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Cleveland State University Library
Lafayette Collection Committee
University Library
Rhodes Tower 501
1860 East 22nd Street
Cleveland, OH 44114-44335

Dear Committee Members:

I am enclosing my entry for your essay competition in the category of non-student. I retired six years ago from the University of Akron Department of History but I am finally nearing completion of a book-length manuscript on Napoleonic women's education, medicine and legal medicine of which this will be a chapter.

I am also sending a blind title page and an abstract.

I am looking forward to further research in the Lafayette Collection as soon as I finish my book. It would be good to write a health history and medical treatment paper on Lafayette himself. Also more complete research about the relationship between Lafayette and Napoleon is needed. The serious scholarship on Lafayette's later years after Adrienne's death remains to be done since Leo Gershey never got that far in his multi-volume biography (which treats Lafayette unfairly anyhow).

As I suggest in my paper, it would be wonderful if more of Lafayette's papers ever become available because these have certainly wet my appetite. Not being a military historian, I never had any particular interest in Lafayette until Robert Crout of Charleston, South Carolina, asked me to write some sort of paper on his wife for a social history session at a conference he was planning. With a great deal of luck, that topic grew into this comparative narrative. A big break came when my hematologist at the Cleveland Clinic, Allan Lichtin, M.D., gave me the phone number of his father in Cincinnati (who is credited in a footnote for helping me), a retired pharmacy faculty member who gets excited about 18th-century pharmaceutical science. *Voilà!*

Sincerely yours,



June K. Burton

**Two “Better Halves” in the Worst of Times—
Adrienne Noailles Lafayette (1759-1807) and Fanny Burney d’Arblay (1752-
1840) as Medical and Surgical Patients under the First Empire**

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Lafayette Collection Essay Competition

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1840) as Medical and Surgical Patients under the First Empire**

Abstract

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1840) as Medical and Surgical Patients under the First Empire**

The focus of this essay combines microfilmed archival papers found in the Marquis de Lafayette Microfilm Collection at Cleveland State University from the Chateau de La Grange near Paris with the published journals and diaries of Frances Burney d’Arblay. The result is a comparative narrative about the medical history and treatment of Adrienne Noailles Lafayette, the wife of General Lafayette, and the English novelist “Fanny Burney” who married Lafayette’s aide-de-camp, General Alexandre d’Arblay..

We are introduced to these couples at La Grange in 1802. The meeting provided the middle-aged Lafayette with an occasion to show off the many scientific improvements he had made to his farm. Adrienne’s medical history follows, leading up to her final illness, which is described in great detail in the microfilmed documents. Careful analysis of some almost illegible receipts from an apothecary found in Adrienne’s household accounts enables us to learn something the “definitive biography” of Madame Lafayette by André Maurois (Paris, 1960) omits: the immediate cause of her death. By working backwards from the prescriptions to what it was that these medications, herbs and home nursing supplies were then used for suggests what actually killed her. She died as a result of their treatment; nevertheless, Lafayette retained his optimism and faith in science.

Frances Burney’s famous operation occurred later in the Napoleonic era, fortunately after great strides in surgery had been made due to the vast number of amputations performed on the battlefields of Europe. The most famous battlefield surgeon of the First Empire, Baron Larrey, led the surgical team that performed her mastectomy in Paris in 1811. Burney’s diary entries about her feelings during her breast surgery provided the first personal account in the English language of a pre-anesthetic mastectomy.

Although the main focus is medical practice, the paper tells us a great deal more-- about social history, manners, and marriage customs of Georgian England and Napoleonic France. We see the protagonists’ medically-inflicted suffering and their endurance, and the strength of their marriages as well. Neither woman’s role as wife made her the lesser marriage partner of a famous husband.

Two “Better Halves” in the Worst of Times—
Adrienne Noailles Lafayette (1759-1807) and Fanny Burney Arblay (1752-
1840) as Medical and Surgical Patients under the First Empire¹

The Peace of Amiens (1802) between Great Britain and France, which suspended the French Revolutionary wars, made it possible to resume travel between England and the continent. One traveler who took advantage of this cease fire was the already-famous English novelist and diarist Frances “Fanny”² Burney d’Arblay, who went abroad with her eleven-year old son to rejoin her French-born husband. General Alexandre d’Arblay, had already returned to his homeland soon after the preliminary peace was made in order to see his family and to find employment. Shortly after her arrival, in May 1802 the Arblays accepted the invitation of General Gilbert Motier de Lafayette and his wife, Adrienne Noailles, to visit them for a weekend at their home. The Lafayettes then resided at “La Grange-Bléneau” in Brie, a fifteenth-century chateau with woodlands and farms located about thirty miles from Paris, which Adrienne had inherited from

¹ A shorter version of this comparative paper was delivered at the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe at Charleston, South Carolina, in 1999, and is scheduled to appear in its “Selected Papers,” now in press at Florida State University Press; essentially this version of the Lafayette half was published as a pamphlet by the American Friends of Lafayette, Easton, Pennsylvania, 1999, and is copyrighted.

