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Black and White Singing: Race, Social Class, and Music-Making in Sarah Harriet Burney's Novels

DANIELLE GROVER

Abstract: This article explores connections between musical performance, race, and social status in Sarah Harriet Burney's novels, *Geraldine Fauconberg, Clarentine* and *Traits of Nature*. It examines representations of white music-making in *Clarentine* before comparing the uneasy relationship Burney sets up among music, social class, and race in *Geraldine Fauconberg* alongside depictions of race in her bestseller, *Traits of Nature*. Chronologically, Burney's novels shift from a positive representation of musical accomplishment in *Clarentine* to a more negative representation in *Traits of Nature*. Burney's racial attitudes can be viewed through the lens of music-making. In this vein, there are similarities between Black characters and musically accomplished women as both are subject to a specific type of scrutiny which Burney deplores. Contemporary racial theory and Burney's background are considered alongside episodes of music-making and representations of Black characters in the novels.

As an underrated novelist who shared the same publisher as Jane Austen and whose novel *Traits of Nature* generated more profit than *Sense and Sensibility*, Sarah Harriet Burney (1772-1844) has been overlooked in literary scholarship.[1] Perhaps she has been unfairly compared with her half-sister, the author Frances Burney, or her father, Charles Burney, who captivated the musical world. Yet the scenes of music-making in her novels, *Clarentine* (1796), *Geraldine Fauconberg* (1808), and *Traits of Nature* (1812), invite thought-provoking debates on the relationship between race, music-making, and social class. Although Sarah Harriet Burney had no formal education until 1781 (when she was tutored by a governess in Switzerland until 1783), her education was sufficient to secure her a role as a governess in 1804 and again in September 1822. Her peripatetic lifestyle continued later in life, as she resided in Florence for seven months in 1830. With an interest in other cultures, she was a linguist who was fluent in French and travelled so much that Queen Charlotte referred to her as a "little Swiss girl" when Frances worked as her Keeper of the Robes (Burney, *Letters* xxxiv, xlii, xlvii). She was also able to translate Italian.[2] The excellent knowledge of

French and Italian that Burney acquired in Switzerland even allowed her to act as an interpreter for French refugee nobles on a few occasions. Additionally, she lived in Florence for seven months in 1830 (Clark, "General Introduction" xxxv, li-liii).

Unsurprisingly, Burney's interest in diverse cultures filters through to her novels such as *Geraldine Fauconberg* and *Traits of Nature,* where Black characters have positive attributes and, through their interactions with the heroines, enable readers to see the heroines' compassion and other virtues. Although this representation of Black characters appears to be positive, these character portrayals have their limits, as figures like Caesar are primarily used as tools to tell the stories of white characters. Burney's links between music and race are particularly striking as her focus departs from that of her musicologist father whose momentous *General History of Music* concentrated on white musicians.[3] This article will compare the uneasy relationship Burney sets up among music, social class, and race in *Geraldine Fauconberg* alongside depictions of race in her bestseller, *Traits of Nature*. Prior to the publication of these two novels, Burney's *Clarentine* presented music as a female accomplishment that promoted courtship, with no reference to race. Although race in the eighteenth century referred more to "type" (ethnicity or nationality rather than skin color), "race" will refer to white and black skin color in the context of this study.[4]

The way in which music shines a light on racial attitudes in *Geraldine Fauconberg* through a music-making scene involving a Black character, Caesar, reinforces some points that Carmen María Fernández Rodríguez makes in her essay on blackness and identity in Sarah Harriet Burney's fiction. Exploring the racial dimension in Burney's novels, Fernández Rodríguez argues that Burney "directly addresses racial discrimination in *Geraldine Fauconberg* and *Traits of Nature*" to the extent that "[Burney's] subversive and unconventional attitudes are close to those of abolitionist writers" (98). Fernández Rodríguez convincingly links the publication of *Geraldine Fauconberg* with the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807-08, claiming that Burney's later novels may have been motivated by anti-slavery sentiments (98). This claim is especially persuasive because Burney's sympathy for racial minorities is implied in a letter from 1813, which claimed that the British politician William Wilberforce, prominent in the battle to abolish slavery, deserved praise.[5] Additionally, Black characters appear in *Geraldine Fauconberg*

and *Traits of Nature*, which were published after abolition. Fernández Rodríguez notes Burney's compassionate representation of Caesar's music-making in *Geraldine Fauconberg* and her sympathetic presentation of the Black character Amy in *Traits of Nature*. While Fernández Rodríguez analyses Burney's portrait of blackness and how Burney approaches the marginalization of her Black characters, this article focuses on analyzing perceptions of race through the specific lens of music-making. I claim that the musical scene in *Geraldine Fauconberg* reinforces the hierarchies that Fernández Rodríguez observes, as well as the sympathy for the racialized Other that she perceives in Burney's writings. While concurring with Fernández Rodríguez's assessment that Caesar "becomes an appendage to Geraldine and an excuse to highlight a woman's merit," this article presents three additional claims.

