Sir Walter Scott met Frances Burney, Madame d’Arblay (1752–1840), for the first time at her London home, in November of 1826. Burney, then seventy-four, is said to have complimented Scott (who was in his mid-fifties), telling him that he was one of just two people she had then been wishing to meet. Scott writes appreciatively of Burney’s flattery, but he does little in his private writings to return the favor.  

$^{1}$ His diary entry begins, “Nov. 18.—Was introduced by [Samuel] Rogers to Mad. d’Arblay, the celebrated authoress of Evelina and Cecilia—an elderly lady, with no remains of personal beauty, but with a simple and gentle manner, a pleasing expression of countenance, and apparently quick feelings.”  

$^{2}$ Scott’s “elderly lady, with no remains of personal beauty” has become one of the most frequently invoked descriptions of Burney in her old age. Regrettably, the details he emphasizes distort our picture of Burney as a late-life author.

In the first part of this essay, I consider Burney’s oft-dismissed, last-published work, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832), for its sustained attention to gender, aging, and authorship. When the *Memoirs* is read from cover to cover, I argue, significant and previously unnoticed patterns emerge that offer insights into her important conceptions of and extensive ruminations on authorial celebrity in old age. In addition, the narration of the *Memoirs* suggests what an aged woman author was up against in fashioning her
persona within a text. After examining the *Memoirs*, I consider the work’s complicated reception in 1832 and thereafter, in order to further our discussion of Burney’s less often read, and too often misunderstood, late writings. I argue for the importance of the *Memoirs* to literary history and offer a new line of inquiry to provide explanations that may help us make sense of its “failure.”

**The Portrait of the Author as an Old Woman**

Unlike many celebrated contemporary female authors, Burney appears not to have sat for a portrait in her later years. We have had little to go on to picture her as an “elderly lady” of letters. To fill this void, critics and biographers have often latched onto Sir Walter Scott’s words. His verbal portrait allows us to envision Burney’s looks and demeanor in her advanced years. But Scott was clearly steeped in his culture’s preconceptions of what female old age was and should be. His description echoes some of the most clichéd notions then in circulation, some of them positive. Although perceived as beyond any potential for attractiveness, “elderly ladies,” at their best, were imagined as cheerful, benevolent, affectionate, patient, and resigned. Or so Thomas Gisborne imagines in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (2nd ed., 1797).³ He describes old age as a time a woman may expect to be treated with tenderness and respect, as long as she avoids the behavioral traps that could obviate that treatment, including attachment to youthful amusements, avarice, selfishness, affectionate tendencies, querulousness, peevishness, and dissatisfaction.⁴ Gisborne’s assessment is in keeping with other descriptions from this era of elderly women’s supposed strengths and failings. Whether at her best or worst, such an old woman hardly emerges as a repository of wisdom or experience. Scott’s Burney would seem to have escaped some of the supposed flaws of the aged woman in being found pleasing and gentle, but his assessment of her “quick feelings” is not entirely complimentary. Scott’s description may ultimately be most useful not as an actual portrait of the artist as an old woman, then, but as further evidence of the stereotypes Burney had to contend with—and wrote in response to—in the 1820s and 1830s.

In *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, I devoted a chapter to comparing Burney’s and Edgeworth’s last published novels for what they tell us about the packaging and reception of authorship in old
age. Through readings of Edgeworth’s *Helen* (1834) and Burney’s *The Wanderer* (1814), as well as explorations of each novel’s reception, I argued that Edgeworth performed the role of “old woman novelist,” both in her prefatory materials and female characters, far more conventionally than Burney. I concluded that, in *The Wanderer* (published when she was in her early sixties), Burney presented riskier portraits of the aging female as sexually experienced—as well as romantically, and perhaps even sexually, active.\(^5\) I suggested that Burney suffered for these choices, which may, in part, have precipitated the negative reviews she endured, including, most famously, John Wilson Croker’s devastating anonymous assessment. He wrote in the *Quarterly Review* that *The Wanderer* was the product of “an old coquette who endeavours, by the wild tawdriness and laborious gaiety of her attire, to compensate for the loss of the natural charms of freshness, novelty, and youth.” The body of the novel and the body of the aging female author were found similarly repugnant and false fronted, as *The Wanderer* was deemed “*Evelina* grown old; the vivacity, the bloom, the elegance, ‘the purple light of love’ are vanished; the eyes are there, but they are dim; the cheek, but it is furrowed; the lips, but they are withered.”\(^6\) Croker depicted Burney as an old woman incapable of writing a novel of freshness, elegance, or vivacity. Nevertheless, in that chapter, I admittedly did little more than scratch the surface where the subject of Burney and old age is concerned. As I quipped there, we have Winifred Gérin’s *The Young Fanny Burney* and Anna Bird Stewart’s *Young Miss Burney*, but no titles trumpeting *Old Fanny Burney* or *Old Madame d’Arblay*.

In Burney’s case, this is not due to a lack of material. Joyce Hemlow’s editing of Burney’s journals and letters began with later documents, from the years 1791 and after. Since the completion of the twelve-volume set by Oxford University Press in 1984, Burney’s old age has been better documented in print than her youth.\(^7\) Even so, and despite fine scholarship by Janice Farrar Thaddeus, Margaret Doody, Joyce Hemlow, and others, Burney’s later years remain the least scrutinized period of her life. They get short shrift in all manner of biographical and critical texts. For instance, in Claire Harman’s recent biography, the two short chapters dealing with Burney’s life in 1815 and thereafter are depressingly titled “Keeping Life Alive” and “Post-Mortem.” In Kate Chisholm’s biography, a mere thirteen pages make up the chapter “Last Thoughts in Mayfair, 1818–1840.”\(^8\) The reason for devoting so little space to Burney’s late life is perhaps most baldly stated in Austin Dobson’s 1903 biography. His final chapter, which
he titles “Half a Lifetime,” spans forty-eight years. Dobson acknowledges that this “may appear—at first sight—to suggest a certain hurry at the close. But the fault lies with the material, not with the limits of the volume.” Burney’s life, Dobson writes, grows “less interesting” in middle age and thereafter.  

No doubt there are those who suspect that Dobson got at least that portion of Burney’s story right. But I am convinced that we stand to gain a great deal by turning a fresh eye to the biographical and literary material by and about Burney in old age. Regardless of one’s perspective on the level of interest we ought to have in Burney’s late life, there is, inarguably, a great deal left to say about it. With five published volumes of journal letters covering the years 1815–40; with the three-volume Memoirs of Doctor Burney (1832), which is often overlooked, maligned, or misunderstood; and with copious materials on her reception in late life that have yet to be examined, there is much to consider. In my reading of the Memoirs, I point us in directions that may be fruitful to pursue in future scholarship, including Burney’s textual persona and its contours and contradictions. It is wrongheaded to continue to ignore the actual old age of a famed woman writer whose nickname, from the age of eleven, was “The Old Lady.”  

Burney offers us a crucial life and set of writings to examine where gender, authorship, and aging are concerned.