²“Fanny” was the nom-de-plume of Francis Burney, as well as the familiar name used by her family. While some excellent recent feminist scholarship consistently uses her Christian name instead, in this paper about intimate family life I have opted frequently to use the name by which her contemporaries knew her.

her grandmother.³ The two women had just met for the first time the previous week when Mme Lafayette, despite her infirmities, had climbed three flights of stairs to the Arblay's Paris apartment to proffer the invitation personally.⁴

The two men were old friends with much in common-- General Arblay had once been Lafayette's aide-de-camp in the French Army, serving with him in the Army of the North and the National Guard; later each had fled from the excesses of the Revolution--Lafayette over the northern border and Arblay to England; later, both had returned to their beloved country of France under the magnanimity of Napoleon; and, Lafayette and Arblay had produced a stream of letters lobbying to have their respective military pensions restored. Curiously, their financial situations also were similar in that both husbands were supported by very devoted yet strong-willed, more level-headed wives. When Gilbert dared not set foot in Paris, because his name was still on the proscription list of *émigrés* after he returned to France from Olmütz without Bonaparte's permission, "Noailles Lafayette"⁵ (as Adrienne signed her business letters) **walked** all over the country to recover

³Today La Grange is owned by Count René de Chambrun. He and the Fondation Josée et René de Chambrun allowed the Library of Congress to microfilm some of the papers of Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette for the Manuscripts Division in 1995 and 1996. A duplicate of the microfilms, which contain approximately 25,000 items on 64 reels, was acquired by Cleveland State University Library in 1998 with the help of John Horton. These papers were discovered in 1956, and André Maurois, author of *Adrienne ou La vie de Mme de La Fayette* (Paris, 1960) did not see all of them. [Microfilms hereafter LP, LG.].

⁴Burney and her son joined General Arblay, who had arrived earlier after the preliminary signing of the Treaty of Amiens allowed the resumption of travel from England to France. Joyce Hemlow et al, eds., *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)*, (Oxford, 1975)V, xlii. [Hereafter JLFB].

⁵For examples see: LP LG, Reel 3/Folder 31b, 42 and 43a. Although Adrienne proudly called her self "la femme de Lafayette," she signed her letters using her maiden name and her married name as a good public relations ploy since her seventeenth-century ancestor had been the Marshal Noailles.

whatever portion remained unsold of her noble family's ancestral properties confiscated during the course of the French Revolution. She walked because the Lafayettes could afford neither to own equipage nor to hire someone to take them! Thereafter (we can tell from the La Grange archives), Adrienne managed the household accounts well, even providing her idealistic husband with his monthly "pocket money" of 48 francs.⁶ Her newly-found friend Fanny Burney also supported her husband and young son, but with the proceeds and investments from her series of Gothic novels: *Evelina or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), which has been called the first popular novel in English literature about a woman, written by a woman;⁷ *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782); and *Camilla or a Picture of Youth* (1796), written shortly after she was married. Obviously the two generals were truly blessed to have such able spouses.

Although about forty-five, Lafayette was no longer the tall, impressive, soldierly figure he had once been. He had broken his femur in February 1802, and after optimistically and stoically submitting to an excruciatingly-painful and ill-conceived experimental therapy, which applied traction to his leg (in an effort to keep it from shortening) but that was so tight that it caused the skin on his hip to become gangrenous, he was forced to use a wheelchair to attend the wedding of his daughter Virginie. Eventually, he was rehabilitated to the point of using a cane for the rest of his life to compensate for his lameness. Such limited activity contributed eventually to his becoming too overweight to mount a horse: Hence, Lafayette would be precluded from becoming literally at least, a "man on a white horse" as Napoleon feared.

⁶Ibid., Reel 4/Folder 45.

⁷Judy Simon's introduction, Fanny Burney, *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress* (London, 1986), viii.

Now in her early forties, Adrienne's once-dark hair was already streaked with gray. Fanny Burney, who was known for her keen powers of observation, recorded her impression of Lafayette's "virtuous & heroick Wife": she "is by no means handsome, but has Eyes so expressive, so large, & so speaking, that it is not easy to criticize her other features, for it is almost impossible to look at them."⁸ Burney also explained how Adrienne's mobility had become limited: "by some Cold, or mismanagement, & total want of exercise, in the Prison of Olmütz, some humour has fallen into one of her ancles [sic], that, though it does not make her absolutely lame, causes walking to be so painful & difficult to her, that she moves as little as possible, & is always obliged to have a stool for her feet."⁹ Burney was right; Adrienne's youthfulness had been extinguished by everything that she had endured.

Adrienne had married at the age of fourteen (when Gilbert was sixteen). By sixteen, she gave birth in 1775 to her first daughter, Henriette, a delicate child who perished in 1777, while Lafayette was in America. A second daughter Anastasie arrived that year. Her third child and only son, George Washington, was born after a painful pregnancy two years later--on Christmas Eve in 1779. Her fourth and youngest child, Virginie, was born two months prematurely in 1782, the year Lafayette reached his legal majority at the age of twenty-five. By age twenty-three, Adrienne had completed childbearing.

Besides early physical trials that might contribute to aging prematurely, Adrienne had been subjected to extraordinary emotional turmoils. Even as a teenager, she had always fainted whenever she became over-excited. Her fragile health, which had been shaken by the anxieties of Lafayette's

⁸Hemlow, JLFB, 303.