First, I argue that, by analyzing music-making scenes, we can note how both musically accomplished women and Black individuals were scrutinized by audiences who judged them against a conventional standard presumed to be white and male. Therefore, Caesar's authentic and spontaneous performance can be contrasted with depictions of female musical accomplishment in Burney's three novels. Second, Burney sympathizes with Black people by highlighting her hero and heroine's compassion for Caesar and Amy in *Geraldine Fauconberg* and *Traits of Nature*, respectively; in the former, racial attitudes can be viewed through the perspective of music-making. Not only is Burney participating in a discourse about race, as Fernández Rodríguez implies, but she is also adding to the popular debate about the function of accomplishments in female education in the eighteenth century. While any audience scrutinizes performers, Burney shows that performing women were judged for how they approached performance and their physical appearance in the act of performing. Certain women, like Barbara, approached musical accomplishment ostentatiously, whilst more modest performers, like Geraldine and Clarentine, did not. Regardless of intent, however, all performing women were subject to the judgmental gaze. Granted, Burney's novels still display a degree of racism, apparent through her alignment of racial dichotomies with social hierarchies presenting beautiful descriptions of white Geraldine's physical appearance alongside Black Caesar's grimaces. Third, the article will explain how *Geraldine Fauconberg* and *Traits of Nature* simultaneously

dismantle contemporary stereotypes that linked one's race with one's moral character.

My analysis of *Geraldine Fauconberg* and *Traits of Nature* is part of a growing field of scholarship that attempts to understand the nuances of race in the eighteenth century. The critic Dror Wahrman claims that the later eighteenth century departed from the idea that race was malleable and fluid and, instead, depicts it as innate and essential (86). This view was already present in writing by Hannah Augstein, who defines race in the eighteenth century using three characteristics:

> Mankind is divisible into a certain number of "races" whose characteristics are fixed and defy the modifying influences of external circumstances. Secondly, . . . intellectual and moral capacities may be unevenly spread within the various human races. Thirdly, . . . mental endowments are bound up with certain physiognomical specificities, which, being defined as racial characteristics, are considered to reveal the inward nature of the individual or the population in question. (x)

Thus, according to Augstein's research, race in the eighteenth century was seen to dictate one's personal traits, with outside influences having no bearing on these fixed qualities; some races were believed to be more moral and intelligent than others; and one's character was determined by race. Contemporary polemical tracts explored and confirmed such stereotypes. In "The African Character" (1830-31), Hegel links race with intellectual and moral character, remarking that "the negroes indulge . . . that perfect contempt for humanity, which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race" (94). Forty years later, A. R. Wallace's views in the essay "Are humans one race or many?" (1870) coincide with the idea of an intellectual and behavioral racial hierarchy, reflective of Augstein's second point. Wallace claims that "the intellectual and moral, as well as physical, qualities of the European are superior" (303, 307), a view that Edward Said traces in various sources in *Orientalism*, his pivotal text on post-colonial theory.

We can situate Burney's judgments about race in the context of postcolonial and critical race theory beginning with Said's work and continuing with Roxann Wheeler's and Srinivas Aravamudan's more recent scholarship. The contrast that *Geraldine Fauconberg* presents between a respected white gentrified female performer and a Black performer fighting against ridicule initially sets up a racial dichotomy

expounded upon in Said's *Orientalism*. Said defines "Orientalism" as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." He further claims that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). In the discussion of *Geraldine Fauconberg,* the (white) audience members who ridicule Caesar judge his native song and dance by their European standards and deem him inferior. Caesar and the heroine participate in the same activity (music), but the audience makes an overt judgment between white and Black music-making. Burney's sympathies with Black people are apparent here as her heroine separates herself from these racial biases by encouraging Caesar's performance. In *Traits of Nature,* the positive portrayal of Amy and the criticism of Adela's racist brother also reject racial prejudice.

Wheeler's and Aravamudan's work challenge the traditional racial dichotomies that Burney was enmeshed in. Roxann Wheeler argues that certain novels tried to erase racial divisions through methods like religious conversion and marriage. Wheeler's claim that novels did not encourage readers to think of race as deterministic can be mapped onto *Geraldine Fauconberg* as Geraldine's respect for Caesar's music-making dismantles racial divisions despite the hostile audience.[6] Burney also portrays Black characters as noble and trustworthy in *Traits of Nature*, detaching blackness from immorality. This reversal has connections with Aravamudan's idea of "tropicolization," which revises the discourse of colonial domination. Aravamudan ascribes the "tropicopolitan" (colonized subject) significant agency (5-6). While Burney's Black characters, like Caesar and Amy, are given space in the novels, Burney ascribes them limited agency as they act as minor characters, which makes Burney's racial sympathy more subtle. Perhaps Burney was delicately revealing her abolitionist viewpoints to avoid offending her audience.

