Instead, Burney foregrounds her professional identity in order to present a narrative that is in many ways detached from the private reality of family life. She reconstructs her father’s public persona, and, to an even greater extent, her own. The character of “Frances Burney” in the narrative is largely defined through the public and emphatically professional activity of literary production. Often hagiographic, arguably self-serving and, in places, demonstrably inaccurate, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* is nevertheless a significant articulation of Burney’s fraught relationship not merely with her father, but with the cultural and professional implications of being Dr Burney’s daughter.³ *Memoirs* should thus be understood as a careful staging of that inheritance.

In the construction of her biographical work, Burney assumes the narrative pose of editor: her father’s memoirs are “arranged from his own manuscripts, from family papers, and from personal recollections” (*Mem.* 1, frontispiece). However, as many scholars have pointed

out, these “manuscripts” and “family papers” are extensively excised and suppressed. Gillen D’Arcy Wood accuses Burney of “outright editorial suppression” and describes her *Memoirs* as an “idealized, heavily censored account”.⁴ Miriam Benkovitz, one of the first scholars to compare the extant manuscript material with the finished product, characterised Burney’s biography of her father as “unjust and untruthful”.⁵ The remaining fragments of Charles Burney’s memoirs were partially published in 1988 by Slava Klima, Gary Bowers and Kerry Grant, who in their introduction to that volume trace Burney’s long and painful editorial process through her own journals and letters. Like Wood, Klima, *et al* concede that Burney suppressed and idealised much of her father’s life, but they give more extensive treatment to the circumstances behind the *Memoirs’* publication. They point out that “even after her destruction of the bulk of his memoirs, Mme d’Arblay still planned to edit her father’s letters”, but in 1828 she realised that she would be unable to publish letters addressed *to* Charles for legal reasons, so abandoned this plan. They then describe the pressure on Burney to come up with some form of memoir, “as publishers kept hinting that if her own account of her father did not come out, some outside less qualified than herself might wish to publish one”, and argue that it is for this reason that Burney moved from editing to acting as “biographer”.⁶

This narrative of compromise, like much of the criticism that *Memoirs* has received since its publication, is underpinned by an assumption that biography was, and is, a stable form, rather than a site of intense conflict over the nature of knowledge, truth, and art. Benkovitz’s criticism of Burney is rooted in a similar assumption: “no biographer with a full sense of responsibility”, she writes, “can ignore or corrupt the recollections of his subject even when they are plainly illusory” (257). This article conversely, recognises the inherent instability of Romantic biography as a form, and demonstrates it through a comparative analysis of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s sentiments on domestic biography with those of Lætitia-Matilda Hawkins. This instability, I argue, allowed Burney to inscribe her own literary

authority above and beyond her domestic role as Dr Burney's daughter. In so doing, she offered a counterpoint to the version of professional identity that she had sought to uphold throughout her previous career, in which the woman writer's labouring body preserves respectability through its domestication.

Boswellian Biography: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hawkins

Publishers' warnings of the likelihood of an unauthorised biography of her father would probably have recalled to Burney's mind the tussle over the literary remains of her friend and mentor Samuel Johnson after his death in 1784. At that time, Burney had refused to provide James Boswell (1740-1795) with any letters from Johnson to herself; upon hearing in 1787 that Boswell had spoken of her, she wrote: "I feel sorry to be named or remembered by that Biographical, anecdotal memorandum, til his book of poor Dr Johnson's Life is finished & published".⁷ Burney's distaste for Boswell's project denotes not only her own resistance to being "named or remembered" by Boswell, but also her ambivalence towards the figure of the biographer. To be "remembered" by Boswell is to be placed in the hands of an absurd "anecdotal memorandum", rather than a responsible literary professional. The anecdote is a form that had been consciously invoked by Hester Piozzi (1741-1821) in her *Anecdotes of the late Samuel Johnson LLD* (1786), of which Burney had also disapproved: writing in 1785 to Piozzi's daughter, Hester Maria Thrale, she exclaims "'What will she not say!' is precisely my question to myself, whenever I consider the subject of this threatened life".⁸ Burney's derogation of Boswell as "anecdotal", therefore, consigns him to the same (debased) category as Burney's former friend, whose "imprudent anecdotes" she feared.⁹