⁹Ibid., 302.

anxieties of Lafayette's adventures in America coupled with the difficult series of pregnancies, was further tested by the traumatic losses of her devout mother and sister to the guillotine during the Terror. This was compounded when they received no Christian burial; instead their remains were tossed into a common grave at Picpus on the eastern edge of Paris. Following Lafayette's "defection" and capture by the Austrians, his delicate wife, always susceptible to chills, was imprisoned in Paris during the cold winter of 1794-95.

Once released after three years of separation from her husband, Adrienne and her two daughters Anastasie and Virginie voluntarily joined Lafayette who himself was ailing in the prison of Olmütz. With Adrienne as care-giver, Gilbert soon recovered. However, apparently, the inactivity and stress of extended incarceration in two small rooms, a nutritionally-poor diet, and uncomfortable living conditions led to a medical crisis for Adrienne. She became feverish, head-achy, and her arms and leg swelled so that she could neither walk nor write without soon experiencing great pain. According to her daughter's account, her fever started in October 1796 and persisted for eleven months.¹⁰ Abscesses formed on her swollen limbs. Adrienne's request for permission to leave the prison to seek special medical attention in Vienna was denied unless she agreed not to return to the prison—a precondition she found unacceptable after overcoming all obstacles to end her separation from her husband. Yet there was not so much as an armchair to provide comfort in their austere living-quarters. A German-speaking military doctor named Dr. Kreutschke¹¹ (with whom Lafayette could only communicate in Latin) saw Adrienne at the prison,

¹⁰Anastasie Lafayette De Lasteyrie, *Life of Madame de Lafayette by Mme De Lasteyrie* (Paris, 1872), 358.

¹¹Constance Wright, *Madame de Lafayette* (New York, 1959), 260.

but he found himself baffled by her condition. He suspected a hematological disease, which he termed “a dissolution of the blood,” but he could prescribe no effective treatment though he visited her regularly. By the time the family was released into the hands of the United States of America Consul in Hamburg, in September 1797, Adrienne was terribly ill and thereafter was never completely well for extended periods.

Adrienne’s peripheral edema seemed for a time to improve and the fever went into remission; however, she had to be carried in an armchair to witness Anastasie’s wedding on May 9, 1798. But once more the family’s economic situation seemed to overrule her suffering. Her painfully swollen legs recovered enough for her to walk with the help of a cane to Paris and around the city to rearrange the family’s finances.

Regardless, the stoic Lafayettes would not allow Adrienne’s poor health to limit their hospitality. According to Burney, they lived “with the utmost simplicity and economy..., kept no sort of equipage, dress in the plainest and cheapest style.....” While she acknowledged that in his public appearances some people thought Lafayette behaved otherwise, at home he was “all that is reputable & amiable, fond, attentive, & instructive to his children,... & displaying, upon every occasion the tenderest gratitude to the wife, who followed him into captivity, & to whom, from that period, he became, by universal account, far more warmly & exclusively attached than he had ever been formerly: though her virtues & conduct had always been objects to him of respect & esteem.”¹²

Lafayette took great pride in showing La Grange to visitors. He was especially proud of its collection of American artifacts; innovations in agricultural engineering; the fine livestock and animals (dairy cows, sheep, reputedly “unscented” swine, and a menagerie of exotic fowl imported

¹²JLFB, xliii and 303-04.

from many lands), and the lovely landscape itself (remarkable for its fields of genetically-improved higher-yielding crops.¹³ Thus, during the springtime of 1802, Lafayette found himself untroubled by any thought that his soul-mate of almost three decades might ever predecease him.

The friendship of the two couples, who moved within the same social circle¹⁴ endured, but neither of them could foresee (even in May 1805, the last time all four of them were together at George Washington Lafayette's wedding to Emilie de Tracy) the horrific medical crises that both wives would undergo: Adrienne's only two years in the offing; Fanny's breast surgery in 1811.

After a decade of chronic suffering, Adrienne's terminal illness started on August 22, 1807, when she was stricken with violent pains in the stomach, accompanied by high fever. The details of her care are a bit sketchy. Although the Lafayettes kept Dr. Sautereau¹⁵ at Lagrange for many years and occasionally a "M. Prévost"¹⁶ (who may have been "the surgeon of Alay"¹⁷ mentioned in the account books), Dr. Lobinhes was also "on-call" from Paris. Because her mother had not recovered after three weeks, a concerned Anastasie consulted Dr. Lobinhes to whom she dashed off a letter on September 11th. He immediately sent his opinion from Paris: "I do not think the fever

¹³Jules Cloquet, M.D., *Recollections of the Private Life of General Lafayette* (New York, 1836), 34-41.

¹⁴Burney claimed that it would take her an entire volume just to tell about all the members of the Noailled-Lafayette family that she had met. JLF, V, 282.

¹⁵Cloquet, *Recollections*, 59.

¹⁶Dr. Prévost was mentioned in passing by Lobinhes in a letter to Anastacie, 7 October 1807, LP LG, Reel 3/Folder 44. Six letters from Lobinhes either to Adrienne or Anastacie written during the final illness exist in this file. All further references to Lobinhes's treatment are based on this series of correspondence; not all are dated.