Revisiting the Memoirs of Doctor Burney

The Memoirs of Doctor Burney has been called many things—a brilliant, or a flawed, biography, both “lovingly laboured” and “highly deferential.” It has been called a bad, or a good, successor to Boswell’s Life of Johnson, Hester Piozzi’s Anecdotes of Johnson (1786), and Letitia Matilda Hawkins’s Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches, and Memoirs (1822). It has also been called an egotistical book, a veiled autobiography. Burney acknowledges that she has created an “exposition of his posthumous memoirs with her own recollections.” Even so, rarely have we considered the Memoirs of Doctor Burney as the self-conscious production of an older woman writer. Few critics have acknowledged this text’s preoccupation with issues of aging, old age, physical decay, and death. When we read the Memoirs from its first page to its last, which is rarely done, its near obsession with these matters looks obvious and telling. This is a preoccupation demonstrated not only in the
stories and character sketches that Burney includes, but also in the book’s very narrative framework. As Claire Brock puts it, using Burney’s own words, the Memoirs are a “self-defence, a proud self-defence!” written at the end of a long and successful life.\(^{13}\)

The drawn-out process of how the Memoirs came to be published has been described most succinctly, if with greater partiality to the daughter, by Joyce Hemlow, who relies on Burney’s self-justifying letters.\(^{14}\) We know that Frances Burney helped her father, the famous musicologist Charles Burney (1726–1814), begin to edit his papers in 1797. Her brother Charles took over the task during her forced absence in her husband’s native France. When Frances finally returned to England, she and her father read his papers together, destroying some of them. After their father’s death in 1814, the Burney children discovered that no provision had been made for the deposition or editing of his papers. Frances found this shocking, in part because of the murky status of material that even in a “general Family review” had the potential to cause “pain, or confusion, or mischief” (Hemlow, 466). The family collectively decided that Frances would assume the task of editing the papers, with any proceeds from publication to be shared with her sister Esther. In 1817, Frances determined that her father had not left a publishable work. She worried that, if the memoirs were published as is, she would be judged a profiteer who exposed “her faded Father’s faded talents” (449). She also worried that the papers tarnished the Burney family name.

By 1820, Frances Burney had read over the mass of material two times and “committed to the flames” anything that struck her as “irrelevant” or “mischievous” (450). Continuing to read the “enormous load” through the 1820s, Frances, with her sister Esther’s apparent approbation, “continued burning the collection as fast” as she “had leisure to re-read” (451). In 1828, she “faced an ultimatum” that if she “did not intend to publish a life of her father,” the authors of the “‘Literary Biographical works’ would have to attempt it” (Hemlow 455). Frances, not wanting to be hurried into print by such a threat, thereafter worked secretly, completing the Memoirs by 1831. Although she wanted the work brought out after her own death, her nephew Charles Parr Burney encouraged her to publish the book at once, so that she could answer any criticisms or questions that might arise (456). She published with poet-turned-publisher Edward Moxon.\(^{15}\) Except for one letter considering how much to charge per copy of the Memoirs, how-
ever, “All other papers regarding the negotiations with Moxon have vanished” (Thaddeus, 196).

The three-volume text of the Memoirs that we know today was published in November 1832 and reviewed widely, although it “did not win critical acclaim,” as Margaret Doody concludes. Moxon was apparently slow to pay Burney, but it is estimated that she made £1,000 from the book by 1835, with Esther Burney’s heirs receiving the same amount (Burney, Letters, 12:785n1). According to George Justice, £2,000 for a book “was good pay.” The book was financially successful, then, but no second edition was called for. The Memoirs was not—and is not now—considered to be among Burney’s great literary achievements. Few set out to read it from cover to cover.

The Memoirs defies summary, which may be one of the reasons for its reputation. It is highly anecdotal, albeit roughly chronological. Over the course of its three volumes, it introduces the most important public figures from both Charles and Frances Burney’s lives, concentrating particularly on those literary celebrities they knew in common. The Memoirs is famous—even infamous—for using precious little primary material from her father’s life and for including a surprisingly large amount from her own, reprinting edited versions of many of her journal letters to family members and friends. As a result, even in the third-person narratives where Frances tells stories about people the Burneys knew, or things she and her father witnessed, the focus is rarely on Charles. He seems to dart in and out of the text, typically to add a sobering or rational comment, or to relay something provocative or incendiary that Johnson has said. The principal value of the Memoirs is not as a proper study of Charles’s life. Rather, it is a collection of anecdotes that record highlights of the man and his circle—and of the circle they shared. (Frances takes the stance that anything that reflects well on her reflects well on him.)

Rarely has the narrative structure of the Memoirs been considered in detail, however. We have virtually no close readings of it or even of its significant passages, other than of its long account of Evelina’s coming into the world, a section I consider later in this essay. First, it is important to establish that in the Memoirs of Doctor Burney, two elderly figures are constantly (though often indirectly) compared: the aged father Dr. Charles Burney, and the aged daughter “memorialist,” as Frances Burney calls herself. The degree to which either of these two figures is an accurate portrait is a subject of critical debate. The extent to which the Memoirs presents a
Rewriting Frances Burney and Old Age

reliable life of either Burney is a line of inquiry that I do not pursue in this essay.\(^\text{21}\) Of greater urgency than the vexed, unanswerable question of the accuracy of the *Memoirs*, perhaps, is that Frances Burney chose to depict herself as an aged woman in her narration. In particular, Burney’s conception of herself as the “memorialist” puts forward a portrait of the aged woman writer that, for many reasons, she appears to have wanted the public to appreciate. We have seldom remarked on the ways in which she crafted this portrait of herself as an old woman in contrast to that of her father as an old man. Burney’s presenting herself as the memorialist offers us a very different persona from that of Sir Walter Scott’s emotion-laden elderly lady with no remains of personal beauty. It is also very different from the portrait of the old woman writer that some early reviewers of the *Memoirs* would paint and later critics would repeat: Burney as senile egotist. Burney’s carefully drawn memorialist figure is, instead, a woman of capacious information and rational tenacity, much more the valuable sage than the harmless emoting grandmother or the vain superannuated harridan.

From its first pages, the *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* identifies itself as a book, remade from old materials, by an old woman. Burney emphasizes that she, as an author, will “resume, though in trembling, her long-forsaken pen” (1:vii). Of course, this latter point—her pen having been “long-forsaken,” at least as far as work for publication was concerned—is a detail that would have been well known to the reading public. Her last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), had appeared almost two decades prior to the publication of the *Memoirs*. And although her earlier novels continued to be read and were often mentioned in the periodicals in the late 1810s and 1820s, Burney’s silence as an author had not gone unremarked. She was, in fact, being written about as old news in the periodical press by the time the *Memoirs* was published. For example, in an 1830 review of a book by another female novelist, Burney is referred to as the “once popular” Madame d’Arblay.\(^\text{22}\) This kind of remark is typical. Mentions of Burney across the 1820s, though usually positive, demonstrate significant nostalgia. She was no longer suspected to be adding anything to her stock as an author. Few would have been anticipating a new work by Frances Burney. The other adjective Burney used to describe herself when taking up her pen in the *Memoirs*—“trembling”—was probably meant to invoke her trademark modesty. Claire Harman sees the *Memoirs* as “the nether end, almost the logical conclusion, of Fanny’s persistent neurosis about authorship.”\(^\text{23}\) Her use of the word “trembling” supports Harman’s point. At the
same time, however, it is an unfortunate word choice, a loaded term for a woman writer to use at the age of eighty, calling up images of frailty and physical debility that Burney may or may not have intended. Perhaps she was also seeking gentle treatment from readers and critics on the basis of her age. Adding to the picture of decay is Burney’s indicating that the very materials she works with are old. She writes that the papers of her father she reworks “have been laid aside, though never forgotten . . . during many years” (1:vi). Such mentions of memory, age, and antiquity are repeated throughout the book. There are long ruminations on her being “alive to memory” (1:191), references to writing from memory (2:167), or working from documents to “refresh her memory” (2:122). The language of reminiscing, forgetting, and remembering is woven into the fabric of the Memoirs. She repeatedly reminds readers of her advanced age, but also of her unshaken ability to recall earlier days, as she narrates her father’s life. Her pen may be trembling, but her mind is keen.

