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Christina Davidson, University of Sussex

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Frances Burney, Elinor Joddrel, and the "Defiance to All Forms" and "Antique Prescriptions"

CHRISTINA DAVIDSON

In Frances Burney's dedicatory letter to her final novel, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814), she affirms her belief that politics have always been "without" her "sphere," asserting that she located her narrative in earlier times specifically because the French Revolution was "a period which, completely past, can excite no rival sentiments" (5-6). Recent interest in Burney's mediation of eighteenth-century debates suggests that her denial of a "disposition . . . for venturing upon the stormy sea of politics" is disingenuous, seeing her chosen context as a vehicle through which she explores contemporary issues (*The Wanderer* 4).[1] While such approaches are insightful and convincing, they overlook a major discussion in her letter, concerning the status and function of the novel, and of Burney's own awareness of her position and role as a female novelist. Although Burney recognizes that the past is intertwined with the present, asserting that the French Revolution is "blended with . . . every intellectual survey of the present times" (6), her letter repeatedly turns to her *own* past as a writer, looking back to what she "venture[s] to style [her] literary career" (4-5). These prefatory paragraphs of literary discussion indicate that Burney's interests in *The Wanderer* are as much personal and artistic as political, revealing that, in terms of ideas developed by her contemporary, the influential thinker Adam Smith, she was as much a "self-spectator" as a "spectator."[2] She remembers the responses of Dr. Johnson and Edmund Burke to her "first small work" (5); she discusses the pejorative associations of the term "novel," and the influential power of nomenclature (something she explores extensively in this novel); she confesses that she once "felt ashamed of appearing to be a votary to a species" which her own father condemned (8-9); but she discusses the edifying potentialities of the form, asserting that she is now "past the period of chusing to write . . . a merely romantic love-tale" (9). Burney indicates that this, her final novel, is different. Thus, Burney's "intellectual survey" includes the use of history for commentary on current social and political issues. But in addition, the phrase might be read as an allusion to an introspective and retrospective survey, indicating that her purpose was also to reflect on the impact of revolutionary ideas on her own art as a writer. Such a reading contributes

to a growing critical interest in Burney's professionalism, which sees her as "secure in her public position as an author" (Thaddeus 3), as having "ideas of her own" about establishing herself in the literary marketplace (Brock 110), and as engaging with theories of reading and philosophy (Bray 28). Further, in shifting the focus from Burney's "spectatorship" of historical and contemporary issues to her "self-spectatorship," the argument developed here relocates what has been described as a "self-defence" of her own career in the *Memoirs* (1832) to the novels written or drafted earlier, in the 1790s (qtd. in Brock 136).

At the center of Burney's "survey" and "self-spectatorship" is the figure of Elinor Joddrel, for the shoring-up of Burney's feminist predilections and the pressures on her as a "proper lady writer" is manifest in the problematic foil to the long-suffering protagonist, Juliet.[3] As this discussion shows, Burney draws on literary and historical figures, as well as extra-literary discourses, to construct a highly individualistic and complex secondary character. Further, the ambiguous nature of Elinor Joddrel allows Burney to rationalize and theorize the theatrical disappointments of her past, drawing strength from her belief in the greater potentialities of the younger novel form; it allows Burney to revisit her early identification with male writers and to anticipate a critical reception which would be resistant to her final novel's scope, focus, and themes; and it allows Burney to respond to such female writers as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, exploring her regret that she herself had not been more courageous in her use of the novel form.

The Ambiguous Miss Joddrel

Modern theorists have argued that literature draws from literary and "extraliterary genres."[4] The plurality of influences underpinning the developing character of Elinor Joddrel helps account for her ambiguity, for Burney harnessed the language of literary *and* non-literary discourses, not merely to create Elinor's highly individualized and sometimes eccentric idiolect but also to raise questions about the ownership and use of the discourses themselves.

A primary model for the character of Elinor Joddrel is the historical and literary figure of the female philosopher. Burney drafted *The Wanderer* during the highly sensitive and reactionary years of the 1790s, and in the context of war with France and the war of ideas over women's rights and duties, her decision to use such a model can be viewed as self-protective.