¹⁷See: *ibid*, Reel 4/Folder 45.

that your mother had yesterday after eating was brought on by what she ate; it is more probable that it is a little relapse [*une petite rochute*], and in this case it is necessary to administer wine of quinquina [cinchona or Peruvian tree bark from which quinine is derived] right away in a dosage of two spoonfuls every three hours.” He felt this would settle her stomach if the dosage were mild enough not to irritate it. He dismissed the need for an evacuation, which he thought would further irritate her stomach.

On September 20th, Lobinhes again wrote to Adrienne : “I have the pleasure to learn from you yourself that you are improving and in the same proportion as your stomach pain diminishes. This proves that you must continue to convalesce and continue to follow with scrupulous exactitude everything that you are doing.” He went on to mention that he thought that the open blister on her leg, which he thought might abscess since it was weeping, was not an entirely bad occurrence since it alleviated some of the swelling. However, he ordered some cautery to close this wound. To the news that the anti-scorbutic [normally a remedy for scurvy] wine gave her headaches and heart discomfort, he expressed astonishment. If this continued, he thought she should take a bottle of bouillon first thing in the morning. Moreover, he urged that she be transported from La Grange to Aulnay, as soon as possible, so that he come from Paris (bringing along his wife and children!) to attend her in person there.

On October 7th, Dr. Lobinhes apologized for being unable to provide help after receiving an intervening letter about a “crisis of Saturday” too vaguely explained to enable him to give a diagnosis. However, the current letter in hand to which he was responding, was more precise. “I see that neither the fever nor the vomiting has returned, but the stomach weakness is worse” This called for lighter food and less of it, “only bouillon thickened with cream of rice or potato flour.”

He suggested that a couple of hours before dinner, they give her “a spoonful of elixir of *garus* in coffee, and if this is not enough, several times in the morning and twice in the evening some spoonfuls of senna [dried leaflets of cassia plant, a mild laxative] in a cold infusion,” containing some dried centuary [a bitter herb to settle the stomach by strengthening stomach secretions] and orange leaves sweetened with orange blossom syrup. Finally, he now he begged them to bring Adrienne to Aulnay.

A few days later as he was about to set forth, Dr. Lobinhes penned another letter to Anastasie: “I have seen with satisfaction that Madame your mother after having taken the emetic and three medicines has suffered at first diminution of feeling, and afterwards the disappearance of the fever entirely.” But he was not wholly pleased. “These evacuations however necessary have the effect of weakening her and irritating very much her nerves and stomach,” which made it difficult for her to keep down any food. Consequently, this time, he prescribed a mixture of Rata or Madeira wine, ordinary water and herbs, before eating a few spoonfuls of thin porridge, which was all she could keep down. If the fever returned, he said, the feverfuse quinquina would have to be ground into a powder. Finally, he prescribed the ultimate remedy: “I would like you to make a *pot au feu*, especially for your mother and that it be composd only of chicken and veal. Such broth is gentle and ought to congeal when it cools.” In any case, he would await the patient at the residence of her Aunt Tessé.

At last Adrienne was brought on October 11 to Aulnay, which was about three leagues from Paris. Leaving her in the personal care of Dr. Lobinhes, a seemingly unconcerned Gilbert and young George Washington set out to visit Lafayette’s elderly aunt in Chauvanic. Yet Adrienne did not stabilize as she had done so many times before. This time the family decided to transport

to Paris proper, so that she could benefit from what was then perceived to be the best medical care in the world. Unfortunately, proximity to Paris did not help.

Lafayette and his son were unexpectedly summoned to Adrienne's side from Chauvaniac, only to find her condition had worsened. Gilbert later wrote¹⁸ that for some unknown reason he had never really believed what the doctors had said about a defective pylorus [the opening of the stomach into the intestine], so he was completely unprepared for her deterioration. Nevertheless, Lafayette's calming presence appeared to help Adrienne to rally somewhat the following day. She confidently explained to the family friend Madame Simiane that she had a "*maligne* [malignant] fever," and after undergoing a course of treatment prescribed by her doctor, she would recover as usual.

As her fever continued, at times Adrienne's mind lapsed into hallucinations and deliriums. In the former state, she imagined she was living in Bible times in Egypt or Syria with Attalie and the family of Jacob. In her delirium, she focused on stressful or joyful events in her life such as the journey to Olmütz to share Lafayette's imprisonment or the birth of her son. Meanwhile Lafayette kept his daily vigil at her bedside engaging in a sweet repartee with his "angel," the wife he would refer to in his letters as "this incomparable woman." Always Adrienne was a perfect patient, always taking her medicine when asked and thanking everyone for their attention. Lafayette held her stone cold hands for days. Her body was covered with blisters and peeling skin, which she tried to make light of by saying that she looked like a flayed animal. When she felt a seizure coming on, she

¹⁸The long, undated letter Lafayette wrote to his close friend La Tour-Maubourg in early January 1808 gives all the details of Adrienne's final illness. The original is in LP LG, Reel 4/Folder 48 and also reprinted elsewhere, but edited, sometimes omitting critical phrases. Maurois followed the letter carefully.