Burney's novels also reflect the intersection between nineteenth-century British female writers and the colonial debate surrounding slavery and abolition. Moira Ferguson argues that numerous women writers had a "eurocentric sense of slave reality" and this "feminist impulse . . . helped secure white British women's political self-empowerment" (4). While Burney's novels are not advertised as anti-slavery prose, in her physical descriptions of Caesar, Burney "drew on stereotypes of slaves and slavery that had become part of an orthodox

perspective" (4). Although Burney shows clear racial sympathy, there are limits to her radicalism. Clare Midgley also links gender with anti-slavery sentiment by arguing that anti-slavery ideology sought to suppress uncomfortable questions about the exploitation of women. Links between Black characters and women as objects of scrutiny appear in representations of musically accomplished women and Caesar in *Geraldine Fauconberg*. For example, the judgment that Caesar faces during his performance is similar to that experienced by Clarentine, Geraldine, Adela, and Barbara in all three novels. In this sense, women and the racial "Others" must abide by an implied etiquette. Caesar is rejected for his "uncouth" and "nasal" singing while Barbara's performance is rejected for her overexertion. Thus, when observing music-making scenes, readers can sympathize with the pressure placed on both women and Black people.

Clarentine

Published in 1796, Burney's *Clarentine* is the story of two cousins who declare their love to Clarentine and her eventual marriage to one of the suitors despite obstacles. It presents a heroine whose music delights a romantic suitor. Jane Austen unfairly dismissed *Clarentine*, though she had read the novel repeatedly.[7] However, in the same year that Frances Burney's *Camilla* became a resounding success, Frances commended Sarah Harriet's *Clarentine* in a letter to her father, adding that the Princess Elizabeth spoke to her "in high terms" of the novel.[8] Chronologically, Burney's novels shift from a positive representation of musical accomplishment in *Clarentine*—where it is presented as a courtship tool and index of the female character—to a more negative representation in *Traits of Nature*.

Clarentine reveals music's natural role in courtship opportunities but shows that female performers were under the male gaze.[9] In volume 2, Clarentine's accomplished music-making charms her audience. Her "unaffected diffidence" and "unpretending modesty" enhance her musical performance of "several of the most beautiful little airs she could select" (2: 33). Clarentine has "additional charms" when performing music, and Eltham is stunned by the visual and auditory spectacle of her performance. In fact, Clarentine's playing strikes Eltham to such a degree that he asks, "how did you acquire talents so bewitching, and manners so irresistible?" (2: 34). The fascination with

Clarentine's musical performance continues when

> It [the harp] was soon brought; and Clarentine, who had now taken regular lessons of a master for some time, and really played with admirable taste and expression, astonished and charmed Eltham so much by the extraordinary progress she had made . . . Eltham thanked her . . . in the most animated terms, for the extreme pleasure she had given him. (2: 250-51)

Here a heroine's musical performance pleases a potential romantic suitor, firmly linking music's function with courtship. Although Eltham's reaction is positive, this is a clear example of the audience imposing a judgment on a musical performer, just as other female and Black performers were similarly critiqued in the novels. The musical courtship that Clarentine shares with Eltham anticipates Burney's depictions of Geraldine and Ferdinand in *Geraldine Fauconberg*, which the later novel makes important.

Geraldine Fauconberg

Written as an epistolary novel, *Geraldine Fauconberg* tracks its hero Ferdinand's intensifying love for the heroine, Geraldine, through the accounts of Ferdinand's sister. Geraldine's sweet nature extends to her charity towards Caesar, a destitute Black character. Admiring Geraldine's compassion and virtue, Ferdinand attempts to make himself worthy of her. One of Sarah Harriet Burney's letters reveals that, through her crafting of Geraldine, Burney "wished to sketch such a character as the worthy might love, the young might advantageously imitate and the rational might allow was not overstrained" (Burney, *Letters* 102). Similarly, *The Critical Review* greatly applauded Geraldine's judgment and sense:

> We wish that the instructresses and guardians of our females would not only pay serious attention to, but *take a leaf* out of Geraldine. The quietness of her character, the steady judgement, the admirable presence of mind, which she displays, without a particle of pride or ostentation . . . hold forth a most excellent example. (104-05)

Interestingly, Geraldine's "excellent example" is best seen in the kindness and respect she shows to a Black man.

Burney's novel presents music as a courtship tool that illuminates perspectives about race and uses singing to enhance Geraldine's physical

appearance. This aesthetic joy at observing Geraldine performing music is reflected in the narrator's softening sibilance:

> Lovely as she is, yet never does she look so beautiful as when thus employed; her mouth, particularly is embellished by it to a wonderful degree; no grimaces, no affectation, disfigure the symmetry of her features; but her whole aspect is lighted up by an air of genuine sensibility, a sort of supplicating softness, that has, more than once, affected me nearly as much as her exquisite sweetness of voice and truly Italian taste. (1: 116)

A similar account of music-making beautifying the female form later appeared in an 1811 polemical treatise, *Mirror of the Graces*. This conduct book presents music as a physically and aurally embodied practice. Richard Leppert acknowledges the close link between the sight and sound of music, stating that "the physicality of music-making itself" as "the body is a sight, in essence a sight of sounds" (*Sight* xix-xx).