From the moment of the work’s publication, Burney’s frequent reference to herself in the third person, often as “this memorialist,” has struck some readers as annoying, unnecessary, or both. It is a term Burney invokes on the first page of her “Preface, or Apology,” calling herself her father’s “present Editor and Memorialist” (1:iii). One early reader bothered by the author’s choice of self-reference was novelist Maria Edgeworth, who had a decade earlier published a memoir of her famous father, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq., Begun By Himself and Concluded by His Daughter (1820). Maria Edgeworth writes in a private letter to a friend that Frances Burney in the Memoirs of Doctor Burney has a strange notion that it is more humble or prettier or better taste to call herself Recluse of West Humble or your unworthy humble servant or the present memorialist than simply to use the short pronoun I. This false theory leads to much circumlocution, awkwardness, and an appearance of pedantry and affectation. It becomes tiresome and ridiculous.24

Few subsequent readers have found Burney’s mix of first- and third-person references to herself to be propitious. I think it important to add, though, that there was relatively recent and famous precedence for such a choice. One of the most successful memoirs published in the early nineteenth century, the English Civil War writer Lucy Hutchinson’s Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson (1806), written during the Restoration, used an amal-
gamation of first- and third-person references in telling her own and her husband’s story, and it was celebrated by early nineteenth-century readers. This simultaneously intimate (“I”) and modestly distancing (“she”) narrative mechanism may well have influenced those who came to admire Hutchinson as a female exemplar, finding her to be “one of the purest and most accomplished” women of her day.25

Burney’s narrative approach did not produce the same effect on readers. She invents many third-person labels to refer to herself, but the most germane here is “memorialist.” She invokes the term more than a dozen times in the first two volumes of the work, but in the third volume, she uses the term more than fifty times. It may be fitting that “memorialist” would come to prominence in sections of the book that deal most directly with her father’s later years, because this was the era in which both father and daughter were celebrated public figures. It may also be that by the third volume, Burney, who had been working on the Memoirs for years, was becoming tired and simply began repeating the term as a comfortable old saw. We might consider that through the use of this term, Burney is calling herself something more than a writer of memoir or biography.26 A now obsolete eighteenth-century meaning of “memorialist,” according to the OED, was “a person who has a good memory,” a fitting descriptor of the raison d’être provided in the text for Frances Burney’s late-life authorship. Thus, her use of the term implies that she writes and publishes in late life because she has an excellent memory and is therefore well placed to recount details of her father, herself, and their circle.

In the third volume of the Memoirs, Burney not only takes great pains to establish her own excellent memory in late life, but she also contrasts it to her father’s faulty memory in old age. In doing so, she draws a distinction between what was then called the “green” or vigorous old age of a woman of sound mind, in contrast to the “feeble” old age of a withered man whose recollections may no longer be trusted. What is interesting, and has not been much remarked on, is that these two figures are roughly contemporaries in chronological age. Frances Burney, in 1832, was in her eightieth year, the age her father would have been in 1805–06, when he was, according to Frances’s account, producing the shoddy memoir writing that she would ultimately reject in favor of her own. In 1807, he had a stroke that paralyzed his left hand.27 Of course, both father and daughter had been working on their memoirs—his of himself and hers of him—for
a significant period of time prior to that. But for all of the commentary we have on Frances’s turning her memoir of her father into an autobiography, we have surprisingly little commentary on what it means that, according to the Memoirs at least, each writer was active at roughly the same period of late life, with, supposedly, vastly different capacities for authorship.

There are many places in the Memoirs in which Frances touts her own capabilities as an aged author, particularly by presenting herself as a trustworthy source of memories. As she puts it in volume 3, referring to herself in the third person as “Editor,” she offers readers a “well-stored memory of the minutest points of the character, conduct, disposition, and opinions of Charles Burney” (3:435). Charles, by contrast, is repeatedly said in the Memoirs to have lost his memory and therefore his authorial abilities. Frances communicates this distinction through the stories she tells and through her narrator’s remarks. She carefully describes her father’s “failure of memory” (3:335) along with his failing sight and hearing. She attributes to him the statement, “I am become fearful of beginning any story that occurs to me, lest I should be stopped short by hunting for Mr. How d’ye call him’s style and titles” (3:335). Charles is said to have had a conversation with an old bookseller: “I catechised [him] about old people and old things,—but alas! of the first, not one creature is now alive whom I remember, or who can remember me!” (3:244). In describing an accident that befell her father in 1801, Frances concludes, “But who discovers the exact moment of arriving defalcation either of body or mind, till taught it by one of those severe instructors, Disease, or Accident?” (3:301). Frances goes to great pains to illustrate her father’s superannuation alongside her own continued capacities, her recollections having been “hoarded from childhood in her memory” (1:vii). Her father, on the other hand, she suspects would have “obliterated” his autobiographical papers in late life had he “revised his writings after the recovery of his health and spirits,” that is, post 1807, when he allegedly became fearful of having a paralytic seizure (1:xvi). Frances notes that, at this point, he was eighty-one years old; what she does not note is that she herself, as she works on his papers some decades later, is but a few years shy of that age. Once we do the math, the contrast could not be clearer. In her old age, Frances has successfully hoarded her memories of her father, in order to record them “scrupulously” (1:vii), but she claims her father would have—should have—destroyed his own writings in old age, if he had been well enough, or if he had remembered to do so. Of course, we might say that this characterization, whether accurate or not, provides
a convenient excuse for her having used so few—and, as we know now, destroyed so many—of her father’s papers. But there is something more at stake here, too.