At the same time, Burney's objection may in part derive from Boswell's habit of transcribing events as they happened, rendering private life unsafe from the prying eyes of the "memorandum". In light of Burney's own habit of recounting conversations verbatim for

the amusement of her family in her long journal-letters, this discomfort with Boswell's technique might seem hypocritical. However, it also underscores Burney's anxiety about the spaces in which literary labour takes place, as well as those into which it should or should not intrude. Boswell's "memorandum[ing]" - that is his habit of on-the-spot note-taking - brings literary labour into the sociable public of the drawing room, blurring the distinction between social and professional selves that Burney had carefully maintained throughout her life. Burney's espousal of professional print-based rather than manuscript publication, as Betty Schellenberg has observed, allowed her to separate her work from her private (and gendered) self by eschewing the problematic reliance of manuscript culture on personal patronage.¹⁰ However, while in some senses print publication helped Burney to overcome the limitations of a gendered artistic culture, it did position her as a public professional in an unregulated public market, in which the lionised author and the celebrated work were treated as almost interchangeable. As I argue elsewhere, Burney's resistance to performing her authorship in the pseudo-privacy of the drawing room had led her at an early stage to privilege domestic privacy, as a creative space uninflected by the commodification of the artistic producer by an audience; the household of Charles Burney, inhabited and frequented by a network of artistic professionals, provided the model for this idealised space.¹¹ It is for this reason, then, that maintaining the vision of that household in *Memoirs* is of particular importance to Burney's own artistic identity. Equally, it was this privileging of private artistic space that rendered Boswell's "memoranduming" so distasteful to Burney, both as a ostentatious performance of literary labour, and a commodification of the artistic privacy she so valued.

Burney's discomfort with Boswell's biographical strategy echoes an increasing anxiety, in the late-Georgian period, about the relationship between biography and literary celebrity. In his 1816 "Letter to a friend of Robert Burns", William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is similarly suspicious of the "Boswellian plan" of biography, constituted of "gross and trivial

recollections".¹² Bewailing "the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life", Wordsworth tries to establish a distinction between a man's public and private character, arguing that "the maintenance of private dignity, is one of the most efficacious guardians of public freedom." In particular, Wordsworth insists upon the sanctity of the domestic in the case of authors: he argues, "our business is with their books" (122). As Julian North observes, "Wordsworth figures the biographer as a violator of home and hearth" (although Ian Hamilton suggests this insistence partially stems from Wordsworth's own anxiety not to have details of his private life made public).¹³ While in one sense, then, his denouncing of Boswellism can be understood as pragmatic, Wordsworth's resistance to making the private self available, unmediated, to the public also expresses a familiar fear of evaluative disruption: the claim that "our business", and thus inherent value, should be found in "books" parallels Burney's resistance to the disruption of artistic value through an obsession with the person of the producer.

Such "intrusions" into the domestic sphere are similarly characterised as disrupting literary value by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), who dismisses such works as "gossip": in his 1810 essay "A Prefatory Observation on Modern Biography" he denounces "garulous [sic] biography" and "the habit of gossiping in general", and particularly its encroachment into biographical works:

A crime it is [...] thus to introduce the spirit of vulgar scandal, and personal inquietude into the Closet and the Library, environing with evil passions the very Sanctuaries, to which we should flee for refuge from them! [...] And both the Authors and Admirers of such Publications, in what respect are they less Truants and Deserters from their own Hearts, and from their appointed Task of understanding and amending them, than the

most garrulous female Chronicler, of the goings-on of yesterday in the Families of her Neighbours and Towns-folk?¹⁴

Coleridge explicitly designates a certain type of biographical “gossip” as feminine, and thus implicitly degraded. The figure of the “garrulous female Chronicler”, consequently, diminishes the status of the female biographer. By Coleridge’s reckoning, the “female Chronicler” is intrinsically domestic, and the domestic is not a fit subject for biography: “genuine Biography” should “withstand the cravings of worthless curiosity, as distinguished from the thirst after useful knowledge” (286). The position that a “female Chronicler” finds herself in is thus one in which her assumed domesticity allows her access to knowledge of hearth and home which, according to Coleridge, is at odds with the “useful”, and in Wordsworth’s terms is “a gross intrusion”.