In a December 1790 letter to Miss Berry and her sister, Horace Walpole denigrates the "Amazonian allies, headed by Kate Macaulay and the virago Barbauld, whom Mr. Burke calls our *poissardes*" (465, my italics), and at the end of the decade, Richard Polwhele's poem, *The Unsex'd Females* (1798) railed against "A female band despising NATURE'S law" (line 12) whose propensities made the writer "shudder" (line 15).[5] To contrast with Wollstonecraft, however, Polwhele cited Burney as a paragon of feminine virtue; thus, Burney's lack of hurry to publish her final novel might be read as a move to maintain a reputation that had remained intact during her long writing career. Julia Epstein suggests that had "it been published in the 1790s . . . *The Wanderer* might have been read in a more appropriate context and appreciated" (176). However, Burney's use of the novel as a vehicle through which to revisit and mediate controversial debates was perilous. Further, to use it to review her own art in light of revolutionary ideas could be seen as an immodest act, lacking feminine delicacy, as well as an act of self-justification, contravening codes of gendered literary etiquette. In a novel where disguise is a prominent motif, Burney's casting Elinor Joddrel as a female philosopher can thus be read as a literary feint, deflecting attention from aspects of herself embedded in her creation.

To some extent Burney was successful, and literary reviewers failed to detect the ambiguity underpinning Elinor's characterization; one contemporary reviewer dubbed Elinor an "ill-fated . . . dupe of an enthusiastic mind," and another condemned her as "monstrous."[6] Some modern readings have seen her as an "anti-heroine" (C. Johnson 21, Epstein 176, Tomalin 307), as "outlandish if not actually grotesque" (Perkins 10), and as "a feminist grotesque figure" reduced "to a figure of farce" (Bilger 217). More commonly, modern critics have interpreted Burney's presentation of Elinor as sympathetic. However, although there has been a recent attempt to break down the Elinor and Juliet binary, most critical approaches persist in seeing Juliet as the figure who represents the values which Burney supported, seeing Elinor as a troubling Wollstonecraftian figure.[7] Claudia Johnson has described Elinor in terms of a formal element, functioning as a mouthpiece through which Burney provides a "running commentary on the humiliation and injustice suffered . . . by the heroine" (21). Elinor is undoubtedly a formal device, but she is a more complex and ambiguous composition than even Johnson's account indicates. Although Elinor articulates the "injustices suffered by the heroine," she contributes to Juliet's humiliations herself, to some extent enacting the inequalities of patriarchy for her own selfish ends. Elinor contravenes prevailing tastes

for female modesty, delicacy, and sexual decorum because she is confident, politicized, and sexually expressive. Thus, Burney's exploitation of a historical type, the stigmatized figure of the female philosopher, taps into contemporary fears concerning the education and empowerment of real women—fear of the misuse of power, fear of the desexualisation of women in terms of loss of stereotypically feminine qualities, and fear of the destabilizing force of such women in society.

By 1814 the literary type of the female philosopher was well established. Charlotte Lennox's novel *Henrietta* (1758) seemingly inspired aspects of *The Wanderer* and contains an early example of a "female free-thinker" who proudly announces her deism (171). In a parody of Pope's verse, Lennox's outspoken character asserts "whatever is, is right" (171); later, in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), that novel's free-thinking figure, Harriet Freke, declares "'Whatever is, is wrong'" (230).[8] Also resembling Mrs. Freke in her masculinization, independent spirit, and charismatic dominance is Elinor Joddrel, who initially takes Juliet under her wing, providing her with clothes and even a name. It is Elinor who suggests that Juliet should support herself by teaching musical accomplishments to wealthy girls, thereby dramatizing the views of Mary Wollstonecraft on women's independence. Elinor returns from France inspired by revolutionary ideas. Repudiating her fiancé in favor of his brother, Albert Harleigh, she exercises what she sees as her right to love whom she pleases and to express that love freely. Burney's choice of the name Harleigh and her decision to foreground this secondary plot of unrequited love also consciously evokes Mary Hays's 1796 novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and Henry MacKenzie's earlier work, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), both featuring a hero named Harley. Further, literary representation and historical events overlapped since Hays's novel was based on her own admiration of William Frend. In some ways too the secondary plot evokes the events of Wollstonecraft's life as revealed in Godwin's *Memoirs* (1798). Wollstonecraft's pursuit of Gilbert Imlay from France to England and her suicide attempts can be recognized in Elinor's refusal to relinquish Harleigh to Juliet and in her attempts to take her own life.