Although Frances describes her father's memory as faulty and her own memory as almost without fail, she is quick to inform readers that her pen is a tired one. Her mind may not fail, but her fingers fail her, she seems to suggest at every turn. This contrast may have confused readers. What limitations was she admitting as a writer? She discusses the act of quoting long, old letters in the Memoirs as a choice made to “spare herself the toil of re-committing to paper” particular stories (3:152). She also seems to suggest—again, rather unfortunately—that writing undertaken while young is better writing than that undertaken in old age. For instance, before quoting three long letters she wrote to Crisp, Frances writes that letters authored by the young “may be more amusing to the reader, from their natural flow of youthful spirits . . . than any more steady recollections that could at present be offered from the same pen” (1:297–98). This statement may be taken at face value; perhaps Burney really believed her own literary powers to be failing. But it also may be a calculated statement meant to excuse her from being accused of having written with too much levity in old age. Or perhaps her characteristic authorial modesty may be the most useful lens through which to view such statements. Still, if there was false modesty at work here, these moments were not well calculated to win over her readers. And implying that the writings of the young are more amusing obviously means that the majority of the Memoirs, even if steady, must be seen as less, or even un-, amusing. Adding to the problem was the widely held view of the critics and the public that Frances Burney had already experienced a decline in literary powers from Evelina and Cecilia to Camilla and The Wanderer. Negative reviews of Burney’s The Wanderer suggested that the more female authors tried to deny the loss of bloom in their works, the more ridiculous they became, as the aging woman novelist’s body of work is likened to her own body (Looser, 38–39). Perhaps as a result of these reviews, Burney’s statements in the Memoirs took a different tack with readers, as she at least partially accepted their negative assessments. But, as I will show, in an elderly female author’s catch-22, her apologia did not protect her from further vicious attacks based on her age and sex.

The relentless focus on age in the Memoirs is an important factor in the presentation and reception of this misunderstood text. As we have seen, Burney enjoins readers to applaud her for not putting on direct display
the written fruits of her father’s faulty memory but simultaneously to for-
give her any shortcomings in the quality of her own aged writing. She also
gives readers another reason to approve of her efforts; she tells us that the
act of writing is psychologically crucial to an author’s later years. Writing
in old age is said to fatigue the nerves and harass the health, but it also has
the potential to become “what literary pursuits will ever become to minds
capable of their development”: “a check to morbid sadness,” “a renovator of
wearied faculties,” and, finally, “a source of enjoyment” (2:354). Later, even
Charles Burney’s “hoards” of papers are partially approved for their serving
as a “frequent recourse for recreation in his latter years” (3:59). If women
writers of this period were said to specialize in using the “modesty topos”
to apologize for having written, and to smooth the way for a positive recep-
tion, Burney crafts a kind of old woman’s modesty topos, in a quest for a
different kind of chivalrous treatment. She implies that readers ought to
treat late life writers with kid gloves, because writing in old age promises
the writer not just pleasure but also the potential for mental renovation.

Thus far, I have concentrated on the characterizations of the author-
memorialist Frances Burney and on the would-be memoirist Charles Bur-
ney. But it is important to mention that the treatment of age and aging
in the Memoirs ranges far beyond this material. Aging is also central to
anecdotes that are prominent throughout the book. For example, Sam-
uel Johnson is said to have quipped, “It is a terrible thing that we cannot
wish young ladies to be well, without wishing them to become old women”
(2:159). This anecdote is said to have produced a reply from Charles Bur-
ney, who argues that it is a good thing that the pleasures of longevity are
gradual, so that people are not at a loss for how to welcome them (2:159).
David Garrick’s life as a wit is said to have resulted in his prematurely
aging face, a theme that recurs in stories about him (2:160, 2:201). Edmund
Burke is said to have made in conversation a “dissertation upon the beauty,
but rarity, of great minds sustaining great powers to great old age” (2:231).
A complete inventory of this sort of commentary on old age in the Memoirs
would be substantial.

Even the book’s readers are imagined as either old or young, with Bur-
ney separating the responses she anticipates based on their ages. As she
writes, the names that she invokes in the Memoirs will seem “of recent date
to the aged, yet of still living curiosity to the youthful reader” (1:viii). In
introducing her description of King George III, she again distinguishes her
readers, old from young. For the old, her story will “afford a pleasing remi-
niscence,” while “those who are too young to recollect him” may still find
the anecdote a “matter of laudable curiosity” (2:385). Her addressing read-
ers as either old or young in this book is an especially meaningful choice,
given her repeated self-presentation as an exemplar of fertile mental, if not always authorial, old age. This older woman writer courts her readers, too,
based on their ages.

The subject of old age frequently makes its appearance in the book’s
many short character sketches. In fact, the Memoirs uses several repeated
conventions in describing its cast of characters. They include presenting the
importance of triumphant and mentally active old age, narrating regret-
ted but good deaths, and offering panegyrics on the aged by those who
outlived them. The ages of particular individuals, their ages at the time
of a notable accomplishment, and their ages at death are also prominently
mentioned. Burney is not above making comments on physical appearance,
which echoes, in part, the judgment that Sir Walter Scott rendered on her
in his private journal. Horace Walpole, according to Burney, was much past
seventy, though he continued to look young (2:274). He is also described as
an “old bachelor of other days” (3:66). The Duchess of Leinster is described
as “still beautiful, though old” (2:267). Elizabeth Montagu’s face is said to
have “retained strong remains of beauty throughout her life” (2:271). The
Duchess of Portland in her eighty-third year is said to have had a physiog-
nomy of sweetness, sense, and dignity (2: 310). Invoking almost the precise
phrase that Sir Walter Scott used, Burney describes Mary Delany as hav-
ing “little remains of beauty” in old age (2:304). But Burney, unlike Scott,
frequently couples her descriptions of relative physical beauty in old age
with extensive material on an individual’s continued intellectual strength
or ongoing professional accomplishments. Her aged are rarely stereotypi-
cally harmless, excitable, or simple.

The discussions of Mary Delany provide a good case in point, as they
suggest Burney’s notions of an admirable woman in old age. If Charles
Burney is positioned as the text’s elderly character contrasted against his
daughter, the aged memorialist, Mary Delany appears throughout the
Memoirs as Frances’s aged doppelgänger. Delany’s faculties are described
repeatedly as entirely unimpaired by old age. Burney compares the
eighteen-year old Delany to the Delany of eighty-four, saying that she was
the same in being “lively, gay, pleasant, and good-humouredly arch and
“playful” at both ends of the age spectrum (2:398). Burney also lectures the young about the contentment of the old, using Delany as her example, writing that “far nearer to mortal happiness is such contentment in the aged, than is suspected, or believed, by assuming or presuming youth” (3:356). Even in describing Delany’s death from an inflammation of the chest (brought on by a cold), Burney goes to great pains to describe her friend as nearly unimpaired in every mental and physical capacity and as a model of piety (3:103–04). This, the Memoirs suggests, is what a learned woman’s good old age might look like. When Burney describes Delany (again, in a quoted letter) as “the model of an accomplished gentlewoman of former times” (3:169), it sounds similar to what Burney was aiming for in her self-presentation in the Memoirs.29

The Mixed Reception of Burney’s Memoirs

One of the reasons it is important to chart the extensive and complicated treatment of old age in this work is that it goes some distance toward explaining why many contemporary reviewers focused on Frances Burney’s advanced age so decidedly, whether positively or negatively. This does not, however, explain the virulence with which one critic in particular attacked her book. Burney was familiar with the harsh treatment that critics could marshal when scrutinizing new publications by older women writers. As we have seen, she had experienced it in the reception of The Wanderer. Still, she was apparently shocked by the personal attacks mounted against her in 1832. In some ways, the negative reception of her Memoirs was typical. In other ways, however, the response was sui generis. Typical is the overarching skepticism or condescending chivalry with which a new work by an old woman was met in this era. Many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century critics—and perhaps readers as well—seem to have felt uncomfortable with older women writers publishing new literary works. What breaks the mold in Burney’s case is that Memoirs was flattened by the same reviewer who had demolished The Wanderer almost twenty years previously: John Wilson Croker.30

Croker specialized in destructive reviews. Even in his own time, his name was synonymous with unfairly harsh reviewing practices. As the writer Sydney Smith put it in an 1838 letter, “If what I write is liked, so much the better; but, liked or not liked, sold or not sold, Wilson Cro-
kered or not Wilson Crokered, I will write.” Unfortunately, Burney had to endure being “Wilson Crokered” in prominent reviews of the last two works of her career. Though no one now really believes that it was Croker’s negative reviews that killed John Keats or that stopped Tennyson’s pen from writing poetry for a decade, Croker has become notorious for the misogyny in his reviews of female authors. To that, we might add that he had a penchant for expressing sentiments that we would now label sexist and ageist. He may have lauded and recognized the national significance that, as he put it in another anonymous review, “eminent literary ladies are longlived.” But when it came to passing judgment on older women writers’ individual works, he was rarely so sanguine or celebratory.