The “Boswellian plan” was not without its female critics; Lætitia-Matilda Hawkins (1759-1835), the daughter of Charles Burney’s bitter rival Sir John Hawkins (1719-1789), and, like Frances Burney, a novelist who published memoirs of her musicologist father, lamented “the greedy craving for portrait and anecdote” that in 1822 she would denounce as “the literary vice of the present age”.¹⁵ However, despite Hawkins’s evident disapproval of the “literary vice” of biography in its Boswellian form, she does not uphold Wordsworth’s horror at the invasion of hearth and home. For Hawkins, by contrast, biographers have a civic and cultural responsibility to represent the domestic. In *Letters on the Female Mind* (1793), she identifies a “disparity of minuteness” as the distinction between “ancient and modern biography”, and calls for a rebalancing of the public and private characters of “heroes”:

It is not on the page of local history, it is not on the records of war, that any hero’s private character appears in a point of view that can enable us to judge what he was as

a man: he must be followed into his retirements: he must lay aside his helmet and his breast-plate, before we can decide what share his head and heart have borne in the achievements [sic] of the day.¹⁶

Hawkins's emphasis on the "private" realm of "retirement" privileges the inherent authenticity and authority of the domestic sphere of which the patriarch is head. Yet Hawkins's narrative pose in her own biography of her father is constantly that of compositor rather than author: "endeavour[ing] to preserve small things from oblivion".¹⁷ She attributes her work to a variety of "sources" from amongst her father's (male) acquaintance, including Richard Clarke (1739-1831) and Samuel Tolfrey (?1754-1825), and disclaims legitimate authority in deferring to theirs:

Did I know of any fable of an honest Jay who returned with thanks the Peacock's plumage, I would refer to this fiction to justify my obtruding on you this volume.

(i. preface)

Hawkins draws attention to her speciation as "Jay" who has borrowed "plumage" it cannot naturally produce. Hawkins's pose of "honesty" is thus dependent on a declaration that although she represents, she does not create, nor does she claim to do so. This apologia for her masquerade of authority reinforces the gendered, Aristotelian genealogy of creativity, at the same time as it invokes such a genealogy as justification of her authority. In so doing, she upholds her claim to biographical truth from the privileged position of domestic intimacy, without risking the impropriety of the "garrulous female chronicler", and legitimises female memory as a re-inscription of (in Coleridge's phrase) paternalist "useful knowledge".

The “Biographical” Dr. Burney

Burney’s re-inscription of the paternal, although with similar origins to Hawkins’s, takes a more radical form: one that has been frequently characterised as self-serving. Wood asserts that Burney “began her writing career as her father’s dutiful amanuensis, and ended it the most tyrannical of his editors” (85). Although Wood identifies an important shift here, this tale of editorial revenge is only one dimension of this complex relationship. Burney appears motivated in part by an impulse to enshrine and protect her father’s reputation as “Man of Letters” (*Mem.*, 1:ix), in continuing the editorial process they had begun together. However, she also inscribes the tale of her own literary evolution: in elevating Charles as a sociable, conversational, and learned man she distinguishes herself from him as a professional, and as an “author”.

Far from Hawkins’s attempt to “save small things from oblivion”, for Burney, preservation risks publicity and oblivion secures privacy. As a result, Charles Burney’s own journals are only occasionally and tantalisingly reproduced in his daughter’s text, and are far outnumbered by excerpts from her own journals and letters. The highest incidence of insertions from Charles’s own papers occurs in the period during which Burney was separated from her father and living in France. Unable herself to bear witness to her father’s life at this point, Burney inserts these fragments somewhat apologetically. She writes that “no further narrative, of which the detail can be personal or reciprocal with the Editor, can now be given of Dr. Burney”, implying that “narrative” sanctioned by the authority of “the Editor” is preferable to the “fragments of memoirs” upon which she is reduced to relying (*Mem.*, 3: 321). This counters the editorial strategy suggested in her introduction, in which Burney invokes her father’s “intentions, or rather, directions [...] that his Memoirs should be published”; her description here of “the task of arranging the ensuing collations with her own personal recollections” suggests Burney’s own memory will simply help shape that “arrangement” of those “manuscript stores” left behind by her father (1: v-vi).