motioned Gilbert away to spare him; but he refused to leave her side. Lobinhes continued to see her, sent off messages to Dr. Corvisart¹⁹ both seeking advice and summoning him to come immediately. All in vain. Lobinhes could only prolong Adrienne's life; he could not save it. At last only the heated blankets, with which her daughters and nurses covered her, insulated the last bit of life inside. She expired with her family seated in a semi-circle around her bed on Christmas Eve at 11:45 p.m., the twenty-eighth anniversary of the birth of her beloved son George Washington.²⁰

Taking their cue from Lafayette's letters of bereavement²¹ and Anastasie's biography of her mother,²² historians have interpreted Adrienne's death as the culmination of a love story. After all, Adrienne's last words to Lafayette [whose extra-marital affairs in his youth, including the one with Mme de Simiane whom she had forgiven, had been known to her] had been quite touching: "*Je suis toute à vous.*" He carried this message around his neck in a locket for the rest of his life.

Setting sentiment aside, however, from what did Adrienne die? Among the household accounts documents in the recently microfilmed La Grange Collection are several pages of itemized bills for medicines for Adrienne from the pharmacist Leloup, which cover the period from April 20, 1806 to May 1, 1807. A meticulous study of these suggests that tuberculosis, peripheral vascular

¹⁹Jean-Nicholas Corvisart (1755-1821) presided over the medical service of the Napoleonic court. His credentials include teaching anatomy, surgery, pharmacy, pathology, and obstetrics at the Faculty of Medicine; member of the Legion of Honor; member of the Institut; and Baron of the Empire.

²⁰George Washington Lafayette was born 24 December 1779, so this was his 27th birthday.

²¹To La Tour-Maubourg, Mme de Staël, and Mme de Grammont in LP LG, Reel/Folder 48.

²²Mme de Lasteyrie, *Life of Mme de Lafayette*, especially 392 and 395-96.

disease, congestive heart failure or possibly kidney failure were probably not the **immediate** cause of her death.

Adrienne's prescriptions included: numerous sets of leeches; stones for cautery; emetics and botanical remedies that included poppy-heads and laudanum [a narcotic cordial containing opium that acts as a seditive], marsh mallow (althea) root to soothe her mucous membrane (similar to the cough drops we have nowadays), blackberry jelly, saffron, and dozens of citrons [the largest member of the citrus family—often ten inches long—whose pulp is unusable but the peel is candied]. Most important among these receipts there are also nine prescriptions for various forms of lead—either “lead cerate” [a cerate is a smearing mixture containing beeswax], “lead” or “concentrated lead.” Because there are also receipts for plasters, we can theorize that the lead cerate was to smear on the plasters [strips of gauze]. These in turn were placed on her legs (which were so swollen that they blistered and the skin was broken wide-open enough to require cautery) hopefully to act as an astringent. The plasters were then wrapped with gummed bandages (also listed) to promote the adsorption of the chemicals as well as to increase the circulation. If some external application of lead cerate was therapeutic, why not facilitate healing from the inside out? So over about a three-month period, somebody ordered the eight bottles of liquid lead compounds.

From this sample,²³ it appears that Adrienne died from lead-poisoning. The symptoms of her last illness—intense stomach pain, headaches, hallucinations, vomiting, delirium and convulsions—are all consistent with this. If more of Adrienne's prescriptions are ever catalogued,

²³Reel 4/Folder 45. I am most grateful to Dr. J. Leon Lichtin, Ph.D., professor emeritus of pharmacology at the University of Cincinnati, for his stimulating and invaluable phone conversations about possible uses of lead cerates and compounds. Note: the word for leaded substances used in these bills for Adrienne's prescriptions is *saturne* or a derivative, not *plomb*.

we might know how much more she imbibed before her death. Interestingly, Lafayette, who knew his wife best, doubted the physician's diagnosis of a defect in the pylorus, but he also blamed her death on being "at the critical age."²⁴ This last statement suggests that some of the herbs purchased from the local drugstore that were intended to stop bleeding may also have been aimed at decreasing vaginal hemorrhaging, something that might occur at the onset of menopause. In any case, Lafayette's faith in science overruled any suspicion that iatropical disease had accelerated Adrienne's death. Moreover, according to Robert's *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la Langue française* (1973), it was not until the late nineteenth century that "Saturnisme" entered the French language as the term for lead cholice--as its dangerous toxicity especially when applied to open wounds and internally became fully appreciated.

Adrienne and Gilbert Lafayette dealt heroically with her medical condition, he both during her lifetime as well as after her death. In their prolific correspondence the Lafayettes never talked about Adrienne's terrible astringent and anti-inflammatory treatments, applications of leeches, et cetera. The details of her medical treatments were entirely too unspeakable for them to voice.

How did people in those days manage to cope with such treatments that led to the untimely death of a loved one? Upon her death, the Lafayette family immediately focused on drafting a death notice for the newspapers and arranging for her burial mass and interment among her relatives at what had by then become a hallowed burial place--Picpus Cemetery. Adrienne herself had much earlier taken a leading role in the inscription for its purchase. Her husband was comforted by the thought that one day he in turn would be laid to rest beside her. Lafayette ordered memorial masses

²⁴Lafayette to La Tour-Maubourg, previously cited.

said annually on the anniversary of her death as Adrienne had wished.