As Geraldine's confidence grows, she progresses from playing the piano, which can act as a shield from observation, to the more exposed activity of singing in volume 1 when Ferdinand's sister reports that "we listened with attention, and I soon distinguished the clear, mellow and grateful voice of Geraldine, accompanied by the drawing room piano-forte" (1: 179). The positive reception of Geraldine's music-making continues into volume 3 when Ferdinand's sister recounts:

> When she [Geraldine] had concluded, awakening, as if from an affecting dream, I turned to observe the effect a performance so admirable might have produced upon my brother . . . all sound of music had for some minutes ceased, before he changed his attitude, or raised his head. Our eyes at last met; and I instantly traced in his, unquestionable evidences of the strongest emotion. (3: 37-38)

Through carefully crafted body language, Burney reveals the effect of Geraldine's music-making on Ferdinand's body and eyes which had "unquestionable evidences of the strongest emotion." Such an account of the profound effect of Geraldine's music on Ferdinand is similar in tone to the description of how Eltham was moved by Clarentine's playing. Burney details music's emotive effect in both accounts and makes it clear that musically accomplished women were subject to scrutiny.

While Geraldine's musical performances are courtship opportunities that are visually and audibly pleasing to the hero, Caesar's music is spontaneous, self-directed, and not linked to courtship. While the emotions elicited by Clarentine's and Geraldine's performances are romantic and the tone is serious, Caesar's surprising performance startles its audience and prompts them to ridicule him. The name "Caesar" was often used for slaves, according to Fernández Rodríguez, who adds that Edgeworth's novels used it too (105).[10] Fernández Rodríguez argues that Burney follows usual practice in naming slaves and animals after Roman emperors (106). Geraldine initially finds Caesar starving and dying. She is compassionate, introducing him as a "poor wretch." The racial stereotyping that Ferguson claims female writers employed is evident when the narrator reports Geraldine physically "kneeling beside him, regardless of his squalid and loathsome appearance" (1: 204).[11] Geraldine's countenance shows "joy" when he starts to revive. She encourages "the famished negro" to "swallow" some wine (1: 205). Grateful for Geraldine's attention, Caesar begins to "fix his dim eyes upon the fair creature to whose exertions he was indebted to for returning life, clasp his shrunk hands together, and burst into a passion of tears!" before Geraldine soothes the "poor distressed being" (1: 206). Although the focus of the scene is to show Geraldine's sensibility and virtue, Caesar's adoration for Geraldine warms the reader to him, even though there are clear dichotomies of color ("negro" and "fair") and contrasts between Geraldine's healthy and attractive body (through the perspective of her music-making) and Caesar's weak body, Geraldine dismantles barriers by reaching out to Caesar. She physically lowers herself down to kneel beside and help him.

Interestingly, after Geraldine shows this sympathy towards Caesar and a respectful relationship between them is established, the narrator draws contrasts between their performances. The musical performances of Caesar and of a "lame and squinting fiddler" distinctly contrast with those of Geraldine. Describing the fiddler as "lame" classifies him as a disabled person; ability—like race—was a category of marginalization. "Squinting" refers to an inelegant gesture or a visual impairment, which contrasts with Geraldine's "lovely" appearance and harkens back to Caesar's grimaces when Geraldine first met him. In his initial performance, Caesar provokes ridicule from the audience:

Geraldine remarked with some surprise, that the music had

> wholly ceased; and desired us to stop, and listen to a strange, unaccountable, droning noise, occasionally interrupted, or, at least, overpowered by peals of laughter, and loud reiterated bursts of applause. . . . You would have been entertained had you witnessed the confusion. . . . The murmuring, muttering, indistinct sound which had baffled our united conjectures, proceeded from honest Caesar, the negro, who, whilst the company sat down to take some rest and refreshment, had been prevailed upon to exhibit for their amusement, one of his native dances, to no other music than that of his own nasal uncouth singing. What it most resembles is the vile twanging of a Jew's harp; and yet it is altogether different from that, and from every thing else which European ears ever heard. (2: 157-58)

The narrator immediately contrasts the "strange unaccountable droning noise" from Caesar with "everything else which European ears ever heard" and uses the racial comparison of "the vile twanging of a Jew's harp." The fact that Caesar is "prevailed upon" to perform and is then laughed at implies immediate judgment, rudeness, and ignorance. Alongside visual imagery, Burney builds up the auditory imagery so that "peals of laughter" and "confusion" accompany Caesar's performance, which occurs immediately after the elegant visual spectacle of Geraldine's.