Burney cites ‘a nervous laxity of expression, a monotonous prolixity of detail’ (3:383) as her reason for suppressing the majority of her father’s manuscripts:

And hence, consequently, or rather unavoidably, have arisen in their present state those abridged, or recollected, not copied Memoirs; which, though on one hand largely curtailed from their massy original, are occasionally lengthened on the other, from confidential communications; joined to a whole life’s recollections of the history, opinions, disposition and character of Dr. Burney. (3:384)

Burney’s claim, that she is better able to convey “the history, opinions, disposition and character of Dr. Burney” than Charles himself, is based on the assertion that his style had declined in old age, and bore no comparison with the works of his prime: “it never would have seen the public light, had it been revised by its composer in his healthier days of chastening criticism” (3:383). Thus as literary executor, Burney’s authority lies in her ability to distinguish between the true (that is, publishable) Charles Burney, and the frail and ageing father in need of protection and privacy. However, this suppression continues a trend established from the outset of *Memoirs*, in which Burney repeatedly declines to include her father’s writing in favour of her own. In the first volume, for example, Burney chooses to exclude the bulk of her father’s youthful anecdotes detailing his early life in Shrewsbury. She justifies this omission by stating: “These accounts, when committed to paper, produced without the versatility of countenance, and the vivacious gestures that animated the colloquial disclosure, so lose their charm, as to appear vapid, languid, and tedious” (1:4). Burney contrasts this with her father’s later eminence as ‘not only one of the best informed, but one of the most polished members of society’ (1:4-5), revealing a crucial emphasis on Charles’s conversational, rather than literary, talents.

Similarly, Burney is sparing in reproducing her father's poetry. Fancying himself (in Ribeiro's words), as "a bit of a poet", Charles had produced innumerable poetic effusions over the years (xxvii). Burney concedes occasionally in including these, but she is quick to disavow their artistic merit. She writes that "the following affectionate rhymes [...] must not, in these fastidious days, be called verses [...] They are inserted only biographically" (1:90). On another occasion the reader "is entreated to remember that they were not designed for the press" (1:147). While she occasionally inserts what she calls "his doggerel chronology" (1:289), this is not a production for public consumption, unlike the professional texts Burney herself produces. Charles's poems are not robust enough to stand up to the "fastidious" public, as they are the product of "affection", an expression of self rather than act of an artistic creation in its own right. In this sense, Burney's suppression of much of this poetry can be seen as an attempt to maintain the privacy of her father's "affectionate" writing as distinct from his published, specialist works. Overwhelmingly, though, she privileges her literary-professional judgement over her father's; furthermore, she betrays a devaluing of the "biographical", as opposed to the literary, that evokes her earlier distaste for Boswell's methods. While her father's work is a document, included "only biographically", Burney's reframing of his amateur attempts is, by contrast, most certainly "designed for the press".

Whilst the framing device for the work is the life of Charles Burney, *Memoirs* more significantly offers an opportunity for Burney to narrate the story of her own authorship. Her choice of biographical form for this last publication thus serves a dual purpose, mobilising late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century biographical fashion that privileged the representation of the man of letters. Firstly, by representing her father *as* a man of letters, Burney constructs for him a public-professional identity that protects the privacy and domesticity of the family circle. Secondly, Burney uses this persona to actively distinguish the sociable literary pursuits of her father from her own mode of professional authorship, in which literary acts take place

in private and its products are distinct from the gendered body. Female biographers such as Mary Hays have been understood to lay claim to the biographical genre as feminine literary praxis, a theory that Hawkins's privileging of domestic truth would seem to support. Burney, however, employs the biographical as a counterpoint to the literary, thus re-inscribing her professional expertise rather than her gendered subjectivity.¹⁸

Pedigrees of authorship

Burney's determination to succeed within a male-dominated field, rather than in a specifically female canon, has been widely noted. Janice Thaddeus records that in her address to the reviewers on the anonymous publication of *Evelina*, Burney "quotes from Pope and Buckingham, putting herself even more squarely in the company of men, to add a moustache to her mask".¹⁹ Jane Spencer has argued that "biological kinship between writers played a significant part in their lives as a context for their writing, and affected the ways they connected themselves to literary tradition".²⁰ Surely, then, being the daughter of Charles Burney – a literary success in his own right – offered Burney a ready-made pedigree from the male line. However, as Spencer goes on to observe, "Charles Burney the author-father had a rival: the paternal line of earlier writers who offered Burney a tradition to join" (49). Although Burney indeed looked to other 'literary fathers', most prominently Samuel Johnson, Charles's own literary and social success unavoidably informed her self-presentation; in *Memoirs*, Burney's biological father is presented as key to her own literary development.

