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Why Austen, not Burney? Tracing the Mechanisms of Reputation and Legacy

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Abstract

During the 200th anniversary of Austen's death in 2017, the narrative of Austen's rise to fame and her ongoing celebrity circulated throughout modern culture. But how did this happen? When Austen died in 1817, it was not obvious that Austen would become the archetypal British woman writer. Frances Burney was far more famous in her lifetime than Austen was in hers, and Burney's novels (particularly *Evelina* and *Cecilia*) achieved as much, if not more, critical acclaim than Austen's works. By comparing the afterlives of Jane Austen and Frances Burney, the factors that shape legacy come into focus—and scholars can use some of these factors to shape the legacy of British women writers today.

Keywords

legacy, popular culture, literary criticism, Austen, Burney

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During the two hundredth anniversary of Austen’s death in 2017, the narrative of her rise to fame and her ongoing celebrity circulated throughout modern culture. The tale has been told many times in many works, including Deidre Lynch’s collection Janeites, Kathryn Sutherland’s Jane Austen’s Textual Lives, Claire Harman’s Jane’s Fame, Rachel M. Brownstein’s Why Jane Austen?, Juliette Wells’ Everybody’s Jane, Claudia Johnson’s Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures, Devoney Looser’s The Making of Jane Austen and most recently, Sarah Glosson’s Performing Jane.¹ Austen appears to be anomalous among British women writers—not only as her fame outstrips that of her contemporaries, but as Austen has become an icon of Englishness comparable to Shakespeare.

But in 1817, it was not obvious that Austen would become the archetypal English woman writer. Frances Burney was far more famous in her lifetime than Austen was in hers, and Burney’s novels (particularly Evelina and Cecilia) achieved as much, if not more, critical acclaim than Austen’s works.² A comparison of their obituaries in the Gentleman’s Magazine provides an admittedly unsophisticated indicator of their respective status at the time. Austen’s obituary was an item in a list: “At Winchester, Miss Jane Austen, youngest daughter of Rev. George Austen, Rector of Steventon, Hant, authoress of ‘Emma,’ ‘Mansfield Park,’ ‘Pride and Prejudice,’ and ‘Sense and Sensibility.’”³ Burney’s obituary was nearly four pages.⁴ So why doesn’t Burney’s image grace the recent Bank of England ten-pound note, rather than Austen’s?

I want to suggest that the narrative of Jane Austen’s legacy takes on a different aspect when compared to that of Frances Burney, and the differences reveal the factors that have shaped the reception of women writers—and importantly, can be used to shape the legacy of women writers—in the future.⁵

**Family first**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that James Edward Austen-Leigh’s 1870 Memoir of his aunt was a deliberate effort to shape the reputation of Austen—much like Henry Austen’s “Biographical Notice” of his sister in 1818. This conscious management of literary legacy, usually by family members, is often the necessary first step to maintain a writer’s reputation.⁶ Tellingly, Austen-Leigh’s Memoir focused the cultural limelight on Austen more than fifty years after her death, responding to familial concerns that Austen’s works and literary reputation were fading. Austen’s nieces wrote continuations of her works, and while these were not commercially or critically successful, they reflect the effort to keep Austen’s name and works in circulation and anticipated some of the modern strategies of Austen adaptation.⁷
Austen’s relatives continued (and continue) to be very involved in maintaining Austen’s legacy and reputation—as Joan Austen-Leigh’s establishment of, and involvement with, the Jane Austen Society of North America and Richard Knight’s stewardship of the Jane Austen Society of the UK make evident. Like Austen, Burney did not have any direct descendants; her son Alexander predeceased her. Burney’s collateral descendants have been involved in the Burney Societies of the UK and North America, but not to the extent that Austen’s relatives have. It is worth noting that the Burney Society of North America was established in 1993 and the Burney Society of the UK in 1994—much later than the Jane Austen Society of the UK, which was founded in 1940, or even the Jane Austen Society of North America in 1979. So Austen has had a temporal advantage, for the earlier the establishment of the literary society, the more time it has to grow, marshal resources, and spread the good word.

Burney’s family did not produce a full biography or fiction, but Charlotte Barrett, Burney’s niece, published a popular edition of Burney’s diaries and letters between 1842-46, with a memoir of Burney in the first volume. Barrett’s effort to preserve Burney’s reputation was far more successful than Burney’s own Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney (1832), which attempted to safeguard the legacy of her father, and was critically panned. So familial effort to preserve a legacy is not sufficient in itself to guarantee success, and there was no guarantee that Austen-Leigh’s Memoir would be successful either. There are many factors involved: the content of the legacy, the contemporary relevance of the legacy, the method in which the legacy is presented, and an understanding of the contemporary audience, among them. The Barrett edition of Burney’s diaries and letters (discussed below) appeared shortly after Burney’s death in 1840, but with one exception, there were no significant familial efforts to maintain Burney’s literary reputation, or to write sequels, adaptations, or continuations to her works. Perhaps if Burney had had a literary advocate in 1890, fifty years after her death—as Austen had—the narrative of Burney’s legacy would have been different.