While the scene highlights Geraldine's charitable conduct alongside Caesar's racial alienation, Burney chooses to make a Black man the key recipient of Geraldine's charity. Geraldine's performance stirs romantic feelings, but Caesar is a figure of ridicule, and the performances of Caesar and the squinting fiddler are the only ones in the novel that occur outside of the context of musical accomplishment. Considering Geraldine's previously compassionate treatment of Caesar and her and Ferdinand's encouraging response to Caesar's performance, however, the above description is not a straightforward criticism of Black music-making. Indeed, Ferdinand and Geraldine are kinder judges who encourage the diversity and uniqueness of Caesar's performance:

> Our appearance extremely disconcerted him, and with blushes, perhaps, though such as the tincture of his skin rendered invisible to our eyes, he was modestly retiring to an obscure corner, when Ferdinand went up to him and, with a look of encouragement, urged him to proceed.

> "Come, Caesar," cried he, "finish your dance; we shall all like to see it, and Miss Fauconberg will be particularly pleased if you go on."
>
> Caesar glanced his eyes towards Geraldine, and observing her smile and nod, he gained courage.
>
> "Shall I, massa?" inquired he, looking at Mr. Archer.
>
> "Yes, yes, Caesar, by all means."
>
> Forth, then, stepped the emboldened performer, and without farther solicitation, renewed his fatiguing exertions. Expert and active, at the same time that he possesses an excellent ear, he kept time so exactly both with hands and feet, to his own dolorous melody; went through his task with such impenetrable gravity… (2: 158-59)

Caesar's racial difference is evident as "the tincture of his skin rendered [his blushes] invisible to our eyes." However, Caesar is brave and tenacious, overcoming his fear of ridicule to continue performing. Flattering terms, such as "emboldened" and "modestly," describe Caesar, who makes "fatiguing exertions." Caesar is motivated by Ferdinand's "look of encouragement" and approach. Geraldine also invites Caesar to continue performing. Without their support he would have stopped. Musically, Caesar is rhythmically accurate with his "excellent ear," keeping time "so exactly both with hands and feet." While Geraldine's performances are closely aligned with courtship, Caesar's entertainment is free from culturally intelligible motives and generates laughter. Although most of the audience cannot appreciate his unorthodox performance, Geraldine and Ferdinand, the novel's two major characters, encourage Caesar's performance and challenge resistance and the audience's impoliteness by insisting that he continue.

Differing from other eighteenth-century novelists, such as Jane Austen—whose music-making scenes showcase white accomplished women—Burney is radical in presenting a Black performer in *Geraldine Fauconberg*, and the novel's music-making scene is a lens through which racial attitudes can be detected. Burney broadens the music-making arena in *Geraldine Fauconberg* by creating space for a Black musician with whom the heroine sympathizes, and thus she challenges racial prejudice. In *Traits of Nature,* she later expands on this racial sympathy by presenting an exemplary Black character, though *Geraldine Fauconberg* is the only one of the three novels to present a Black performer. Race

dictates the type of music that a performer plays (a song sung with nasal singing and dancing in Caesar's case) and affects its reception (Caesar's music is "uncouth singing" while Geraldine's performance is well-received and performed on the piano and sung). The hostile responses to Caesar are clearly grounded in racial prejudice, and Geraldine's character is enlightened as she firmly rejects this prejudice by inviting Caesar to continue performing, indicating Burney's desire to promote racial tolerance. As *The Critical Review* remarks, the heroine is often someone that readers wish to emulate. Therefore, by making Geraldine reject racial prejudice, Burney encourages her readers to do the same.

If we apply Said's postcolonial theory to *Geraldine Fauconberg,* the West (audience) dismisses and scorns Caesar (paralleled with the "Orient" in this analogy) because it defines Caesar by Western standards: Caesar's performance differs from the English style. The narrator explicitly creates a dichotomy of Black and white music-making, commenting that the performance was "different from every thing else that European ears had ever heard" (2: 158). In *Orientalism*, Said implies the dominance of Western society by claiming that "the Orient [representing the Other] is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist [representing the West] . . . as presence" (208). Interestingly, Geraldine does not dismiss or silence Caesar's music-making, although the way in which the audience ridicules and scoffs at Caesar implies that others wish him to be absent and the audience's jeering reflects their sense of superiority. Said's reference to Orientalism as a "Western style for dominating . . . and having authority over the Orient" (3) can be mapped onto this episode as the audience's jeering becomes the focus of the scene. The audience expects to hear the white amateur female pianists and singers and cannot adjust to listening to the "murmuring, muttering, indistinct sound of a Negro which had baffled" them (2: 158). Aesthetically, music enhances Geraldine's lovely appearance (and Clarentine's attractiveness), but it fails to make Caesar more attractive. Responses are, therefore, far warmer to the visual spectacle of Clarentine's and Geraldine's performances than to the sight and sound of Caesar's performance, which disrupts the traditional social and gendered interpretation of music.