In the abstract, the English public liked to think of literary pursuits as particularly appropriate activities for women in old age. As one anonymous writer (identified only as “G.”) put it in 1825, for most women, old age was a bleak prospect: “Beauty soon fades, accomplishments follow quickly in the rear; and the once beautiful and admired female, scarcely able to exact the coldest civility, spends the remainder of her days in frivolity and unhappiness.” Instead, G. suggests, “The years . . . wasted in pain and frivolity might be agreeably spent in literary pursuits” (485). Even if this literary activity had “no other utility,” the writer concludes, it would be “highly valuable” because “an intelligent female” could “spend her leisure hours with much pleasure in these pursuits, and, at the same time, earn the approbation and esteem of society” (G., 485). But “literary pursuits” may have meant reading rather than writing; the response to an elderly lady publishing her writings was far more complicated. Approbation and esteem often did not follow literary women into old age, as Burney had discovered all too well in 1814.

Madame Fortunée Briquet, in her historical and literary dictionary of French writers, published in 1804, opined that “the old age of a literary person is the evening of a fine day.” Nevertheless, the kinds of writing that Briquet promotes as appropriate for the elderly author are letters (called “the best support of old age”) and what she labels “charming verses.” Publication is not mentioned; engaging in sustained works of writing is not recommended. Hannah More makes similar points far less sympathetically. For More, women’s old age is neither the time for ambition nor for frivolity: “Divine Providence,” she writes, “seems to have intended advanced age as a season of repose, reflection, and preparation for death.” More rails against those who try to cheat old age of “calmness and resignation.” She
reserves especially harsh judgment for those pernicious elderly who indulge in “youthful images,” “light reading,” and worst of all, “loose composition.” The mixed messages for older literary women, even from other aged women writers, are legion. Read, but peruse nothing that inclines to youthful reflections. Write, but only if light, occasional texts and only if highly moral. Publish? Perhaps if someone happens to snatch up your charming didactic verses and sneak them off to the press. Otherwise, best not to do so. In such a cultural context, it is no wonder that Burney initially wanted to wait until after she died to have the Memoirs see print.

It is important to note that the early reviews of the Memoirs, although they almost universally criticized aspects of Burney’s style, often praised the woman and the work in terms that emphasized her venerability and the antiquity of her materials. The Athenaeum’s reviewer concluded, “These volumes surpass in interest and in value most of the reminiscences of these our latter days. . . . She is a lady of unquestioned veracity, as well as talent.” The Monthly Review observed, “We are justified in declaring, that a more amusing and profitable production has not appeared in the same department for many years.” One reviewer celebrates Burney’s focus on the daughter rather than the father, calling the choice “among the happiest sins into which a female author was ever betrayed by pardonable vanity.” Another reviewer begins, “A new work by the authoress of Evelina and Camilla! This alone were a god-send,” and praises the Memoirs for its “purity and truth.” The Gentleman’s Magazine remarks, “We greet in the most friendly spirit her long forsaken pen,” while acknowledging it must “necessarily, not willingly” state objections to Burney’s style. The Harmonicon’s reviewer finds the Memoirs to be a “very amusing book, full of anecdotes, which if sometimes a little too long, and at others scarcely of importance enough to have merited recording at this distance of time, are always lively and well told.” These compliments—despite their back-handedness—are notable. As Thaddeus remarks, “At this juncture any male writer of the period would have written his autobiography. But no women of Burney’s class, or at any rate, of the class the Burney family had with difficulty entered, ever published her memoirs during her lifetime” (189). Burney was again taking a literary risk.

In the Quarterly Review, at least, that risk seriously backfired. Croker’s twenty-nine-page review in the April 1833 issue follows previous reviewers in its condescending chivalry, but it surpasses them in sheer vitriol. Indeed,
Croker’s review has become almost as well known as the *Memoirs*, notorious for its damning statements, particularly for claiming to have caught Burney red-handed concealing information about her age. As previously mentioned, the *Memoirs* included a fifty-page section describing the publication circumstances of *Evelina*, a choice that several critics found odd in a book ostensibly about her father. But Croker’s interest was in unearthing the truth behind the long-circulating and erroneous story that Burney was only seventeen when her first novel was published. He shows that *Evelina* was published when Burney was in her mid twenties, rather than at seventeen (the age of Burney’s heroine, which perhaps led to the public’s confusion). Croker inquired into the parish registers in King’s Lynn to discover this fact. He acknowledges that Burney “may have had no share in propagating the original error,” but he faults her for what he claims is “little anxiety to correct” the error in the *Memoirs*. He twice accuses Burney of “the suppression of dates” and writes that “no spinster of a doubtful age can have a greater aversion to accuracy in matters of date than is exhibited by this lady, who admits that she has been above fifty-five years an author and forty years a wife.” In particular, Croker suggests that the account in the *Memoirs* of Burney’s celebrating *Evelina*’s success by having danced as she had done, as she put it, “in her days of adolescence” (2:148–49) implies a much younger woman than one in her middle twenties. But Burney’s statement in the *Memoirs* indicates she was beyond adolescence in her celebratory dance of 1778. It is important to note that adolescence in this period, according to the *OED*, extended up to the age of twenty-one in females and twenty-five in males. Croker was making a mountain out of a molehill.

In addition to its charges of the suppression of dates, Croker’s review relentlessly attacks Burney’s for her old age. He begins by implying that her style has deteriorated, because her “most popular production was published nearly sixty years ago” (97). After going over Burney’s reasons for not publishing more of her father’s own writings, Croker complains that whatever Burney held back, it could not have been more “feeble, anile, incoherent, or ‘sentant plus l’apoplexie,’ than that which she has substituted for it” (98). These are words pointedly chosen to dismiss Burney’s *Memoirs* as the ravings of a senile, incapable old woman. Indeed, “anile” meant “of or like an old woman, old-womanish; imbecile” (*OED*). Croker did not just give Burney’s *Memoirs* a negative review or accuse her of lying. In essence, he
pronounced that as an author she was so far past her prime as to render any of her attempts at writing risible.