Market matters

Barrett’s edition of Burney’s diaries and letters shaped Burney’s reputation powerfully—as a diarist and social observer, rather than as a novelist. As Lorna J. Clark remarked about Annie Raine Ellis’ 1889 edition of the Early Diary of Frances Burney, “So often, the story of Burney’s reputation follows the history of new editions of her work.” There were multiple printings of both the Barrett and Ellis editions of Burney’s diaries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Diarists are valued—particularly by historians and scholars—but generally they are not accorded the cultural attention that poets, dramatists, and novelists receive (with all due respect to Samuel Pepys and James Boswell.) Not surprisingly, Burney had cameos in social histories, like Greenwood’s 1911 *Lives of the Hanoverian Queens*, and a featured role in Doran’s *Lives of the Queens of England of the House of Hanover* in 1875.¹³ Biographies of Burney proliferated, as G.H. Lewes wrote in 1859, “Of Miss Burney, who is no longer read, nor much worth reading, we have biography, and to spare” (165). Chapters on Burney appeared in collections like Tillotson’s *Lives of Illustrious Women of England* (ca. 1853), Crosland’s *Memorable Women: The Story of their Lives* (ca. 1860), Adams’ *Women of Fashion and Representative Women in Letters and Society* (1878) and his *Child-Life and Girlhood of Remarkable Women* (1895), and Holland’s *Historic Girlhoods* (1910)—while Austen was not featured in any of these works. Significantly, Joyce Hemlow’s groundbreaking 1958 work on Frances Burney did not begin with Burney’s novels, but with a biography, *The History of Fanny Burney*. The twenty-five volume scholarly edition of Burney’s journals and letters, a treasure trove of information about literary, cultural, social, and political history in the Georgian era, started publishing in 1972 and was completed in 2019.¹⁴

Although Burney had written novels, her reputation as a diarist, correspondent, and social observer was growing as the novel achieved cultural dominance and respectability. The timing of this shift did not help Burney’s cultural capital, for as will be discussed below, most of Burney’s novels were not in circulation for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but her diaries and journals were.¹⁵ The rise of the public reviewer—and regular reviews of novels in periodicals like the *Critical Review*, the *Monthly Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review*—coupled with canon-forming anthologies of novels, like Barbauld’s *The British Novelists* (1810), Scott’s *Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library* (1821-1824), and Whittingham Pocket Novelists Series (1828) developed a culture of assessing and valuing novels.¹⁶ There was no comparable critical mechanism to advance the status of diaries, journals, and letters.

The popularity of the novel in the nineteenth century was also fueled by new types of marketing: publishers’ book lists included at the back of novels; libraries that enabled readers to pay to borrow novels volume by volume, rather than purchasing the whole novel at once; and publishing novels in monthly installments in periodicals.¹⁷ Most of these strategies did not work well for personal journals, diaries, or correspondence, which often lack the overarching narratives and the narrative continuity that the marketing strategies for novels relied upon—namely, that a reader could follow the narrative, and return to it easily. Journals, diaries, and correspondence maintain a continuity of the authorial
persona, but they tend to be more detailed, digressive and expansive in their narratives than novels, which makes them more difficult to follow over multiple volumes. A reader was more likely to read a 300-page novel—or even a three-volume novel at 600-plus pages—than thousands of pages of correspondence and journals.

The impact of access

It is also worth remembering that Austen’s six major novels remained in print since 1833, and while Evelina remained in print, Burney’s other novels did not. The starkest case is Burney’s fourth and final novel, The Wanderer, which appeared in 1814—and ten years later, 465 unsold copies of the second edition (also published in 1814) were destroyed. The Wanderer was not republished until the Pandora edition of 1988—a span of 174 years. A subsequent Oxford edition of The Wanderer appeared in 1991, but both of those editions are out of print. (Cambridge University Press is now planning a new edition of Burney’s novels, which will return The Wanderer into circulation). Burney’s 1796 novel, Camilla, had French, German and Swedish editions before the second English edition in 1802. But if WorldCat is to be trusted, there were no editions or reprints of Camilla between a London edition in 1840 and a Bath edition in 1966, a span of 126 years. As Catherine Parisian has shown, there were long stretches—between 1855 and 1882, and between 1914 and 1965—in which Burney’s 1782 blockbuster Cecilia had no new editions or reprints.