Wollstonecraft and her fellow radical associates were frequently described by their detractors as "unsex'd" or unfeminine females. This too is dramatized in *The Wanderer* and is evident in the masculinization of Elinor Joddrel, whose transgression of gender boundaries is used to signal her readiness to defy prevailing social and moral codes. Elinor's speech marks her as a woman who is prepared to enter conversational provinces

usually assigned to men. She debates public issues relating to politics, faith, and personal freedom with vigour and is equally comfortable taking part in personal camaraderie, enjoying a private joke about women with a male companion. In the opening pages of the novel, we are introduced to Elinor and Juliet as anonymous female speakers, conversing with a young man (Harleigh). Shrouded in darkness, the speech of Elinor provides clues for a reading of her character that both confirms and disrupts our expectations. That she is of high social standing is clear from her Standard English and confident delivery. However, that Elinor's speech belongs to a female is perhaps only obvious from narrational pointers describing her as a "young lady" (12). Elinor appropriates traditional masculine allusions and viewpoints when talking about women. She has a tendency to use extravagant metaphors in a bid to entertain and impress, as when she suggests that Juliet offers "'the vivifying food of conjecture'" (12–13), exploiting an established poetic conceit to express women's so-called mystique. There is a sense of solidarity also in the way she teases Harleigh about his rescue of Juliet, spoken in a low voice, as fictional males often do when they are being indelicate or intimate (or both): "'I have no doubt but your tattered dulcinea has secured your protection'" (13). Elinor's allotting of ownership in the term "your dulcinea" and the loaded suggestiveness of "protection" show her willingness to subscribe to gender stereotypes which disempower women.

Indeed, later, when Elinor announces her love of "'ranging without a guide'" (68), the metaphor articulates her readiness to redefine moral and gender boundaries, bringing her closer to literary deviant masculinities. In libertine fashion, Elinor objectifies and sexualizes Juliet on numerous occasions, identifying closely with men in her assessment of Juliet's charm. Speaking to Juliet of Harleigh, she inverts the positive evaluation inherent in most compliments, commenting, "'You are a most provoking little devil'" (52), later observing "'the poor boy is bewitched with you: but you delicate sentimentalists are never yourselves to suspect any danger, till the men are so crazy "'twould be murder to resist them" (110). Such utterances echo courtly refrains which plea for pity on the (male) lover by the "bewitching" female. In addition, such utterances place Juliet in a difficult position for, in the frameworks established by modern linguists, she must either agree to the compliment and "thereby violate the modesty maxim" or disagree and "violate the maxim of agreement" (Jucker and Taavitsainen 195). The conflation of gallantry and libertinism evident in Elinor's speech helps to cast her as ambiguous and complex.

Another mark of the conflation of influences evident in Elinor's creation is her resemblance to such male ne'er-do-wells as Lionel in *Camilla*, giving a racy and rebellious edge to her language, especially in the early chapters. Burney occasionally employed informality or family jargon in her journals, but in her fiction she reserved such registers for characters located on the moral margins of her narratives.[9] Female characters in this category are typically assigned fashionable or "vulgar" colloquialisms. However, some of Elinor's utterances resemble Lionel's youthful, unruly slang, as she peppers her comments with words like "dingy" and "dowdy" (50). Dismissing all things traditional as old-fashioned, she creates neologisms, like "nothingly" and "fogrum,"[10] and she happily employs such proscribed choices as "quiz" and "phiz" (53). Elinor's beliefs in equality are expressed by her rejecting conduct advice regarding women's conversational modesty; further, as we have seen, she embraces a range of language varieties usually associated with different kinds of male speakers.