Later work in postcolonial and critical race theory similarly illuminates Caesar's role in *Geraldine Fauconberg*. Just as Nussbaum's theory claims that "social rank becomes an obfuscating mask for

maintaining difference without cruelty, or insisting on an inferiority here specified as blackness and savageness but within humanity" (80), the difference between Caesar and Geraldine can be viewed through the intersectional lens of class. Like many eighteenth-century novelists of the time, Burney confines her heroines' musical instruments to the harp, piano, and voice, firmly locating them in the middle classes.[12] Richard Leppert explains that such musical instruments were prescribed for middle- to upper-class women for aesthetic reasons, just as wind instruments were discouraged for women as they could distort the facial features during performance.[13] By contrast, more minor characters (such as Caesar and the fiddler in *Geraldine Fauconberg*) perform on cheaper instruments, reflecting their lower status. Thus, instrumentation can also be an embodiment of social status and a means of performing one's gender. As Geraldine is of a higher social status than Caesar and since the audience reacts more positively to her performance, this indicates a combination of racial and social bias. However, Caesar's thought-provoking performance helps broaden his audience's horizons and question how they define music.

The contrast between the performers' different social classes, their physical appearances, and different instrumentation automatically indicates social as well as racial divides as Burney links whiteness with beauty and traditionally female instruments like the piano, while blackness embodies unflattering physical appearance and nasal "uncouth" singing. Burney describes her heroine as "lovely" and Caesar, initially, as "squalid and loathsome" (1: 204), which, as Ferguson argues, draws "on stereotypes of slaves and slavery that had become part of an orthodox perspective" (4). Although Burney's depictions do show the "orthodox perspective" that Ferguson describes as part of anti-slavery prose, Burney's unique inclusion of Caesar's music-making gives some voice to the racial Other. In doing so, Burney carves a space for Black characters to make music, which is validated by Geraldine's and Ferdinand's compassionate reactions to Caesar. This is a performance space that few other eighteenth-century novelists created. Perhaps Burney's family background influenced her here. The professional musicians in Burney's family likely encountered a broader social demographic when interacting with musicians. If musicians were viewed as a form of the "Other," as Campbell's *The London Tradesman* dismissively presented eighteenth-century musicians, Burney thus

criticizes the prejudice surrounding Caesar's musical performance to imply that attitudes to the profession should be more open-minded.[14]

Traits of Nature

In Burney's fiction, music is a courtship tool when performed by women; for example, in *Geraldine Fauconberg*, Ferdinand is happy to "beg" Geraldine to sing a song since music enhances the heroine's appearance just as it did for *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Darcy, who "stationed himself beside the fair performer" Elizabeth Bennet (144). All of these examples show the importance of female music-making as a visual spectacle. But while Clarentine's and Geraldine's music-making is presented as a natural part of the courtship process, the narrator mocks Barbara in *Traits of Nature* for ensuring that she is the object of the male gaze, revealing that there were conditions placed on women's domestic musical performances. Instead of presenting music as a courtship tool or showcasing the performances of Black people, Burney presents a scathing view of music as a female accomplishment in *Traits of Nature*, showing, through her representation of vain Barbara, how it was often learned superficially and only for fashion's sake.

Described by *The Monthly Review* as containing "a fertile invention, a dexterity of management, and a fluency of style" (102-03), and fervently praised in Frances Burney's letters, the first edition of *Traits of Nature* (1812) sold out after three months, and its popularity led to a French translation (entitled *Tableaux de la Nature*). In this comedy of manners, in which the heroine is sent away from her father's house and journeys through loss and sadness but is rewarded with a happy marriage, Burney presents female musical accomplishment more skeptically than in *Clarentine* and *Geraldine Fauconberg*.

Fascinatingly, Burney uses similar adjectives ("shrill" and "twanging") to mock Barbara's musical performance as her narrator did when describing Caesar's music in *Geraldine Fauconberg*, thus creating another curious linguistic connection between otherness and the pursuit of female accomplishments. Both Black and female performers are conscious of intense scrutiny from their audiences, who criticize Caesar's and Barbara's performances, but there is a different set of criteria when judging female versus Black performers. The assessment of female performers is mixed and based on the author's and characters' opinions of an accomplished woman's modesty and talent. As such,

Burney contributes to the popular debate about the utility of musical accomplishment in the female education system. She is not rejecting female accomplishment as a practice (Geraldine and Clarentine are applauded for their talented and modest performances), but the narrator's mockery of Barbara suggests that Burney believes that musical accomplishment should be achieved without ostentatiousness or vanity. While Barbara is mocked, Geraldine and Clarentine are applauded for their talent and modesty. By contrast, Caesar's sincerity and accuracy during his performance is irrelevant; his "native" singing and dancing is judged more harshly because it is not European. Indeed, this mob mentality is not evident when vain Barbara performs in *Traits of Nature*; Black characters faced more objectors than arrogant white women did. By revealing Barbara's superficial pursuit of accomplishment in *Traits of Nature*, as she anticipates the ostentatious Miss Brinville in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* and contrasts with Caesar's self-directed performance in *Geraldine Fauconberg*, Sarah Harriet Burney points to the superficiality of female accomplishments when manipulated by certain women as part of their education.[15]