Of course, access to novels affects reputation and shapes scholarship and criticism, which play a part in legacy too. Access and reputation can be mutually reinforcing: lack of access leads to an author’s diminished reputation, and an author’s diminished reputation leads to lack of access. Chapman’s famous scholarly edition of Austen’s novels in 1923 added to Austen’s stature and legitimacy in ways not available to Burney, or to any other woman writer, for decades. The modern scholarly editions of Burney’s novels did not begin to appear until the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s—and once again, the temporal delay hindered accumulated influence. The production of scholarly editions has had a cascading effect in terms of the development of scholarship on Burney and Austen, the inclusion of their works in curricula, and popular access and cultural circulation.

The critics weigh in

But why weren’t Burney’s novels in print? Burney’s reputation as a novelist diminished because her later novels (especially her last, The Wanderer) received
negative reviews, particularly scathing ones from John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* and William Hazlitt in the *Edinburgh Review*.

While I cannot claim that a few bad reviews are sufficient to destroy a reputation, these reviews were influential. Laura Runge delineates the change in reviewing culture with the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, which, unlike the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*, did not evaluate every novel that was published. Runge argues that “William Hazlitt’s famous review of *The Wanderer* in the *Edinburgh* documents the turn in critical fortunes for the woman author, making gender the most significant criterion in the hierarchy of novelists” (295). Runge writes:

Instead of ranking Burney among the best novelists—he identifies Cervantes, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne—Hazlitt groups Burney with unnamed and clearly unregarded women writers. In the process he articulates a gendered theory of the novel that associates literary criteria with the biological and social attributes of sex. Women’s soft minds, like their soft bodies, are incapable of the sustained attention and inborn genius required to create the best novels, pace Cervantes et. al…..Because of the selective format in the quarterlies [like the *Edinburgh Review*] a critic need only mention women novelists in extraordinary circumstances, and given the longer essay style, he could discourse at length on other—male—writers in lieu of detailed discussion of their work. Of the nineteen pages in this review, notice of Burney’s work occupies only the last three. (295)

Hazlitt declared *The Wanderer* the work of “a very woman”: “She [Burney] is a quick, lively, and accurate observer of persons and things; but she always looks at them with a consciousness of her sex;….There is little in her works of passion or character, or even manners,….Evelina is also her best novel, because it is the shortest; that is, it has all the liveliness in the sketches of character, and exquisiteness of comic dialogue and repartee, without the tediousness of the story, and endless affectation of the sentiments” (336).

Croker was no better in the *Quarterly Review*: “If we had not been assured in the title-page that this work had been produced by the same pen as Cecilia, we should have pronounced Madame D’Arblay to be a feeble imitator of the style and manner of Miss Burney—we should have admitted the flat fidelity of her copy, but we should have lamented the total want of vigour, vivacity, and originality…. ” (124) The impact of such reviews was devastating, and Burney,
who was in her early sixties, had a difficult time controlling her legacy as she aged, as Devoney Looser has shown.\textsuperscript{24}

Her family was not able to mitigate the effect of the reviews either. Not long after Burney’s death in 1840, her niece Charlotte Barrett published \textit{The Diary and Letters of Madame D’Arblay}, and Burney’s relatives asked Thomas Babington Macaulay to review the work—which meant assessing Burney’s fiction as well. This publication and solicited review were the most significant Burney family interventions to safeguard Burney’s legacy.\textsuperscript{25}

In his 1843 review, Macaulay propounded what would become the critical commonplace about Burney for over a century: “…the whole fame of Madame D’Arblay rests on what she did during the earlier half of her life, and that every thing which she published during the forty-three years which preceded her death, lowered her reputation” (564). He dismissed \textit{The Wanderer} rather than criticize it, as he wrote, “In 1814 she published her last novel, the Wanderer, a book which no judicious friend to her memory will attempt to draw from the oblivion into which it has justly fallen” (558).

Macaulay had been infuriated by Croker, but he would only advocate for Burney to a point: “We are, therefore, forced to refuse to Madame D’Arblay a place in the highest rank of art; but we cannot deny that, in the rank to which she belonged, she had few equals, and scarcely any superior” (563). He carefully defined his position in his conclusion:

> She [Burney] took away the reproach which lay on a most useful and delightful species of composition. She vindicated the right of her sex to an equal share in a fair and noble province of letters. Several accomplished women have followed in her track. At present, the novels which we owe to English ladies form no small part of the literary glory of our country. No class of works is more honourably distinguished by fine observation, by grace, by delicate wit, by pure moral feeling. Several among the successors of Madame D’Arblay have equalled her; two, we think, have surpassed her. But the fact that she has been surpassed, gives her an additional claim to our respect and gratitude; for in truth we owe to her, not only Evelina, Cecilia, and Camilla, but also Mansfield Park and The Absentee (569-70).

And there it is—the woman who made novels and women writers respectable was slotted behind Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth.\textsuperscript{26} Macaulay’s assessment of Burney reverberated throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. Ironically,
Austen’s praise of Burney’s *Cecilia* and *Camilla* in *Northanger Abbey* did not (31).