As a widower, Lafayette lived on until May 20, 1834, but he remained inconsolable over the loss of his angelic wife. It is not too difficult to understand his unhappiness. He had married Adrienne at sixteen. Although he probably experimented with other women at the court of Versailles during the early years of their marriage, the shared experience of the incarceration at Olmütz had dawned on them together permanently. In her mind her sacrifice did pay off. Moreover, throughout her life she was comforted by a deep religious faith drawn from the religious upbringing of her family.

If the Lafayettes never talked about Adrienne's terrible astringent and anti-inflammatory treatments, leechings, et cetera, Fanny Burney d'Arblay's ailment was even more unspeakable. Yet she faced it in an equally heroic manner. Born in 1752, seven years before noblewoman Adrienne Noailles, and as a commoner, in Georgian England, made her early life altogether different.

As a youngster, Fanny Burney²⁵ was a tiny child with a weak frame; in fact, she appeared that way all her life. While she was extremely shy and meek in public, she behaved just the opposite within the circle of her family and friends. However, her most notable childhood physical problem seems to have been with her vision: both eyes were extremely shortsighted and possibly dyslexic. For this and other reasons, her father totally neglected her education so that she had to teach herself her letters and how to read, which she did when she was eight to ten years of age. Her natural

²⁵Born Frances Burney on 13 June 1752 to Dr. Charles Burney (a musicologist) and Esther Sleepe at King's Lynn. Her mother, who was the grand-daughter of a French refugee named Dubois, died in 1761, soon after the birth of her ninth child.

mother died about this time while giving birth for the ninth time. These events coincided with the beginning of Fanny's compulsion to write social commentary.

The first sign of stress affecting Burney's health occurred in 1781 when she succumbed to nervous exhaustion in the rush to meet her deadline for publication of *Cecilia*.²⁶ However, the first enduring health problems she encountered occurred between the years 1787 and 1791 when she was Second Keeper of the Robes to England's Queen Charlotte—a post she accepted, in part, because at age thirty-four, being the last unmarried child in the family, having no dowry, and never having gotten on well with her stepmother,²⁷ she was a homeless spinster who needed security in her old age. At her father's insistence, she accepted the post that promised her a pension for her old age. But she soon became physically exhausted at court by the long hours serving really as a personal maid to the demanding monarch and being made to stand beside the Queen for long hours; moreover, she missed contact with the literary world, which she had enjoyed since the publication of her first novel. And the perceived “insanity” [actually porphyria, we now know] of George III contributed to the turmoil of courtly life. Because of her poor health, Fanny's father, the famous musicologist Dr. Charles Burney, after a year-long negotiation was able to get her released from Royal service with a pension of 100 £ a year.

In 1793, while visiting her sister Susanna, Fanny Burney met General Alexandre d'Arblay²⁸

²⁶Judy Simons, *Cecilia*, ix.

²⁷Mrs. Elizabeth Allen, whom Dr. Burney had secretly married in October 1767, when Fanny was about fifteen. Allen so disapproved of a writing career for women that Fanny destroyed all her “scribblings.” When her father remarried, all plans to send Fanny abroad to be educated with her sisters were abandoned.

²⁸Arblay descended from the Bazille family of Joigny, France. He joined the emigré colony residing at Juniper Hall near Norbury Park, close to the Locke's estate.

two years her junior, who was then a penniless former French Army General who had joined the colony of French *émigrés* residing at Juniper Hall near Norbury Park, an estate belonging to the Locke family. Her courtship with the gay, amusing, affectionate and affable officer took off immediately. Because Arblay was a Roman Catholic, impoverished, and a constitutionalist in French politics, her father disapproved of the match. Regardless, Fanny leaped into marriage on 31 July 1793, when she was forty-one.

The Arblays' only child, a son named Alexander,²⁹ arrived the next year, 1794. But Fanny had to stop his breast-feeding when she developed an ulcer on one breast, which she attributed to something transmitted to her from the infant through nursing. Mixing motherhood and work, she continued her writing and published *Camilla* when she was forty-four. Although subscriptions were purchased by such famous people as the novelist Jane Austen and the politician Edmund Burke, it was somewhat of a literary failure. Nevertheless, it provided her with enough money to build a small cottage on the Locke's estate in Surrey, which she dubbed "Camilla Cottage" and where the family lived until 1797, with Fanny as the breadwinner.

Finally, the preliminary signing of the Peace of Amiens (October 1801) meant that a by-now quite homesick General d'Arblay could return to France with the goals of visiting his family, securing his military pension, and finding gainful employment. So desperate was he for this that he even offered to join the expedition to the swamps of Saint Domingo—but with the qualification that he would never be asked to fight against his wife's countrymen. Thus, he escaped that potential medical catastrophe due to Napoleon's sympathetic understanding that he was after all,

²⁹Note the British spelling in contrast to his father's name. He became a priest in the Church of England; a vocation both parents promoted since it provided financial security.

as the First Council said, “*Camilla’s* husband.”