Burney's attempt to account for her editorial choices in *Memoirs* should thus be seen within this matrix of literary and biological genealogy, expressing simultaneously her own sense of literary authority and her identity in relation to her subject. While critics have treated Burney's self-narration in *Memoirs* as a failure of biographical form, biography is in fact a peculiarly appropriate form for Burney's double negotiation of filial and authorial identity. Her

distancing of herself from the “Boswellian” plan is thus of a piece with the more complex, and fraught, series of identifications and separations she is forced to confront with the death of her father. As Paul Eakin has observed, “because the assertion of autonomy is dependent on [a] dynamic of recognition, identity is *necessarily* relational”.²¹ In his study of what he has termed “patriographies”, or memoirs of fathers, G. Thomas Couser argues that these texts are

best read not as static representations of fathers (i.e. biographies) [...] but rather as attempts to claim or even fashion a relationship with a father who is absent – because of death, geographical distance, or emotional reserve. I am not suggesting that the narratives are addressed to those fathers; in most cases, the father’s death prevents that. Rather the narratives are attempts to alter an existing relationship, or even effect a new one, with the author’s father.²²

An examination of a much-cited letter from Frances Burney to Charles, responding to his suggestion she withdraw her play *Love and Fashion* in 1800, offers an idea of the literary/biological relationship that the *Memoirs* sought to alter. Unlike other letters since her marriage to Alexander D’Arbly (1754-1818), Burney signs this letter “F. B.” rather than “F. d’A.”, invoking her consanguineal, rather than conjugal, identity, as a member of a family of artistic professionals. Invoking her “Burney”-ness, she emphasises the relationship of her literary identity to that of her father; she appeals to him to accept the separate nature of that identity precisely *because* of their kinship:

rather say to yourself with an internal smile, ‘After all – tis but *like Father like Child* – for to what walk do I confine myself? She took my example in writing – She takes it in ranging – Why then, after all should I lock her up in one paddock, well as she has fed there, if she says she finds nothing more to nibble – while *I* find all the Earth unequal

to my ambition, & mount the skies to content it? Come on then, poor Fan – the World has acknowledged you my offspring – & I will *disencourage* you no more’. (Frances Burney to Charles Burney, 11 February 1800, *JL*, 4:395)

Here Burney appeals to her father through a shared family language, “disencourage” being a term borrowed from family friend Kitty Cooke (4:395 n. 3); she emphasises their similarities – “in writing” – as the basis for their differences or “ranging”. This paddock metaphor is reminiscent of Burney’s earlier, public mis/identification with her literary forefathers in the preface to *Evelina*:

I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked; whence, though they have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers, and though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren.²³

The “barren” field in which there is nothing left to “nibble” casts Burney as a pioneer, abandoning exhausted subjects and, ultimately, exhausted genres, for pastures new. Burney thus moves on from the limits proscribed by her father, as she has moved on from fields “culled” by Johnson, Rousseau, Richardson, Fielding and Smollett. Just as Burney had aligned herself with, while distinguishing herself from, her literary fathers, her letter of 1800 claims the same simultaneous inheritance and independence from Charles, demanding both recognition and autonomy. While the fields she left behind in *Evelina* have been harvested by the foremost authors of the eighteenth century, the “paddock” of novels in which Charles would confine her has already been “nibbled” by another literary heavyweight: Frances Burney. Having exhausted that field herself, rather than being superseded by the next generation, the protean Burney evolves. It is this typically Burneyan quality of adaptability that she openly

claims as her biological inheritance, which has allowed her (as Sophie Coulombeau argues in another contribution to this collection) to out-evolve the Richardsons, Fieldings and Smolletts from whose literary lineage she has emerged.

Burney is acutely aware that “the world has acknowledged [her Dr Burney’s] daughter”, and while she embraces some parts of that inheritance, she remains alive to the threat of limitation it carries. In *Memoirs*, Burney turns the tables on Charles by having the world acknowledge him *her* father, understanding his identity in relation to hers. While Burney praises the works that brought her father acclaim within polite circles, she skirts the substance of his career, the teaching of music, and emphasises instead Charles’s social achievements and polite, lettered works. This conforms to an emerging nineteenth-century ideal of biography, in that it raises a polite and, significantly, public memorial to the father which acts simultaneously to obfuscate his private self and the reality of his professional life. In so doing, Burney establishes a lettered inheritance for herself, but one that is distinct from her own literary achievements, demonstrating that she has evolved from the sociable, or public, literature of her father and succeeded to a form that was becoming increasingly aligned with the new domestic aesthetic of literature.