Without a literary record of consistent excellence (or perceived consistent excellence), Burney as a novelist could not compete with Austen, whose novels were perceived to be consistently great—even if they were not widely noticed when first published. The critics praised Austen for her deft characterization, realism, spirit, originality, and her understanding of human nature and life; they saw Burney’s later work as unoriginal, unrealistic, mannered, caricatured, and tending towards vulgarity. Without someone or some group of reviewers praising *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, advocating for *Camilla* and *The Wanderer*, or re-envisioning the narrative of Burney’s career as something other than a massive downturn as Croker did, it was unlikely that Burney’s reputation as a novelist would grow. The work of re-envisioning Burney’s career eventually began in the 1980s, with foundational works by Kristina Straub, Julia Epstein, and Margaret Anne Doody—but here too delay worked against Burney, for the narrative of Austen’s stellar career had been established and promoted long before the 1980s.

**The writing of literary history**

Not surprisingly, when scholars and critics started writing the history of the British novel, Burney was included in the narrative, and then slowly displaced from it. Chapters on Burney and Austen appear in works on British women writers—like Kavanagh’s two-volume *English Women of Letters* (1863), Cone and Gilder’s *Pen Portraits of Literary Women* (1887), and Walford’s *Twelve English Authoresses* (1892). But monographs on Austen, not Burney, start appearing before the end of the 19th century—so much so that Walter Pollock begins his 1899 work on Jane Austen by claiming: “So much has been written and so much well written, concerning Miss Austen that there seems to be need for some sort of apology or explanation for putting forth any new volume, however modest, dealing with a writer of gifts and accomplishments which have made her name as famous in the literary world as it was beloved in her family life” (1).

As Claudia Johnson observes, twentieth-century histories of the novel suggest that the important developmental work of the novel was done in the eighteenth century by Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson—with Smollett or Sterne being added to that list on occasion. And, as Johnson notes, these teleological histories suggest that the purpose of the rise of the novel was to get to Austen—as signaled by Ian Watt’s coda to *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) and Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* (1948).
Before the recovery of women writers accelerated in the 1980s, discussions of woman novelists focused on Austen, the Brontës, and Eliot, as in Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). R. Brimley Johnson’s 1918 monograph, *The Women Novelists*, refers to Burney, Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Eliot as “the great four,” but he seems exceptional in this regard (226). Burney, if mentioned, was cited as a strong precursor to Austen, as in Macaulay—at once deferring Burney’s reputation to the younger novelist and circumventing significant engagement with Burney’s novels.

Such narratives of literary history and criticism affect popular culture. Austen was associated with Shakespeare early, for in an 1813 review of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet was analogized to Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*. In his review of *The Diary and Letters of Madame D’Arblay*, Macaulay also associates Austen and Shakespeare, particularly in their excellence in characterization, which is central to literary values of realism and human understanding. Macaulay writes, “His [Shakespeare’s] variety is like the variety of nature, endless diversity, scarcely any monstrosity. The characters of which he has given us an impression, as vivid as that which we receive from the characters of our own associates, are to be reckoned by scores. Yet in all these scores hardly one character is to be found which deviates widely from the common standard, and which we should call very eccentric if we met it in real life….she [Austen] has given us a multitude of characters, all, in a certain sense, common-place, all such as we meet every day, Yet they are all as perfectly discriminated from each other as if they are the most eccentric of human beings” (560-1). Macaulay writes: “Shak[e]speare has had neither equal nor second. But among the writers who, in the point which we have noticed, have approached nearest to the manner of the great master, we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen, a woman of whom England is justly proud” (561). It is telling that in a review of Burney’s life and works, Macaulay praises Austen so highly.

In her lifetime, Burney was compared favorably to Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson by Samuel Johnson, the dean of literary critics of the eighteenth century. There were subsequent critics who praised Burney as combining the traditions of Fielding and Richardson and advancing the novel as a genre.

Although Fielding and Richardson were (and are) recognized as great writers, they are not considered near Shakespeare in achievement; they achieved a different, and for many, a lesser level of greatness. Part of this is due to the status of the novel as a genre—a genre that was deemed as emerging and not yet perfected, a genre whose definition was questioned and value was contested in the long eighteenth century. As Brian Corman writes,
The critics of the Romantic period, then, were the major originators of ideas about and approaches to the history of the English novel and its canon. They established a progressive history of the novel that was to remain Whiggish throughout the [nineteenth] century and well into the next, a history quite different from the histories of poetry and drama produced alongside it. Where those histories looked back to an earlier, golden age of writers like Homer and Shakespeare, histories of the novel had no need to apologize for the inability of recent writers to match the greatness of their predecessors….Since the perfection of the novel (unlike poetry and drama) had yet to occur, there was no need to focus unduly on the past. Later critics continued to apply a similar methodology based on similar assumptions to their histories. The high points in those histories continued to move forward with time; the presentist orientation of the critics, their histories, and their canons remains constant. (54; emphasis added)

Since there were no perfect models of the novel, Burney’s talent being aligned with Fielding’s and Richardson’s was not as culturally powerful as Austen being associated with Shakespeare. Or differently: if there can be only one iconic British writer—and if that writer is Shakespeare—then it does not matter if an author is compared favorably to the architects of the British novel.