Fanny could not stand their separation for long; and, she and her son joined General d’Arblay in Paris in 1802--for what she expected to be a year’s duration but which the resumption of the French Revolutionary wars turned into a decade. Because she was such a well-known novelist, she was immediately introduced to the fabulous Parisian social scene and met all the worthies. Besides attending a *masque*, the theaters, operas and art exhibitions, she attended a review of Napoleon’s troops where she found the women seemingly outrageously dressed in extremely fashionable French style clothing, which unlike her three petticoats had drapery that clung to and revealed their bodies. She noticed Bonaparte’s sallow complexion and serious, brooding manner, too. She also witnessed an examination at Mme Campan’s school where the ladies present included the First Consul’s sister Caroline Murat and step-daughter/sister-in-law Hortense, as well as the famous female painter Elizabeth Vigée-le-Brun. In 1803, she was initially charmed upon meeting the distinguished Dr. Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis, who presented her a copy of his philosophical medical works; but she was quite taken back when she read it and learned that he was a materialist! Needless to say, she also found her English wardrobe quite out of keeping with the current mode of Paris fashion when she exclaimed: “Three petticoats! No one wears more than one! Stays? Everybody has left off even corsets! Shift-sleeves? Not a soul now wears even a chemise.”³⁰ But her prudishness, the proportions of her figure, and near poverty precluded her from becoming trendy. Fortunately, the d’Arblays’ visit to La Grange [the starting point of this essay] was followed by the recovery of the general’s military pension and the landing of a minor civil-service post as a *rédacteur* [one who drafts documents] in the administration of buildings in the Ministry of

³⁰“Dress and Adornment,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica CD*, 1999 Standard Edition.

Interior.³¹ Thereafter, they no longer had to rely solely on Fanny's income

But life was not almost perfect for long. In 1805, Burney developed a lump in her breast, which she felt came from the ulcer she had developed years before when she had nursed her son; however, the lump, to use her own words, "yielded to strict fasting & asses milk"³² and resolved. Symptoms recurred in August 1810, when an annoying small pain in her breast gradually increased, but she did not seek immediate medical treatment. She hoped that by being careful and keeping warm, it would likewise vanish in a few months. Finally, her husband and a close female friend (Mme de Maisonneuve) persuaded her to consult a physician for examination; but Dr. Jouet's prescribed treatment only seemed to increase the pain. She sought a second opinion from Antoine Dubois,³³ a professor of anatomy, surgery and obstetrics, as well official *accoucheur* [male midwife] to Empress Marie-Louise, whose pregnancy was underway. Dubois reassured Fanny that nothing was serious and gave her a prescription to try for a month, before speaking at length, privately with her husband. From the dreadful looks on their faces after their consultation, she guessed that "a small operation," a mastectomy, was necessary to save her life."

Naturally, this shocking news frightened the patient, and her distress heightened. Because Dubois had become too preoccupied with the Royal confinement, Burney wrote to the great battlefield and emergency surgeon who "fathered" the so-called "flying ambulances," Dr.

³¹All events in this paragraph are described in JLFB, V.

³²JLFB, VI, 553.

³³(1756-1837), a military surgeon who had been with the Institut d'Egypte, later professor of the Paris medical faculty and after the difficult birthing of the King of Rome, made member of the Legion of Honor and Baron of the Empire. Burney does not say that he is relative although his surname is the same as that of her great-grand-father.

Dominique Larrey, begging him to take over her case. Larrey chose the most ethical route, however, and arranged a general consultation with a full surgical team, consisting of himself, Dubois, François Ribe³⁴ and J.-L. Moreau de la Sarthe. Dubois really thought her condition was entirely hopeless but since Larrey was willing to try, they told her that they wanted to schedule the operation.³⁵

The mastectomy was scheduled for September 30, 1811, at Mme d'Arblay's home, in her own bed. She arranged for her husband and son to be out of the house to spare them the sound of her screams--for this was still the era of pre-anesthetic surgery. While Larrey had promised to provide her with only a two-hour notice of the surgeons' impending arrival, Dubois subsequently had an emergency, delaying him for two more hours. Consequently, the patient anxiously awaited the men for four hours. After her ordeal, Fanny remembered Dr. Moreau preparing her by entering the room with a drink of laudanum, whose opium content was supposed to send her into a relaxed dream-like state. As it turned out, the sight of four doctors and three assistants,--no women, just seven men all tolled--dressed in black suits-- marching in, terrified her. Remember, she was an exceedingly shy person in public. Yet facing the danger squarely, Burney defiantly mounted the bed unaided, and Dubois positioned her suitably on the mattress. While he discretely covered her face with a handkerchief to shield her from the spectacle, it was so thin that she was able to see the men's silhouettes and the hand signals they used to communicate directions. At the outset, she

³⁴François Ribe (1774-1847), a pupil of Savateur, in 1805 he became surgeon in the Emperor's household, which meant that he was supposed to stay close to Napoleon in case he was wounded; however, he was far away when Napoleon was wounded once, at Ratisbonne.