Croker criticizes the *Memoirs* for being “prolix” and “desultory,” both words stereotypically associated with garrulous old women. He even maintains that she does not have the one thing she most proudly lays claim to have throughout the *Memoirs*: a good memory. He suspects that “the details of Madame d’Arblay’s reminiscences—after a lapse of above fifty years—are not always to be implicitly relied on” (115). In his 1814 review of *The Wanderer*, Croker had written of Burney’s novel-writing career as if it were over. In his review of the *Memoirs* nearly twenty years later, he goes a step further and writes of Burney as if she were already dead. As Croker puts it, in a final, backhanded compliment, Burney “will (her later works happily forgotten) go down to posterity as an exemplary woman in private life” (125). In other words, he predicts she will be remembered as Sir Walter Scott had privately recorded her—as simple and gentle, pleasing and feeling. She would not be remembered as having written or published in old age.

Scott may have been involved, indirectly, in Croker’s review, and there may well be more unrecorded details that have been lost to history. As we now know, Burney began writing her account of the publication history of *Evelina* in part because Scott had encouraged her to do so, after hearing her converse about it at their first meeting (*Memoirs*, 3:122). Interestingly—and this is something that previous scholars have not remarked on—one of the people egging on Croker in his negative review of Burney’s *Memoirs* was Sir Walter Scott’s son-in-law (and later, biographer), John Gibson Lockhart, the longtime editor of the *Quarterly Review*, the periodical that published Croker’s vituperative review of the *Memoirs*. Lockhart appears to have encouraged if not commissioned the review, telling Croker, “Your papers on Mad. d’Arblay & Mayas will be most welcome whenever you have leisure for them.” Lockhart’s first response to Croker is that the Burney review is “too short”: “All you have done is delightful—but I do desiderate some anecdotes—for example those you yourself allude to sub fine.” Lockhart wrote in a private letter to Croker, “I have read 12 pages of F. B. w great pleasure. You exceed yourself in yr description of her vanity of vanities! This will be a first rate paper I am sure.” Lockhart endorses Croker’s attack on Burney for allegedly disguising her age. After reading the whole of his review, Lockhart concludes of Burney, “She really is too wearisome. No housemaid’s conversation about the doings of the servants hall could be more dull & vulgar.” It makes one wonder precisely what,
if anything, Scott had passed on to his son-in-law about his impressions of Burney’s conversational powers.

The Lockhart-Croker correspondence gives the lie to the first line in Croker’s review of Burney’s Memoirs. Croker writes, “We would willingly have declined the task of reviewing this book” (97). On the contrary, Croker seems to have relished it, and Lockhart more than approved it. This is of particular interest because Lockhart was not above coaching Croker to tone it down and aim for greater chivalry where his treatment of old women writers was concerned. At one point, Lockhart stepped in to protect Maria Edgeworth, another old literary woman, and one of Croker’s favorite “she-liberal” targets. Lockhart writes to Croker, “Pray don’t recrucify old [Richard Lovell] Edgeworth, His daughter is 77 & has just pubd a 2d Edition of her Memoirs [of her father]. Your paragraph wd be a big nail in her coffin.” It seems, then, that Lockhart was willing to combat Croker’s maliciousness in print toward old women writers only in select cases, but apparently, no one at the Quarterly Review was concerned about putting a big nail in Burney’s coffin. Croker himself wrote to Lockhart, “I send up to-day the first livraison on d’Arblay, which amuses me & will, I think the readers without any brutality against the poor old body.” But “brutal” would be a fair assessment of what Croker went on to publish.

In any case, Frances Burney was brutalized. At first, she appears in her letters to take it all in stride, writing to her nephew in April 1833, “As to Hostility to my poor Memoirs—I hope, my dear Charles, you do not suppose I hold Hostility to them & to me one & the same thing?” A few months later, however, she claims to be “delighted” and “quite charmed” with the idea of her nieces writing a “Retort Sarcastic” to answer Croker’s review. Burney writes, “Earnestly as I desire to answer what I can so unanswerably reply to, the attacks upon Verity, I shrink from a War of that—or any other kind—in the periodicals. Still, I should like to possess, & shew to my own circle, The Retort Sarcastic of my own Nieces” (Journals, 12:796–97). Hemlow reports that in the “Retort Sarcastic,” the nieces “tried to show that ‘Caroline Evelyn,’ the precursor of Evelina [was] composed before the age of 15 . . . and that the composition of the published Evelina was continuous from that time” (Journals, 12:796n7). This would seem a clever tack to take to demonstrate Burney’s youthful literary powers. In the end, however, none of these defenses was made in public.

Hemlow reports that this “Retort Sarcastic,” written by nieces Fanny Raper and Charlotte Barrett, and perhaps also by Burney’s son, Alex
d’Arblay, survives in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library (Burney, *Journals*, 12:796n7). In another source, Hemlow indicates the survival of a draft defense of the *Memoirs* by Alex d’Arblay but not of the “Retort Sarcastic” (Hemlow, 459). Thus far, my searches have turned up nothing resembling the “Retort Sarcastic” or a draft defense of the *Memoirs* by Burney’s son. It is possible, however, that Hemlow refers to (or has merely confused) this document for the material in the surviving drafts of Charlotte Barrett’s edition of Burney’s letters, which do directly defend her aunt from Croker’s charges of her lying about her age. There is a note among these materials at the Berg from Hemlow: “Charlotte Barrett’s defence of Madam d’Arblay against Croker’s attack on her veracity. J. H.”

Two versions of Barrett’s defense survive, one a fair copy and one marked “Omit,” with small differences between the two. Most of this account was not included in Barrett’s published version in the 1840s. In the printed version, only Barrett’s first paragraph, referring to Johnson, is included: “Among the less favourable Criticisms of this work [the *Memoirs*] the only one that gave the writer serious pain was an attack (in a periodical publication) upon her veracity; a quality which, in her, Doctor Johnson repeatedly said ‘he had never found failing,’ and for which she had been through life trusted, honored, and emulated.” The remainder of Barrett’s defense has remained unpublished, although Hemlow paraphrased its substance in her biography of Burney. Barrett’s defense continues:

The Critic alledged [sic] that Miss Burney was 25 years of age when Evelina was published, & therefore that she could not have been only 17 when it was written. But in fact it was begun when she was still younger, namely, when, at the age of 15, she destroyed her whole mass of juvenile compositions in compliance with the prejudices of her step-mother.—‘Mr. Villars, Lady Howard, Mrs. Mirvan, Sir John Belmont, & Madame Duval’—were all principal personages in the *History of Caroline Evelyn,* Evelina’s mother, and from that work went on to its successor; all the three volumes being pent in her head ere committed to paper, because never intended to be written. Yet—at night, & in occasional solitudes, always offering themselves, in various scenes, situations, dialogues, and incidents, to her imagination. She literally kept her piece nine years, though not consciously and classically.

It was neither the youth nor the sex of the author of ‘Evelina’ that operated on its popularity; Both were utterly unknown when the book, in its first year, ran through three Editions, traversed all London amongst the literary & the fashionable alike—induced Mr. Burke to sit up a whole
Barrett’s defense of Burney’s having begun what would become *Evelina* as a girl is eloquent. One wonders how Croker and the public would have responded to any defense of the kind, had it come from Burney’s circle at the time of the review.