**Popular culture**

These narratives direct popular attention and help shape adaptation and appropriation—which are primary mechanisms of cultural circulation. Devoney Looser has located theatrical versions of Austen’s works as early as the 1890s, with Rosina Filippi’s *Duologues and Scenes of Jane Austen* in 1895 (*Making*, 84-85). This seems ironic, given that Burney wrote plays, most of which were not produced until the 1990s and 2000s.37 There were home theatricals of Austen in the 1920s, like Margaret Macnamara’s 1926 *Elizabeth Refuses: A miniature comedy from Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice*. While there were two plays based on *Evelina* (in 1786 and 1811) and one partly based on *Cecilia* in 1807, they did not achieve cultural prominence or permanence, nor did they encourage others to adapt Burney’s works.38 Instead, there are a handful of plays about Burney—another marker of her status as a diarist and social observer—the earliest being a short 1915 play entitled “Miss Burney at Court” by Maude Morrison Frank.
In the early twentieth century, the film industry began by ransacking literature, out of a need for narrative and to legitimize the then-young medium. Given her fame, it is not surprising that Austen was filmed—or that Helen Jerome’s 1936 successful theatrical version of *Pride and Prejudice* was one of the sources for the 1940 film starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson. As the film industry grew, followed by television, more iterations of Austen appeared; the explosion of Austen-inflected media in the wake of the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice* has been well-documented. Each iteration embeds Austen into culture; each assumes that the audience has knowledge of the predecessors; and each adds to Austen’s cultural power and circulation. The mechanisms of modern media function like a positive feedback loop, and in doing so, they multiply the cultural power and resonance of Austen. As a result, Austen takes up so much cultural real estate that she displaces, if not eliminates, other women writers.

Modern marketing accelerates the effect of those already dominant in cultural circulation as well: a search on etsy.com or cafepress.com for “Jane Austen” yields thousands of Austen-related mugs, posters, calendars, clothing items, and paraphernalia. A search for “Frances Burney” on cafepress.com leads to a recommendation to seek for “Frances” or “Burney”; “Frances Burney” has three responses on etsy.com.

So a text or an author needs to be sufficiently known in the first place to be considered for theatre, film, or television. There needs to be sufficient cultural saturation, and that could not happen for Burney without access to her novels and without her novels being valued. The modern public is still more likely to get another version of *Pride and Prejudice* than a film version of *Evelina*, as delightful as that would be. Burney’s plays are now being produced, but it will take a concerted effort by scholars and devotees for Burney to achieve significant cultural presence. For while there is more access to literature in modern culture than before, there are more texts looking to gain our attention, and the texts that are already known and valorized have the advantage.

**Conclusion**

So why Austen, and not Burney? Because the factors of family, genre, access, critical assessment, literary history, and popular culture aligned in Austen’s favor, and not in Burney’s. The same argument can be made for Maria Edgeworth, another contemporary of Austen’s who was far more famous than Austen: the factors did not align in her favor. (And yes, I could have written an essay titled “Why Austen, not Edgeworth?”) As disconcerting as the displacement of Burney, Edgeworth, and so many others is, it is a bracing thought that if these factors had not aligned as they did, that Austen’s greatness might have been lost as well.
Where does this leave us?

If we want to recover and elevate women writers, it is worth thinking about these factors, the state of the field, and what we can do about it. We live in an age of expanding, if not exploding, canons. Perhaps the circle of authors with national impact—or with status as icons—is, of necessity, small. Still, it behooves us to recover and locate as many authors in that circle as possible.

The factors of genre, access, critical assessment, literary history, and popular culture give us some leverage, and we should use it. We can maintain access and keep works in print—works of all genres, not only novels. We can keep teaching the works of women writers, and keep excavating the voices of women. Scholarship can change the narratives of critical assessment and literary history, as feminist scholars have been doing since the recovery of women writers in the 1970s and 1980s. And we can publish and speak about the work we do, to all sorts of audiences, not only academic ones. This is all the more imperative in places like the United States, where funding for the humanities has been in decline for decades, and women’s rights are now eroding.

As for popular culture…we can generate a cultural conversation by lobbying for film, television, Internet, and theatre productions—and by attending productions, bringing friends, and spreading the word about eighteenth-century women in the media. If *Star Trek* fans in the 1970s could get films produced after the original series was canceled—before the age of the Internet and social media—surely eighteenth-century scholars and aficionados can bring their media powers to the fore.