³⁵For the best medical analysis of the contents of her journals and letters see: Anthony R. Moore, "Pre-anesthetic mastectomy: A patient's experiences," *Surgery* 83, No. 2 (February 1978): 200-05.

noticed them at odds over how large an incision to make, corresponding to how much they believed ought to be removed. At one point the men debated who should hold the breast while the circular incision was made? At this juncture, she bravely but unsuccessfully tried to volunteer herself in order to keep as much of her breast as possible from being amputated. During the mastectomy, Burney succumbed to the pain and screamed in agony. Overcome with the sensations of the sawing and cutting, and then the feeling of this continuing against the grain, finally led her to cease being a spectator and to shut her eyes tightly and listen to their voices. When Larrey seemed to be done, she heard him ask the others whether anything more needed to come off. But Dr. Moreau pointed out where he thought more flesh needed to be scraped down to the bone; and Dubois detected something more after that. Ultimately, all the surgeons were satisfied that they had excised all the cancerous portion, so they proceeded to finish up, close the wound and bind her breast with heavy bandages to soak up the profuse bleeding.

After the operation, Burney determined not to tell her relations in England, especially her father; about her mastectomy, but somehow her sister learned of it. Consequently, after many months of recovery, she penned a detailed description not only of the operation but of her feelings at each juncture, which she sent to dispel the family's concerns about the state of her health. This document became the first patient's account of a pre-anesthetic mastectomy.³⁶ There is a certain tragic irony here in that a sensitive female novelist whose plots had always been about the ways contemporary society's manners violated women had to undergo such an act of medical violence performed by an all-male cast to one of her most symbolic female body parts in order to save her life. Writing the unspeakable was Burney's coping therapy, facilitating her recovery although using

³⁶JLFB, 596-616.

her hand to write pained her terribly for the rest of her life.

Despite a long and painful recovery from the surgery, in 1812 Fanny obtained a passport and returned to England with her draft-age son. Once again on her native soil, she turned her attention to the nursing needs of her aged father, who was then ill. She oversaw his care-giving until his death in April 1814. Although he was Roman Catholic, General d'Arblay acquiesced with Fanny's decision to educate their son to prepare for ordination into the priesthood of the Church of England since it would secure his future against all forms of adversity.

After Napoleon's first abdication, General d'Arblay returned to the Army, and was appointed to the King's Bodyguards. Once more free to travel, Fanny joined her husband in Paris; but fled to Belgium along with many others when Napoleon returned from Elba. Consequently, she was in Brussels during the Battle of Waterloo. [Thackeray used her diary of this event in *Vanity Fair*.] D'Arblay had gone to the Trèves area in an effort to raise an army in support of Louis XVIII when he was kicked badly by a horse, and further injured by unskillful surgery on his right leg. Upon receiving this news Fanny went by carriage around the lines to fetch her hero and take him home to England. Heeding Surgeon Larrey's professional recommendation, she took d'Arblay to Bath for "dry pumping," a form of water therapy that directed a stream of water under pressure against an area in lieu of immersion of the whole body. Nevertheless, General d'Arblay remained an invalid on half-pay (which was slow in coming) until he died on 3 May 1818, ending their marriage of nearly twenty-five years. Fanny Burney remained as inconsolable for the remainder of her life as Gilbert Lafayette became after the loss of Adrienne.

We have a portrait of her from Sir Walter Scott who described the novelist's appearance at age seventy-four, when he met her in 1826 (when Scott was forty-four): "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....”³⁷

Not only did Burney outlive her husband, her only son predeceased her in 1837. She died peacefully on 6 January 1840, on the anniversary of her sister Susanna’s death. Thus, the former surgical patient outlived Adrienne Noailles by more than three decades and the legendary “Hero of Two Worlds” by almost six.

In conclusion, in keeping up appearances these incomparable, heroic women—Adrienne Noailles Lafayette and Frances Burney d’Arblay--demonstrated the strength of Imperial wives “in sickness and in health.” As patients they endured great medically-inflicted suffering. But they were as strong as their marriages. Neither woman’s actual role as wife made her the lesser marriage partner of a famous husband.

These two medical biographies well-illustrate the accuracy of Napoleon’s instincts vis-à-vis physicians and his preference for surgeons. He warned friends, such as Arch Chancellor C ambac er es, against the dangers of taking too much medicine,³⁸ and greeted Dr. Corvisart, whom he appointed to run the medical service of his court, perhaps not too tongue-in-cheek with: “Grand Charlatan, whom have you killed today?”³⁹ He said in final exile on St. Helena that through

³⁷Scott’s *Diary*, November 1826, quoted in “Frances Burney,” *The American Whig Review*, New Series, Vol. VII(1851): 270.

³⁸Emil Ludwig, *Napoleon* (New York, 1954), 598.

³⁹I am indebted to Harold T. Parker for calling this to my attention.

ignorance or error, physicians killed as many people as generals.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he said he respected the masterful surgeon, Jean-Dominique Larrey possibly more than any other man he had ever known.⁴¹

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⁴⁰J. Christopher Herold, *The Mind of Napoleon* (New York, 1961), 137.

⁴¹Herold also points out that in his last will, Napoleon called Larrey: “the most virtuous man I have ever known.” *Ibid.*, 138.