In the rare instances that Burney does refer to her father’s musical activities in *Memoirs*, she usually presents him in his role as a public literary figure, rather than as a musical performer. While Burney does give extensive space to the composition and reception her father’s *A General History of Music*, this is represented as a literary rather than a musical achievement: she writes that “the literary world seemed filled with its praise” (2:213). Charles’s musical career is frequently reinterpreted in *Memoirs* in a manner that elides the technical expertise that is a result of his artisanal training, and by extension his professionalism (an act of suppression which, as Amy Erickson suggests elsewhere in this collection, Burney also applied to her maternal ancestry). In one instance, Burney records a royal audience in which

her father presents copies of his account of the 1784 Commemoration of Handel to King George III (1738-1820) and Queen Charlotte (1744-1818), which included engravings by his nephew Edward Francisco Burney (1760-1848).²⁴ Burney's account of the conversation between her father and the King is bizarre: Charles had been authorised to write the official account of the Handel Commemoration on the basis of his professional expertise, yet in Burney's account of the discussion of the performance, Charles merely 'laughingly agreed' with the King's opinions, before turning the conversation to a suitably literary discussion of Shakespeare (3:18-9). Even more striking is the way in which this conversation, in the account given in the *Memoirs*, ultimately turns to that other eminent author, Burney herself:

...their Majesties both re-opened their books to look at the engravings; when the King, remarking to several of them the signature of E. F. Burney, said: 'All your family are geniuses, Dr. Burney. Your daughter—'

'O! your daughter,' cried the Queen, lifting up one of her hands, 'is a very extraordinary genius, indeed!'

'And is it true,' said the King, eagerly, 'that you never saw *Evelina* before it was printed?'

'Nor even till long after it was published,' answered the Doctor. This excited a curiosity for the details that led, from question to question, to almost all the history that has here been narrated; and which seemed so much to amuse their Majesties, that they never changed the theme during the rest of a long audience. (3:19-20)

It should be remembered that this was a private audience, and that Burney's sole source for this anecdote would have been her father. The account of this incident is in fact extant in Charles Burney's fragmentary memoirs, and confirms Burney's account of the Queen's praise of her

genius. However, in Charles's version, the Queen's remark is left unexamined, and the King turns the conversation back to Charles's work:

[...]“Ay your daughter says the Queen lifting up one of her hands is a very extraordinary genius indeed!” - -

Then the K. said that I had made a much more considerable book of the Commem. issue than he expected, & even, adds his Maj^{ty}. “than probably you expected yourself.” Then the performance in general was discussed [...]²⁵

Charles's memoir is fragmentary, so it is of course possible that the conversation had later turned to *Evelina*. However, the rest of the extant document recounts Charles's discussion of musical matters with the King, which his daughter excludes. The manner in which Frances's version of this anecdote about a musical and literary achievement by Charles descends into an anecdote-within-an-anecdote centralising her authorship is almost comic in its absurdity. Burney's inadvertent admission that the questions of the royal couple lead “to almost the history that has here been narrated” (i.e. the history of the publication of *Evelina*) indicates that the real narrative of *Memoirs* is that of her own literary career. The scene closes with Charles's “parental pleasure”, and he returns home “a flattered father” (3:20), thus recasting his satisfaction rather in terms of Burney's achievements than his own.

Burney's account of the Handel Commemoration closes by reverting to the narrative of the publication of *Evelina*. Nevertheless, it is insistently expressed in terms of inheritance and a creative genealogy (“All your family are geniuses, Dr. Burney...”). In her account of the *History of Music*, Burney seizes another opportunity to claim a literary forefather whilst also claiming independence from him. Charles's literary labours have secluded him from the world: with the second volume of his work complete, “he resumed his wonted place at the opera, at

concerts and in circles of musical excellence”, which Burney is quick to point out are socially sanctioned because “presided over by the royal and accomplished legislator of taste, fashion, and elegance, the Prince of Wales” (2:215). While this offers a concession to the musical world of which her father was a prominent member, Burney makes no mention of a return to teaching duties or performance. His activities here appear purely social, and the extent of his musical exertions seems to be to “compare notes” with the Prince of Wales “upon what was performing” (2:215). Thus Charles is positioned as an observer and commentator rather than participant (which he undoubtedly would sometimes have been) in those performances that unavoidably infiltrate *Memoirs*.