Already there are signs that eighteenth-century women other than Austen who are attracting attention in popular culture. The r/18 collective is promoting readings of Restoration and eighteenth-century plays by women, including Frances Burney, Hannah Cowley, Margaret Cavendish, Susanna Centlivre, and Elizabeth Inchbald; the Red Bull Theatre in New York produced readings of Burney’s *The Woman Hater* and Cowley’s *The Belle Stratagem* in 2021, and Inchbald’s *Animal Magnetism* in 2023. A statue was erected Mary Wollstonecraft in Newington Green on 2020; there is fundraising right now for a statue of Aphra Behn in Canterbury. The Hedgepig Ensemble looks to expand the canon as part of its mission, and its website provides “a curated list of classic plays by women & underrepresented genders—and a call to action to produce them.” There are films and television shows that are generating interest in our period, like *Harlots* (2017-2019), *The Favourite* (2018); *The Great* (2020--); *Bridgerton* (2020--); etc.; there
are novels like Gina Fattore’s *The Spinster Diaries* (2020), which riffs on Burney. There is still plenty of Austen media out there—the films, the festivals, the conferences, the fictions—and we can use Austen as a gateway for other women writers of the long eighteenth century. But it is not only Austen any more, nor should it be.

It will take time, access, and repetition to build Burney’s reputation—or to build the reputation of any of the many women writers of the past. Like the Austen family and the members of the modern Austen societies, scholars can draw attention to these authors and vault them to cultural prominence. The mechanisms that shaped the legacy of Jane Austen show the way, and they are in our control: access, critical assessment, literary history, and popular culture. And then maybe, maybe, 100 years from now, Frances Burney—or Charlotte Lennox, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah Cowley, Maria Edgeworth, or some other British woman writer—will be on the ten-pound note.

**Notes**

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2 See Laura Runge, “Momentary Fame,” on Burney as the model female novelist in book reviews in the late eighteenth century, pp. 292-94.


5 My strategy here varies considerably from Rachel M. Brownstein’s elegant work in *Why Jane Austen?* As Brownstein writes, “The pages that follow are experiments and explorations in what might be called—if the term is very broadly defined—biographical criticism. I am interested in why Jane Austen is on our minds now, and in her relationship to her characters and her readers—
how she runs in and out of the minds of the people she imagined (like blood in their veins, Virginia Woolf thought), and—most broadly—in the ways that imaginary others, historical and fictitious, inhabit and inform minds and lives” (12).

6 For examples of this practice, see William Godwin’s Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798), Alicia Le Fanu’s Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Frances Sheridan (1824) and Frances Burney’s Memoirs of Doctor Burney (1832), which attempted to shape the afterlives of Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin’s wife), Frances Sheridan (Le Fanu’s grandmother), and Charles Burney (Frances’ father).

7 Austen’s niece Catherine Anne (Austen) Hubback published The Younger Sister (1850), a completion of The Watsons; another niece, Anna LeFroy, wrote a continuation of Sandition that was published over a century after her death in 1983. Helen Brown, a great-grand niece of Austen, wrote Susan Price, or Resolution (1930), about the character in Mansfield Park, and she co-authored a completion of The Watsons with Francis Brown in 1928. Austen encouraged such efforts implicitly, for when family members asked about what happened to characters after the end of a novel, she supplied answers; for instance, she told her family who Kitty and Mary Bennet married after the end of Pride and Prejudice. See Austen-Leigh, Memoir, pp. 119.

8 See Joan Austen-Leigh’s “The Founding of JASNA.” As noted on the website for JASNA’s 2017 annual meeting, Richard Knight (a descendant of Austen’s brother, Edward Austen Knight) “recently stood down after 26 years as President of the UK Jane Austen Society.”

9 For the founding of the Burney Society UK, see “About us” on the Society’s website. For the founding of the Jane Austen Society of the UK, see “History of the Society” on the Society’s website.

10 For information on Barrett’s edition of the Letters and its reception, see DelafIELD. Note Bruce Stovel’s comparison of the family biographies of Burney and Austen: “A brief memoir introduces the first volume [Barrett’s edition of Burney’s letters and journals], the first and only biography written by a family member (in marked contrast to Jane Austen, every one of whose ‘major biographers….for more than one hundred years after her death’ was a family member).” (Cited in Clark, 163)

11 Clark, pp. 166. See also Sabor, “Annie Raine Ellis.”

12 WorldCat lists multiple editions and printings of Barrett’s Diary and Letters: 1843; 1846; 1854; 1870-76; 1876; ca. 1880; ca. 1890; 1891; 1892; 1893; 1904; 1905; 1906; and 1943. See World Cat for editions and printings of Annie Raine Ellis’s The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768-1778 in 1889, 1907, and 1913, and for other texts with selections from the diaries and correspondence.