In volume 2, Mrs. Cleveland (Adela's aunt) asks Adela if her musical ability is equal to the "modern misses in the variety and extent of her accomplishments" (2: 76). When Adela modestly denies this, Mrs. Cleveland tells her that she is relieved as she does not want to be "condemned to the horrible annoyance of hearing you and Barbara struggling for preeminence in shrill singing; or whilst she [Barbara] is stunning me with the noise of a grand piano-forte in one room, have to indure the ceaseless twanging of a harp in the next!" (2: 77). She and her other cousin Christina Cleveland dismiss—in particular Barbara—who learn several accomplishments at the expense of acquiring a skill carefully:

> "But how is it that your sister finds time to accommodate these scientific speculations with the dissipations of a London life, and the pursuit of lighter accomplishments—such as singing, playing on the piano-forte, dancing, and probably many others?"
>
> "…she has never been able, when I have asked her to give me an easy explanation of any of the learned terms she has used, to make me understand one syllable she has uttered, without having recourse to a Dictionary or a Cyclopaedia."
>
> (2: 91-92)

As the daughter of a music teacher and musicologist, Sarah Harriet Burney was conscious of the trend for learning accomplishments, irrespective of talent. Here, Barbara's time is filled up with too much surface learning that she cannot apply or remember. In volume 4, Barbara's superficial learning is unfavorably compared with Adela's "unpretending efforts," reflecting how far modesty was prized in this era:

> "Her [Barbara's] singing is all affectation, and ill-executed scamper and rapidity; and with regard to her playing, whatever she undertakes, sounds to me like a series of mistakes! I know that it is all very fine . . . meanwhile, she sets my teeth on edge, and leaves me no wish but to make as speedy an escape as possible."
>
> Adela, happy that her unpretending efforts could so much better amuse him . . . sought for the air he had desired her to sing, and performed it with such genuine sensibility of expression, that it was evident her heart entered into the task, and associated to the words which she was repeating, remembrances the most applicable to her present circumstances, and the most affecting to her present feelings. (4: 239-40)

Ironically, despite Barbara's attempts to showcase her musical accomplishment, her performance "sets . . . teeth on edge" while Adela's performance "with such genuine sensibility of expression" is well-received. In volume 5, we learn of the pressure from Adela's father to acquire excellent musical skills, which robs her of enjoyment and makes her anxiously fly to her "post at the instrument" when she sees his approach, "half-dreading to have been observed, for one instant, off duty" (5: 53). There is speculation that these scenes have autobiographical roots, mirroring a situation between Sarah Harriet Burney and her musically ambitious father (Burney, *Letters* lxi). Two years later, Frances Burney would also depict anxiety relating to musical performance and the pressure to professionalize talent in *The Wanderer*.[16] Caesar's self-directed performance in *Geraldine Fauconberg* contrasts with these women's reluctance to perform; they resist social pressure more than Caesar does. Caesar is happy to perform after Geraldine encourages him while Juliet and Adela shy away from self-display.

In the absence of Black performers and overt racial prejudice

(there is only an exemplary Black servant girl), *Traits of Nature* mocks women who take accomplishments too seriously, a trend that can also be seen in Frances Burney's and Jane Austen's fiction. There is a spectrum of responses to accomplished white female performers, and the audience and author's responses are partly dependent on the performer's modesty and talent. As we do not see Black accomplished female musicians, it is difficult to judge how perceptions of skin color affect the audience's response to performers, although the ridicule that Caesar faces suggests clear racial prejudice. Instead, Burney becomes bolder in criticizing white gentrified music-making (without addressing racial differences) and skeptically presents the flaws in the female education system where, as many conduct books claimed, several accomplishments could be learned superficially. In contrast, Burney's depictions of Black people are far more positive than her representation of music in *Traits of Nature*; she elevates the Black servant girl, "voluble" and "faithful" Amy, who is Adela's treasured companion and more of an equal than a servant. Astonishingly, Amy is referred to sixty-six times in volume 1 alone (five times in volume 3 and twenty-one times in volume 2). Adela and Mrs. Cleveland are racially tolerant, too. The latter "encouraged the attachment" between Amy and Adela (1: 42-43). This racial tolerance is similar to Ferdinand's kindness to Caesar in *Geraldine Fauconberg*. Amy comforts Adela after the latter argues with her racist brother. Amy accompanies Adela when she leaves her first home, and when Adela describes what is most dear to her, she mentions Amy's friendship.