By contrast, literature is Frances Burney’s constant medium. As with her account of the Handel Commemoration, Burney closes the account of her father’s literary achievement in *History of Music*, with a return to her own career. Burney’s narration of her father’s role in the composition of *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782) elides his active suppression of her stage comedy *The Witlings*, her first literary project after *Evelina*. In *Memoirs*, she records that the “casting vote” of Samuel Crisp (1707-1783) consolidated the pressure from the two “daddies” to commence her second novel:

The wishes of two such personages were, of course, resistless; and a new mental speculation, which already, though secretly, had taken a rambling possession of her ideas, upon the evils annexed to that species of family pride which, from generation to generation, seeks, by mortal wills, to arrest the changeful range of succession enacted by the immutable laws of death, became the basis of a composition which she denominated *Memoirs of an Heiress*. (2:216)

Burney here rapidly proceeds from the “resistless” wishes of the two patriarchs, her father and Crisp, to the “family pride” that propels the plot of *Cecilia* by means of “mortal wills”. In this manner Burney thematically links Cecilia Beverley’s problematic inheritance to her own fraught literary heritage. This attempt, by Cecilia’s uncle and by Compton Delvile, to “arrest the changeful range of succession” echoes Burney’s anguished plea to her father, after the withdrawal from production of *Love and Fashion*, to allow her “ranging” as part of her inheritance. Burney’s emphasis, in *Cecilia*, on the destructive power of the dynasty that attempts merely to perpetuate itself inflexibly is aptly reflected in the narrative of her own literary development. In this eight-page section of the *Memoirs* headed ‘History of Music’ (2:211-218), the final three-and-a-half pages deal with the composition of *Cecilia*, and conclude: “the Doctor kept her stationary in St. Martin’s-street, till she had written the word Finis, which ushered her “Heiress” into the world” (2:218). Once more, an account that begins with Charles’s literary career has ended in an account of his daughter’s, suggesting both that Burney herself is the ultimate expression of the Burney “genius”, and that her father’s work can be read, retrospectively, as part of the story of her own.

Conclusions: Memorialising the Memorialist

Burney frames a teleological narrative that culminates in her authorship of her father’s epitaph, with which the final volume of *Memoirs* closes. Throughout, she attempts to maintain an omniscient narrative perspective, relating the events of her own life in the third person, an attempt that frequently breaks down. This is most evident in Burney’s repeated self-appellation of ‘this Memorialist’. Burney variously refers to herself as “the second daughter of Doctor Burney”, “the Editor”, and “the scribler [sic]”, but her use of “Memorialist” occurs most frequently when relating distressing incidents. On the second marriage of Hester Thrale, to Gabriel Piozzi (1741-1809), Burney refers to herself as “Memorialist” five times in five pages

(2:249-253). As a result, this account reads clumsily in places, as in the following example where “the Memorialist” is awkwardly employed in two consecutive sentences:

Too near, however, were the observations of the Memorialist for so easy a solution.
The change in her friend was equally dark and melancholy: yet not personal to the Memorialist was any alteration (2:244)

There is an evident conflict here between Burney’s attempt to narrate the complexities of her close, personal relationship with Thrale and the third-person narrative she employs. The incidence of “Memorialist” is similarly high when she comes to write of her appointment at court (3:75-85); upon finally leaving Windsor, Burney refers to the ‘Memorialist’ three times on one page (3:118). Yet, while her attempts to distance herself from the narrative arguably collapse at these points, Burney’s insistence on her role as “Memorialist” emphasises the fact that she is the survivor of the *Memoirs*: she has lived to tell the tale. In this, she has achieved the project laid out in the frontispiece, taken from the dedication to *Evelina*:

O could my feeble powers the virtues trace
By filial love each fear should be suppress’d
The blush of incapacity I’d chace
And stand – Recorder of Thy worth! – confess’d.

Burney succeeds in suppressing her “fear”, and the figure who “stands confess’d” by the close of this work is undoubtedly Burney herself. “Recorder of [her father’s] worth”, she appends to *Memoirs* the Epitaph she composed for Charles’s tomb. Thus, Burney encloses and contains, through the unified narrative of which she is explicitly “author”, the historicised

and obsolete man of letters of whom she is still the inheritor. Burney's use of biographical form exploits the instability of the genre in the Romantic period in order to accommodate in a single space the distinct public and private personae she had maintained throughout her career. In so doing, she can more fully narrate her authorship within the complex web of relationships that Eakin describes as inherent to life-writing. Although duly cautious of the limits of "succession", biography allows Burney to embrace her identity *as* a Burney, which is as integral to her literary identity as her resistance to her father's authority. In this sense Burney makes *Memoirs* perform several functions: an idealised presentation of Charles Burney's public persona; a negotiation of filial subjectivity; and a demonstration of creative control. All of these elements are crucial to the narrative of Burney's literary evolution, and they find ultimate expression in her final published work.