What we do know is that Croker’s review bothered Frances Burney for the rest of her life. In 1839, Charlotte Barrett wrote about it to Croker’s nemesis, Thomas Babington Macaulay, encouraging him to defend Burney’s legacy against Croker. Macaulay refused, saying, “What has Madame d’Arblay to gain by a controversy with Croker? In truth the article in the Quarterly Review has been utterly forgotten while Evelina and Cecilia are just as much read as ever” (Journals, 12:796n7). But was Burney really anxious about the legacy of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*? I think it more likely that she was worried about being branded a vain old woman who would lie about her age or was hurt by the weakened reputation and fate of her *last* published work, the *Memoirs*, in which she poured so much energy. We can see this concern in an 1839 letter to Barrett, in which Burney writes,

> Though I had lost all thought of my extreme vexation at the Defamation of Mr. Croker, it rises again in perusing the genuine warmth of the Letter of Dr. Jones. . . . And now, once more awakened to my original feeling, I poignantly regret that I did not at once answer it—or let my dearest Alex—who could not even Name my wanton calumniator but with trembling emotion. That I may have made a mistake in 3 such large Volumes, I readily allow, & would readily repair—but certainly not a willful—& far—far less a malevolent one. He has started doubts upon matters the most trivial, & then tried to give them the consequence of a solemn refutation. Did I ever shew you my revered BP of Limeric’s Letter upon the Memoirs? If not, I think I must. (Journals, 12:969)

This exchange continued to resonate after Burney’s death in 1840. Charlotte Barrett went on to publish the aforementioned Bishop of Limerick’s 1832 letter in her edition of the *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay*. Barrett quotes the bishop as having written to Burney,
This moment I have finished your most touching memoir of your admirable father. I cannot now attempt to describe my feelings; but you have laid the friends of virtue, of genius, of goodness, under a lasting obligation. How far it may, in all respects, be suited to the temper of this frivolous, pretending, and most self-sufficient age, I cannot undertake to judge; but your work assuredly gives new and valuable materials for the history of the human mind.

Can there be any doubt that this is the way Burney wanted her father, the Memoirs, and her late-life authorship, remembered, in contrast to Croker’s account?

More detailed studies of Frances Burney’s reputation in old age are needed, including those using materials that appeared after her death. In their dueling reviews of Burney in the 1840s, Croker and Macaulay sparred over her legacy in terms that invoke gender and age, but this was only a small part of the two men’s monumental squabbling. In fact, there is now an entire book devoted to describing Croker and Macaulay’s quarrels. But there is, as of yet, no detailed critical or biographical account of Burney’s later years and late writings, both private and published. What we have instead are two enduring and equally false portraits of her in old age: Sir Walter Scott’s backhanded compliment and John Wilson Croker’s brutal review. Although this essay presents but a brief foray into this complex territory, it serves as a reminder that we must do more and better as literary critics and historians where Burney and a host of her aged female author contemporaries are concerned. We must seek to describe with greater nuance the circumstances, challenges, and achievements of their late lives and writings.

Notes

1. Throughout this essay, I refer to Madame d’Arblay (the name she called herself after marriage and the one she published under in the Memoirs) as Frances Burney. Although arguably one ought to call her “d’Arblay,” particularly when considering her late-life writings, “Burney” remains the standard scholarly convention for referring to her, and so I follow it here.


7. See *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d’Arblay)*, ed. Joyce Hemlow, et al., 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972). Materials from Burney’s early years and her court journals are not yet fully available in print, although Peter Sabor is in the process of editing them, with a team of scholars; volume 1 (1786) and volume 2 (1787) of the planned six recently appeared. See Frances Burney, *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2011). We may have books trumpeting Burney’s early years, but much of the material to describe them fully still remains available only in manuscript. Oddly, then, the materials for describing Burney’s later life have been far more accessible than those for her youth and early middle age.


14. Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 466, hereafter, Hemlow. I have chosen to use the first names Frances and Charles in this section, in order to be clear about which Burney is referred to.

15. Moxon’s biographer suggests that he ended up becoming Burney’s publisher as a result of their mutual connection with Charles Lamb. It is more likely that Burney and Moxon’s mutual connection to Samuel Rogers, who had also introduced Sir Walter Scott to Burney, brought about this publishing partnership. See Harold G. Merriam, *Edward Moxon: Publisher of Poets* (New York: AMS, 1966), 43. Moxon had dedicated his first book of poems to Rogers, whom he had met through Lamb (8–9). Rogers, in his sixties, was the “patron, or at least the friend in need” to several young poets (8).


18. Those interested in comparing some of Charles Burney’s surviving fragments of writing against Frances Burney’s rendering of events may consult *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney, 1726–1769*, ed. Slava Klima, Gary Bowers, and Kerry S. Grant (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1988). This edition includes material up to 1769. One critic who has compared the father’s fragments to the Memoirs is Miriam Benkovitz, who, in “Dr. Burney’s Memoirs,” *Review of English Studies* (1959): 257–68, charges Frances with creating in the Memoirs an “unjust and untruthful impression of Dr. Burney” (257). Benkovitz argues that Frances “chose to pervert or eliminate nearly all of the material her father had recorded as autobiography” (257). Benkovitz compares several passages from Charles’s manuscript to Frances’s published accounts to draw her conclusions, and she also describes omitted materials. There is little question of Frances’s lack of fidelity to her father’s surviving manuscript fragments in her version of the Memoirs. Benkovitz speculates briefly in her essay about both Charles’s and Frances’s ages and their impact on the daughter’s authorial-editorial choices. For Benkovitz, Frances’s old age at the time of writing her father’s memoir “elicits an apology” from a critic, when one should otherwise call the Memoirs “reprehensible” (268).

19. Thaddeus’s *Frances Burney* includes a valuable chapter on the Memoirs.

20. A long line of critics has questioned the veracity of Frances Burney’s characterizations of her father in old age. Most notable among them in the twentieth century is Roger Lonsdale, who, in *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), suggests that Frances’s misrepresentations of her father’s life amounted to “conscious dishonesty” (440). Klima, Bowers, and Grant, in their edition of the *Memoirs of Charles Burney*, also consider Frances Burney’s Memoirs “a very poor substitute for what she destroyed. Written in a prose of turgid preciosity very different from her early style, it made her father into a Sir Charles Grandison and from the time of its publication in 1832 elicited caustic critical comment. John Wilson Croker rightly took her to task for giving as much space to herself as to Dr. Burney, pointing out that as editor she should have presented her father’s memoirs in substantially the form in which she found them” (xxix). Benkovitz, too, in “Dr. Burney’s Memoirs,” argues that the Memoirs “create an unjust and untruthful impression of Dr. Burney” (257).

Hemlow is Frances Burney’s most prominent defender on this subject. Though Hemlow acknowledges that the Memoirs is “not by modern standards an adequate biography” and that “it might be more properly entitled ‘Memoirs of the Doctor and his Daughter,’” she also claims that the book is “authoritative in a way none other can ever be” (466). Its approach to aging is not among Hemlow’s central concerns. Lonsdale, in *Dr. Charles Burney*, is unusual in that his consideration of the Memoirs
puts questions of aging at the fore, but he travels this ground primarily to show that
the book misrepresents the music historian father’s capabilities in old age and to
accuse the daughter of senile egotism (History of Fanny Burney, 451).

