

Burney's Window in Westminster

A Celebration of Frances Burney

Edited by Lorna J. Clark.
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Reviewed by Sarah D. Spence.

The title *A Celebration of Frances Burney* encapsulates a momentous occasion: the Burney Society Conference and dedication in June 2002 of a commemorative window in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey on the author's 250th birthday. The book, edited by Lorna Clark, contains the conference addresses and presentations and is a keepsake for Burney enthusiasts. Lars Troide emphasizes Joyce Hemlow's influence as the first Director of the Burney Project at McGill University in Montreal on the resurgence of Burney's reputation in the twentieth century.

In *A Celebration*, Peter Sabor, Director of the Burney Project, says the Burney Society was founded in 1994 "to promote the study and appreciation of Burney's works and the life and times of her family." In the essay "Giving Voice to Nobody: The Authority of Authorship in the Early Journals," Leslie Robertson analyzes Burney's young life, supplying details of "writing mania" in her juvenilia, which she says proclaims a future important author; the essay also discusses the role of family in her writing. In early journals and other writings, Burney mimics eighteenth-century society, manners, and morals with caustic irony, especially in *Evelina*, her first novel. Her exposure to the "brilliant and entertaining circle" in her father, Dr. Charles Burney's, home provided the setting. Here, she encountered Dr. Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Hester Thrale, and the celebrated actor David Garrick. This society afforded intellectual

challenges, but also provided her with rich encounters, which she used in the diaries to create characters. Her astute sensibility promoted the satiric vein.

In treating other family matters, Lorna Clark has reevaluated the relationship between Fanny and her younger half-sister, Sarah Harriet Burney, who, like Fanny, produced five novels over a forty-year period. However, the step-family discussion avoids the most blatant of unpleasant circumstances. Clark states that the sisters achieved a closer relationship in later years than in earlier ones, in which Sarah Harriet's mother and Fanny's stepmother created tension. Marilyn Francis argues that "Frances Burney's relationship with her stepmother was formative in her personal development and influential in terms of her art" (57). Nevertheless, Francis also states that Burney's journals, correspondence, and her biography of her father, "document strategies of stepmotherly erasure" (58).

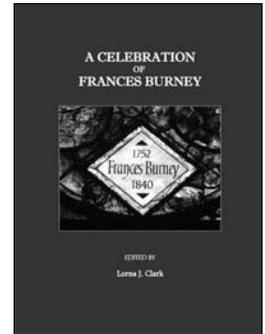
Brian McCrea's essay assesses Burney's handling of men as a "passive, inert lot," the counterparts of strong heroines. He quotes Margaret Anne Doody, on Lord Orville in *Evelina*, Mortimer Delville in *Cecilia*, and Edgar Mandelbert in *Camilla* to emphasize this view. Interestingly, McCrea's essay focuses on Dr. Lyster and Mr. Naird, two of Burney's "other" male characters, who are different from the typically "feckless" Burney hero" (199). McCrea adds that while she was completing *The Wanderer*, Burney attempted to procure a scholarship for her son, Alex, to pursue a career in medicine at Cambridge, perhaps creating Dr. Lyster in anticipation of her son's future.

Six of the essays provide close readings of Burney's novels: *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer*. Justine Crump compares her contemporary readers with a modern-day reader. As such critics as her father's friends read her work aloud, they commented that Frances ought to write drama. Eighteenth-century critics saw certain episodes as comedy,

while modern-day readers view scenes in *Cecilia* as a serious commentary on society's violence against women. On another note, one eighteenth-century critic cites a letter crediting Burney for following the novel of manners and setting an example for young females.

While critics have analyzed such topics as comedy, criticism of society, illness, unattractive heroes, bathing, and even animals in the three earlier novels—*Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*—an important aspect of *The Wanderer* has not been given its due. Some contemporaries viewed the last novel negatively; however, it introduces the beginning of concern for women's rights, women's lack of identity, and inability of women to make a living in the workplace. Interestingly, Burney herself succeeded in earning a living at her own writing. One essay focuses on Elinor Joddrell, *The Wanderer's* antagonist, who exhibits radical behavior in attempts to make society notice her. However, the plight of the heroine, Juliet (Ellis), brings out several issues concerning women's rights, a discussion which is omitted in *A Celebration*. Juliet cannot earn a living since she is not sufficiently reimbursed for her labor, both when she gives music lessons and when she sets up a shop to make hats. Society does not view a woman's work as a means of self-support.

A Celebration provides the reader with a broad scope as well as with minute details of Frances Burney's life: exposure to literary giants in her early years, her family's contributions to her life and to society, and a canvas of eighteenth-century life. Born before Jane Austen and outliving her by twenty-three years, Frances Burney (1752-1840) lived a long life. *A Celebration* affirms the importance of Frances Burney d'Arblay's work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



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