¹ Frances Burney [as Madame d'Arblay], *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from His Own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections, by his daughter Madame d'Arblay*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832). Hereafter, *Mem*.

² Cassandra Ulph, "Frances Burney's Private Professionalism", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38 (2015): 377-393.

³ As Philip Olleson has observed, some of Burney's accounts in *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* are contradicted by letters written at the time of action by Susan Burney. For example, see *The Journals and Letters of Susan Burney: Music and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Philip Olleson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 185 n. 2.

⁴ Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 60, 80; *The Letters of Dr. Charles Burney*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991-), i. xxii-xxix (xxiv-xxv).

⁵ Miriam Benkovitz, "Dr Burney's Memoirs", *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 10:39 (1959): 257-268 (257).

⁶ Charles Burney, *Memoirs of Dr Charles Burney, 1726-1769*, ed. Slava Klima, Garry Bowers and Kerry S. Grant (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1988) (hereafter *CB Mem*), xxix. It should be noted that Klima *et al* are also selective in their reproduction of the extant memoranda.

⁷ Burney to Susanna Burney Philips, 26 February 1787. *The Court Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, 1786-1791*, general ed. Peter Sabor, 6 vols. (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 2011-) (hereafter *CJL*), 2:97. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was published in 1791.

⁸ Frances Burney to Hester Maria Thrale, July 8, 1785, in *Additional Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, general ed. Peter Sabor, 2 vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015-. 1: 258.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 21.

¹¹ I outline this argument in detail in “Frances Burney’s Private Professionalism”.

¹² William Wordsworth, “A letter to a friend of Robert Burns: occasioned by an intended republication of *The Account of the Life of Burns*, by Dr. Currie; and of the selection made by him from his letters” (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), repr. in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), 3:111-138.

¹³ Julian North, “Self-Possession and Gender in Romantic Literary Biography” in *Romantic Biography*, ed. Arthur Bradley and Alan Rows (Hampshire and Vermont: Ashgate, 2003), 109-138 (112); Hamilton argues that Wordsworth was concerned about the parallels between Burns’s misdemeanours and his own – namely, his fathering of an illegitimate daughter with Annette Vallon – which heightened his insistence on the separation of a poet’s private life from his literary reputation. See Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), 104-5.

¹⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “A Prefatory Observation on Modern Biography”, *The Friend* 21 (1810), repr. in *Collected Works, Volume 4: The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), ii. 285-297 (286-7).

¹⁵ Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, *Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches and Memoirs* (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1822), 198.

¹⁶ Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1793), ii. 34-5.

¹⁷ Hawkins, *Memoirs*, 1:1.

¹⁸ Mary Hays, *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries*, 6 vols (R. Phillips: London, 1803). Cynthia Richards argues that Hays writes *Female Biography* “exclusively for women”. Richards, “Revising History, “Dumbing Down” and Imposing Silence: The *Female Biography* of Mary Hays”, *Eighteenth-Century Women: Their Lives, Work and Cultures* 3 (2003): 265-294 (275).

¹⁹ Janice Thaddeus, *Frances Burney: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 40.

²⁰ Jane Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 6.

²¹ Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, 52 [original emphasis]. Eakin responds here to Jessica Benjamin’s concept of the ‘intersubjective dimension’.

²² G. Thomas Couser, “Paper Orphans: Writers’ Children Write their Lives”, *Life Writing* 11:1 (2014): 21-37 (22).

²³ Frances Burney, *Evelina* [1778], ed. Edward A. Bloom, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10.

²⁴ The Handel Festival or “Commemoration” took place in Westminster Abbey in 1784 under the direction of John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, and the Concert of Antient Music (with which Sir John Hawkins had been deeply involved, and whose ‘Account of the Academy of Antient Music’ Hawkins appends to *Memoirs*, i. 336-350). It was held to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Handel’s death in 1759. George III was an ardent supporter of the performance of ‘antient’ music as opposed to the new, Italianate style that Charles Burney championed; for Charles Burney to produce an account of the festival to present to the King was therefore politically savvy, if not necessarily consistent with his own musical ideology.

²⁵ Charles Burney, “Fragment of an Audience with their Majesties in 1785” (n. d.), facsimile held at The Burney Centre, McGill University. Original in the Berg Collection at New York Public Library, MSS Arblay.