Linguistically, Burney does present a social distinction between white and Black characters, as Amy's language contains non-standard grammar and working-class dialect. However, Amy is consistently kind, loyal, and a model employee, which confirms that Burney reacted against racial stereotypes that linked blackness to unworthy characteristics as articulated by scholars like Augstein. To reinforce this sympathetic and admirable portrayal of Amy, the narrator refers to Amy's loyalty and friendship when ending the novel: "Her dependants, and none more than the devoted (and still *inseparable*) Amy, adored her. She was the bond of union between her father and her lord—the gayest, the most benevolent, and ever the most unpresuming of human beings" (5: 251). While Burney presents a predictable relationship between social class and race, linking whiteness with wealth and blackness with poverty through Amy and Caesar, her sympathy with the judgments that Black

characters face is consistent. In her essay on race, Nussbaum shrewdly comments that social class is relevant to distinctions and perceptions about ethnicity, and so it is in Burney's fiction (Nussbaum 70). First, both women and Black people are judged when they perform, which draws links between the racial Other and the musically accomplished woman. Second, Burney uses music-making as a lens to highlight racial prejudice and, through her heroine's compassion, sympathizes with abolition. Third, despite Burney's conventional links between whiteness and wealth, she destabilizes racial stereotypes by refusing to link blackness with negative character traits like immorality. As Fernández Rodríguez claims, where race is concerned, Burney's "subversive and unconventional attitudes are close to those of abolitionist writers" (98), and this is reinforced in *Geraldine Fauconberg* through the heroine's sympathetic treatment of Caesar. While both Caesar and Amy are servants, Burney reveals their honest and worthy characters.

While *Clarentine* and *Geraldine Fauconberg* reveal links between music-making and courtship opportunities, the latter also contrasts without denigrating a white privileged woman's performance with the controversy and diversity of a Black man's music. While white music-making appeared more palatable to "European ears," the hero and heroine's acceptance and kindness to Caesar, their sensitive encouragement of his music allowed this "Other" type of music to be acceptable, as Burney indulges her interest in other cultures and carves out a space for Black musicians. *Traits of Nature* presents how privileged and untalented white women could manipulate musical accomplishment for their own purposes, but the criteria used to judge women's musical accomplishment can be compared with the narrower criteria that audiences use to judge Caesar. In the latter two novels, Burney presents a forward-thinking attitude to race, especially in *Geraldine Fauconberg,* as Caesar's music broadens the experience of his listeners, thus challenging preconceived ideas about music and presenting an ethnically and culturally diverse performance space.

NOTES

[1]*Traits of Nature* and *Sense* and *Sensibility* were advertised at the same time, in 1811 by the publisher, Henry Colburn. He paid Sarah Harriet £50 for each of the five volumes of *Traits of Nature*, which appeared under her own name, which totalled £250. Austen made £140 for *Sense and Sensibility*. See Clark, "Sarah Harriet Burney."

[2]See also Murley.

[3]Charles Burney's inclusion of Black musicians is limited to a single derogatory comment. Apart from a chapter on Ancient Egypt where Burney describes a harpist "in colour rather of the darkest" for an Egyptian (1: 221), in the four volumes of *General History of Music*, I found no incidences of the word "negro," a common word used in the eighteenth century for people of Black African origin, and only one reference to a "little black man" who is ridiculed for being an organist (3: 202-3). Most references to "black" refer to the black notes on a keyboard.

[4]Hannah Franziska Augstein also uses the word "race" to indicate skin color.

[5]Fernández Rodríguez quotes from Sarah Harriet Burney's Letter to Elizabeth Carrick of 6 December 1813 (101). Black individuals, such as Olaudah Equiano, were active in the Abolitionist cause too.

[6]See Wheeler 139.

[7]Jane Austen criticized *Clarentine* in a letter to Cassandra Austen of 8 February 1807 (*Jane Austen's Letters* 120).

[8]Letter 198 from Frances Burney to Dr. Burney, 10 December 1812 (Burney, *Journals and Letters* 464).

[9]The absence of Black performers in domestic music-making scenes in *Clarentine* and in novels of the time may be due to less awareness of racial inequality prior to the Slave Abolition Act of 1808.

[10]Aphra Behn's play *Oroonoko* (1688) also contains a character called Caesar.

[11]See Ferguson 4.

[12]Jane Austen is an example of a novelist who presents female characters who play these instruments. Emma plays the piano in *Emma*, as does Anne in Persuasion. Mary Crawford plays the harp in *Mansfield Park*. Of course, Austen also satirizes women's use of music to attract male attention, particularly when she presents Mary Crawford at the harp.

[13]See Leppert, *Music*.

[14]See chapter 15, "Of Musick," in Campbell 89-94.

[15]In *The Wanderer*, Frances Burney points to the vanity of a woman learning the harp for show: "To sit at the harp so as to justify the assertion of the Baronet became her [Miss Brinville's] principal study; and the glass before which she tried her attitudes and motions, told her such flattering tales, that she soon began to think the harp the sweetest instrument in the world. . . . Of all her pupils, no one was so utterly hopeless as Miss Brinville, whom she [Juliet] found equally destitute of ear, taste, intelligence and application" (Burney, *Wanderer* 236).

[16]In *The Wanderer*, Juliet's anxiety about performing is recorded in detail from chapters 32-40 of volume 2.

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