13 See Greenwood, 115; Doran, Volume II, 57-58, 60, 63, 67-70, 81, 87, 89-91, 121-23, 190, 455. Burney appears many times in the chapter on Elizabeth Montagu in Fyvie’s Some Famous Women of Wit and Beauty: a Georgian Galaxy, and at the beginning of the chapter on Lennox, where Burney is said to be “by common consent, among the immortals” (165).

14 The twelve volumes of The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D’Arblay) (for the years 1791-1840) were published between 1972 and 1984, with Joyce Hemlow as general editor.

15 See Civale, who makes a similar argument that Burney’s diaries overtook her novels in the Victorian periodical press, and complicated Burney’s literary reputation.

16 See Runge on the role of reviewers on the rise of the novel, and the status of the female novelist. Cf. Corman. In terms of the anthologies, Barbauld included *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782) in *The British Novelists* (1810), but she excluded *Camilla* (1796); *The Wanderer* (1814) had not been published yet so it could not be a part of the collection. Burney’s novels were not included in Harrison’s *The Novelist’s Magazine* (1779-1788), which included novels by Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding, Frances Sheridan, and Charlotte Lennox, nor did they appear in Scott’s *Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library* (1821-1824), which included Ann Radcliffe.

17 See also Barchas, who argues that Austen advanced in popularity by the sales of cheap editions in parts.

18 See *The Wanderer*, pp. xlvi.

19 A second edition of *Camilla* was published in 1802 (xxiii). WorldCat lists French editions of *Camilla* in 1797 and 1798; Swedish editions in 1801 and 1802; German editions in 1796 and 1798; excerpts from *Camilla* (probably Rev. Tyrold’s letter) in 1803, 1809, 1812; an American edition of *Camilla* in 1833; a London edition of *Camilla* in 1840; and a Bath edition of *Camilla* in 1966. The Oxford edition of *Camilla* was published in 1972, and reissued as a paperback in 1983, 1999, and 2009.

20 See Parisian for the publication history of *Cecilia*. Table 2.1 (on page 30) lists the English postcopyright editions of *Cecilia* from 1809 onward. There are multiple gaps of over ten years: a gap between 1825 and 1844 (both London editions); a gap between the New York edition (ca. 1852-55) and the London edition of 1882; between 1914 and 1965; between 1965 and 1986.

21 See Spedding, who outlines correlations between increased access to the works of Eliza Haywood (based on rising number of editions, and availability of early editions through microfilm and databases), and subsequent increased scholarship on, and status of, Eliza Haywood.


23 A comparison of Grau’s 1981 bibliography of Burney with the near-contemporary 1982 edition of Gilson’s bibliography of Austen provides one metric of the effects of access, in the contrasting rate of scholarly production. In Grau, the “Biographical, Critical, and Miscellaneous Items” section has 599 entries; in Gilson, the comparable “Biography and Criticism” section has 2012 entries. See Grau, pp. 53-169; Gilson, pp. 465-737.

25 See Delafield 26, 30 for information about Macaulay’s interactions with Burney’s relatives and the writing of the review. Delafield writes, “Macaulay’s defence—if it can be so called—had a wider circulation than Burney’s autobiographical works and Barrett’s editorial efforts. The review was reprinted as the opening essay in Volume 3 of Macaulay’s collected Essays published in April 1843 which was regularly republished throughout the later nineteenth century. The review then supplanting Barrett’s introduction in the W.C. Ward standard edition [1890-91] of the Diary.” (30)

26 See Corman: “[Hazlitt’s] treatment of Burney as the best of a bad lot of novelists between Smollett and Scott prepares the way for the later view of her as the transitional figure between Fielding and Austen that dominates so many late nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives of the development of the novel” (46)

27 Austen was not widely reviewed in her lifetime. See Southam, who includes a review and notice each for Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and the combined posthumous publication of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion. Emma garnered one review and four notices in 1816. There were no reviews for Mansfield Park in Austen’s lifetime; even Sir Walter Scott’s famous review of Emma, which included comments on Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, does not mention of Mansfield Park. While silence is not the same as criticism, it is striking that this critical gap did not change the narrative of Austen’s triumphant career as a novelist.

28 For the criteria of assessment of Austen, see the reviews of Pride and Prejudice in the British Critic (February 1813) and the Critical Review (March 1813), the review of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion in Edinburgh Magazine (May 1818) and Scott’s review of Emma. For the assessment of Burney’s The Wanderer in the context of her career, see Croker in the Quarterly Review (April 1814), Hazlitt in the Edinburgh Review (February 1815) and the Monthly Review (1815).