21. I think it important to put Frances Burney’s destruction of her father’s
documents in historical context. Even a sympathetic critic like Thaddeus concludes
that there is “no defense for the rampant destruction” of Charles Burney’s papers
(Frances Burney, 188). But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,
burning one’s own or another’s letters and papers or editing them heavily prior
to publication could have been construed as an act of love, charity, or admirable
protection of privacy, rather than one of monstrous violence or callous disregard.
Thaddeus admits, for instance, that Frances and her elder sister Esther may have
destroyed some of their father’s papers to hide the fact that Esther was born before
their parents were married (196).

22. Thomas Henry Lister, review of Mrs. Gore, Women as They Are, The
Edinburgh Review 51 (July 1830): 450.


24. The Education of the Heart: The Correspondence of Rachel Mordecai Lazarus
and Maria Edgeworth, ed. Edgar E. MacDonald (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North
Carolina, 1977), 246–47.

683 [683–93].

26. Emily Friedman has been working on Burney’s use of the term memorial in
the court diaries and on the word’s legal implications, which may also be germane
to future readings of the Memoirs. See Friedman, “Life’s Endings: Seeking Closure
in Burney’s Court Diaries,” a paper presented at the Burney Society Conference,
Windsor, United Kingdom, 6 July 2007.

27. John Wagstaff, “Burney, Charles (1726–1814),” Oxford DNB, online at

28. Not all of the commentary on Delany and old age in the Memoirs is
flattering. Burney reports Delany as saying (again, through the copying of an old
letter), “I have been told . . . that when I grew older, I should feel less, but I do not
find it so! I am sooner, I think, hurt and affected than ever. I suppose it is with very
old age as with extreme youth, the effect of weakness; neither of those stages of life
have firmness for bearing misfortune with equanimity” (2:397).

29. These details make it especially interesting that Delany’s descendants were
among the angriest readers of Burney’s Memoirs. They took issue with Burney’s
claim that Delany had received financial assistance from the Duchess of Portland,
something that made Delany look like a charity case. Burney had a letter proving
that Delany had received such assistance. The Delany descendant-Burney family
disputes were ongoing and ultimately public. Delany’s granddaughter, Lady
Llanover, was continuing the attacks on Burney in print as late as 1862. See Doody,
Frances Burney, 378.
30. In fact, Croker would continue to skewer Burney’s reputation after her death as well. Lorna Clark, in “Afterlife and Further Reading,” from the Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney, ed. Sabor, describes his review as “devastating in its acrimony and effect; Burney’s reputation would hardly recover for a century” (164).


32. [John Wilson Croker], review of R. R. Madden’s The Infirmities of Genius Illustrated by Referring the Anomalies of the Literary Character to the Habits and Constitutional Peculiarities of Men of Genius, Quarterly Review 50 (1834): 53 [34–56].


41. [Anonymous], review of Burney, Memoirs, Harmonicon 1 (1833): 52 [51–54; 75–79; 99–100; and 121–24].

42. [John Wilson Croker], review of Burney, Memoirs, Quarterly Review 49 (1833): 111 [97–125]. Croker’s claim is unfair in many respects. Even if Burney does not, in the first volumes of the Memoirs, record dates as often as Croker might like, she does include them frequently in later volumes, along with the ages of almost everyone she treats. Furthermore, Burney was hardly the most secretive woman writer of the era when it came to recording her age. She might be compared to Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, for instance, whose birth year was unknown and went unrecorded on her gravestone. Morgan wrote in her fragment autobiography, “What has a woman to do with dates? Cold, false, erroneous dates!” See George Paston, Little Memoirs of the Nineteenth Century (Teddington: Echo Library, 2006), 52. According to Dennis R. Dean, in “Morgan, Sydney, Lady Morgan (bap. 1783, d. 1859), Oxford DNB, online at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19234>, Lady Morgan “was so elusive about her age that even her death certificate could state only ‘about 80 years.’ ”

43. Although there are several references to “juvenile” activities in this section, which would imply “youth,” we also find, several pages later, that Burney deems Hester “Queeney” Thrale as having “then barely entered into her adolescence” (Memoirs, 2:154). In 1778, Queeney would have been in her fourteenth year.
Unpublished letter from John Gibson Lockhart to John Wilson Croker, 23 January 1833, from the John Wilson Croker Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. This fascinating collection of 26,257 items has, to date, been little mined by literary scholars.


Lockhart tells Croker that some of Burney’s “extracts may [need to] be abridged” in the final piece, but that seems to be the most significant of his final editorial suggestions. See Strout, “Some Unpublished Letters,” 134.


There is also an unsigned, undated (ca. 1862) response to an attack by Lady Llanover on Burney’s *Memoirs* that concludes, “There has been in the second or third rate publications of the present day, an attempt to run down Madame d’Arblay: but I hope she may stand these attacks; and when we recollect what Sir Walter Scott said of her, and that Lord Macaulay declared ‘she lived to be a Classic,’ with such testimony and with the fruits of her own talent and genius, she may shine in the estimation of our great grandchildren when the paste and scissor publications are dead and forgotten, and in defiance of Penny a liners, fine ladies, and Ladies maids.” This statement seems almost in direct response to Croker’s predictions. See m.b. (Arblay), Misc., in the Frances Burney d’Arblay Collection of Papers, 1653–1894, from the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, henceforth referred to as the Burney d’Arblay Collection of Papers. This material by or relating to members of the Burney family and connections, includes 5 manuscript volumes, 5 pocketbooks with manuscript memoranda, 8 letters, ca. 144 manuscript pieces, 44 scraps relating to Cecilia, and a draft reply to Lady Llanover’s attack.

See the diary and letters of Madame d’Arblay, edited by her niece, London, 1842–46, from the Burney d’Arblay Collection. It is described as “Incomplete ms. Consists of Madame d’Arblay’s diary [March] 1778–March 10, 1823 arranged and with emendations by Charlotte Barrett.” It consists of 8 volumes in 10 boxes. The quoted material is from “supplementary material, box 1 of 2.”


On Burney’s posthumous reception, see Clark, “Afterlife,” 163–79.
56. Thomas, *Quarrel*. Thomas suggests that Macaulay did not get a chance to publish all of his ad hominem attack on Croker in his own Burney review, at least at first. The editor removed Macaulay’s statement that Croker’s looking into the records of Burney’s birth was an act that was “merely a speck in the life of one who got a good place by playing the spy or a courtesan in his youth, and a good legacy by turning parasite to a whole seraglio of courtesans in his old age” (quoted by Thomas, *Quarrel*, 159). Lockhart later found himself between a rock and a hard place trying to negotiate for both Croker’s and Macaulay’s allegiance. He wrote to a devotee of Macaulay about that author’s assessment of Croker in the Burney dispute, “Do not suppose I blame Macaulay for criticising Croker in regard to that affair; but it might have been done in the style of a gentleman. It is done now in a style of low, vulgar rancour and *injustice*.” See Andrew Lang, *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, 2 vols. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1897), 2:215. Of Macaulay’s magisterial attacks on Croker, one critic, William Forsyth, in *Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century, in Illustration of the Manners and Morals of the Age* (New York: D. Appleton, 1871), concludes, “I think it would be difficult in the annals of criticism to beat this” (318).