29 This distinction between the early and late phases of Burney’s career was apparent in the novel anthologies: Evelina and Cecilia were included in Barbauld and Whittingham’s novel collections, but Camilla and The Wanderer were not. The Wanderer could not have been included in Barbauld’s British Novelists, since it was published four years after Barbauld’s collection appeared. None of Burney’s novels were included in Scott’s Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library. All of Austen’s novels were published after Barbauld’s 1810 collection; none of her novels were included in the later Whittington series or even in Scott’s series, despite Scott’s praise for her work.

30 See Clark for a summary of Burney’s place in literary criticism.

31 See Walford for another instance of argument that the second half of Burney’s career was disappointing. Her chapter on Austen is filled with unstinting praise.

32 See Claudia Johnson, “‘Let Me Make Novels of a Country.’” She notes the dominance of male authors in histories of the novel by McKillop, Watt, and Leavis, along with the narrative that the rise of the novel leads to Austen.
In his introduction, Johnson acknowledges women writers before Burney, including Behn, Manley, Haywood, Fielding, and Lennox, but he refers to Burney as “the first woman novelist” (7).

See Bredvold: “Evelina was the first English novel of drawing-room life, or the ‘romance of the tea-table.’ . . . [Burney] had the talents necessary to develop a realistic technique, which distinctly advanced the art of the English novel in the direction of Jane Austen” (136-37). Cf. Gosse: “Miss Burney was a delightful novelist in her youth, but, unless she influenced Miss Austen, she took no part in the progressive development of English literature” (87-90).

See The Critical Review: “…Elizabeth, whose archness and sweetness of manner render her a very attractive object in the family piece. She is in fact the Beatrice of the tale; and falls in love on much the same principles of contrariety” (320). Cf. “…Elizabeth, who, thinking him [Darcy] the proudest of his species, takes great delight in playing the Beatrice upon him…” (322)

See Allen, pp. 95-98. See also Cecil, pp. 224: “She was the first writer to detect how it might be possible to combine the methods of Richardson and Fielding.”

See Sabor, “Rediscovery,” for a discussion of Burney’s plays, including the single performance of Edwy and Elgiva on March 21, 1795, and the discovery of two comedies and three tragedies by Burney in the twentieth century. Burney’s comedy, A Busy Day, which premiered in autumn 1993, was her first play to be produced since Edwy and Elgiva (Sabor, “Rediscovery,” 153). Her comedy, The Witlings, has its world premiere at the Main Street Theater in Houston in 1998. A version of The Woman Hater was first performed at a Burney Society conference in Montreal in October 2003. The Woman Hater had its British premiere at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond in December 2007, and its US premiere in 2016 with the Mamai Theater Company in Cleveland, Ohio.

See Grau 19. The plays based on Evelina are Friedrich Ludwig Schröder’s Victorine (1786) and William Charles White’s The Poor Lodger: A Comedy in Five Acts (1811); the play partly based on Cecilia is Henry Siddons’ Time’s a Tell-Tale: A Comedy in Five Acts. (1807) Mascha Hansen writes that Victorine was successful in Germany, but she speculates that may have been partly due to the play’s rejection of Frenchified manners. (44) Hansen discusses the many changes made to bring Evelina to the German stage and remarks, “He [Schroder, the adapter] wanted a fast-paced comedy, and his concessions to his German audience’s taste and horizon seem to have been effective, considering the play’s success. That this was not due to the popularity of Burney’s novel, is I think, evident from the few surviving playbills: none of them mentions Burney or Evelina.” (45) According to Hansen, Burney was not involved in the original production, and it is not clear that she even knew of it. Nor is it clear that Burney knew of the adaptations of her novels in England. Time’s a Tell Tale (1807) was adapted from Cecilia by Henry Siddons, the son of the actress Sarah Siddons, and this production occurred while Burney was living in France. According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, “His [Henry Siddons’] plays Time’s a Tell-Tale, The Russian Imposter, and Tale of Terror, or, Castle Without a Spectre, produced at Covent Garden for Murray’s benefit in 1803, as well as his other pieces, were not very successful either.” I have not been able to find out anything further. There are many reasons why a play does not succeed: poor adaptation; bad casting; bad timing in the season; changing popular taste; etc.
For Austen and cultural circulation, see Francus. For discussions of Austen media (films, television, fan fiction, web series, and so on) in the 1990s and beyond, see Dow and Hanson, Glosson, Harman, Lynch, Mirmohamadi, Pucci and Thompson, Troost and Greenfield, and Wells.

In the late 1990s, Paula Stepankowsky, then President of the Burney Society of North America, contacted a number of production companies about the possibility of a film version of Evelina, or a biopic of Burney. She was told that the idea had merit, but that eighteenth-century novels were too expensive to produce because of costumes and sets (Private correspondence).

The R/18 collective is a group of academics, including Lisa Freeman, Misty Anderson, Daniel O’Quinn, Kristina Straub, and others who are working with theatre groups, encouraging them to produce eighteenth-century plays, and promoting those plays.

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