Yet Burney's approach is more complex than the mere creation of a "wicked" or "wrong-headed" character. In spite of Elinor's aberrations and faults, she is depicted, at times, as heroic. Elinor's insanity might be seen as a conflation of literary types of madwoman: Ophelia and Crazy Jane, both losing their sanity and their loves. Like Lady Macbeth, too, Elinor "unsexes" herself, donating her feminine attire to Juliet, dressing as a man, and rejecting feminine qualities in the manner and content of her talk. But Burney draws on elevating masculine models too, employing her intimate knowledge of Shakespeare to imbue her character with the traits of tragedy. Elinor's obsessive love and jealousy can be traced to *Othello*, and there are echoes of Antony in her bungled suicide attempts. However, Elinor's obsessions and language indicate that Hamlet was Burney's main model.[12] With an intertextual reference to the tragedy, Elinor admits her intention "'to spur [her] almost blunted purpose'" (372).[13] She refers to suicide frequently and develops an intense interest in the soul, eventually undergoing a kind of conversion by Harleigh into a belief in the afterlife. Like Hamlet too, she displays a self-consciousness that she might be perceived as insane, musing "'There are fools, I know, in the world, who suppose me mad'" (586). Similarly, Elinor's search for the truth associates her with the universalizing preoccupations of Hamlet[14] or even the visionary clarity of King Lear.[15] Elinor's raving search for "truth," as well as her articulation of it, therefore, places her in a masculine tradition of madness, making her like both Hamlet and Lear in her self-destructive outspokenness and quest.

In many ways Elinor is a "solitary walker," an epithet that not only evokes Wollstonecraft and Rousseau but also conjures the generic Shakespearean tragic hero, the man outside of and "above the element he lives in."[16] Her political ideas certainly set her apart from the society she inhabits, a society whose values are largely revealed by the narrative to be grasping and mechanical, so that Elinor's ideology, though radical, has to be weighed and judged against a background of bourgeois principles fallen into decay. If Elinor's function is a foil to the heroine's more conventional qualities, she parallels Juliet in her isolation. But as Juliet is brought eventually into the fold of an English circle of her choosing, Elinor becomes more estranged, her separateness completed at the end of the novel when she leaves for "the end of the world" (797). Formalistically, her dialogue separates her also. As we have seen, it disrupts the reader's gender expectations of novelistic (and real-life) conventions. But her dialogue also places her in a dramatic tradition, specifically Shakespearean, so that her rhetoric is familiar yet disjunctive; it imbues her utterances with the authority and insight of male tragic heroes, yet, issuing from the mouth of a novelistic sentimental female character, the grandiosity can seem overwhelming as if it hangs "loose about her, like a giant's robe."[17]

Nevertheless, there are points in the novel when Elinor's rhetoric is powerful and moving. In Chapter XVIII, for example, Elinor explains to Harleigh why she has the right to love him and to articulate that love. Many of her comments allude to Wollstonecraftian principles; indeed, she refers overtly to "'the Rights of woman'" and asserts her right as a human being to give her "'personal vindication'" (175). Preparing her explanation, rarely interrupted by other interlocutors in the scene, Elinor describes the tyranny of custom which makes slaves of women, commenting "'how it clings to our practice! how it embarrasses our conduct! how it awes our very nature itself, and bewilders and confounds even our free will!'" (174). In a similar scene in Edgeworth's *Belinda*, Mrs. Freke issues only platitudes which allude to but pervert Wollstonecraft's views, positing that virtue and politeness are "hypocrisy" and that female delicacy is enslaving (229). But Mrs. Freke's arguments are not developed, and the discussion ends with her laughing immoderately (228–31). Edgeworth constantly intersperses Mrs. Freke's utterances by opposing speaker-views and narrative that undermines the authority and sincerity of her opinions. In contrast, narrative commentary in *The Wanderer* promotes Elinor's conversation as serious, affecting, and earnest, drawing attention to the emotive impact of her utterances on her listeners and herself. Elinor echoes Mrs. Freke when

she exclaims, "'We are slaves to [custom's] laws and its follies'" (174), but her rhetorical questioning and faltering delivery infuse *her* speech with solemnity and sincerity:

> "Who should have told me, only five minutes ago, that, at an instant such as this; an instant of liberation from all shackles, of defiance to all forms; its antique prescriptions should still retain their power to confuse and torment me? Who should have told me, that, at an instant such as this, I should blush to pronounce the attachment in which I ought to glory? and hardly know how to articulate …. That I should love you, Harleigh, can surprise no one but yourself!" (174)

Elinor's rejection of the laws of custom contravenes the general thrust of Burney's work, which promotes behaviour conforming to societal conventions. In *Cecilia*, however, Burney presents a possible caveat to this principle when she assigns to the idealistic Mr. Belfield the view that "'general conformity extirpates genius, and murders originality'" (11). Burney's narrative invites us to acknowledge the originality of the ideas expressed by Elinor Joddrel and to respond to the emotive impact of her language, even while it rejects this model of feminine behaviour, which it represents as troublesome and unworkable.

Although Elinor's theatrical dialogue seems out of tune with typical registers of prose fiction, there is sincerity in her rhetoric to which the reader responds, so that, as we read Elinor's utterances, we are swept (as Burney was with Burke) into the vortex of her eloquence.[18] Such a character and such dialogue were ripe for Burney's drama, and, indeed, her tragedies show that she was experienced in writing the elevated, solemn style, experimenting with the gothic style of drama popular at the end of the eighteenth century.[19] Yet when Burney represented a freethinking female in dramatic form, she assigned her dialogue that was unvaried and formulistic.[20] Joyce, in Burney's play *The Woman-Hater* (1802), relishes liberty and insists on choosing her own husband, but when released from the restraint of her former "character" (Miss Wilmot), her persuasions are couched in repetitious refrains lacking affect:

> "Now if you'd give the money to me, you'd see the difference! Now do try, Uncle, do! 'Twill make you quite giddy to see how I shall whisk it about! I'll go to plays,—I'll go to Balls,—I'll go to Operas,—I'll

> go to puppet-shews,—I'll see all the wild beasts, I'll eat all the tarts at the Pastry Cooks;—and my Coach shall have such lovely brisk Horses—they'll gallop over you before you can get out of the way!—Now will you give me the money, Uncle? will you?" (5.4.93–100)

Burney drafted *The Woman Hater* and *The Wanderer* at a similar time in her career, ranging between the forms, drawing on a dramatic tradition, and imbuing her fictional character with theatrical presence. Read in the context of her other sources, Burney's mingling of Shakespearean paradigms with her own dramatic models indicates her wish to configure Elinor as elevated and pitiable, as well as "unfeminine" and deviant, accounting for and explaining her ambiguous complexity.

Burney and "the wretched performance" of her drama

Elinor's theatricality provides significant pointers to Burney's theorization of genres in the context of critical responses to women writers. In her recent discussion of Burney's plays, Emily Hodgson Anderson observes how critics have read the violence and female suffering in Burney's novels as "symptomatic of Burney's own anger at the cultural situation of eighteenth-century women writers" (630). Anderson explores Burney's dilemma as a female playwright—how "if she worked in this genre, she would inevitably make a spectacle of herself" (633). Examining the moments of staged feelings in the final three novels, Anderson reads Elinor's description of her failed suicides as Burney's "statement on the . . . general tragedy of the female playwright," concluding that *The Wanderer* both "marks" and "documents" the "failings of Burney's dramatic efforts" (647 and 648). Anderson's reading of *The Wanderer* as "an authorial performance of repression" (648), therefore, contributes to critical accounts that tend to figure Burney as frustrated and defeated (see Doody, *Life* 91 and 312). But reading her final novel against the grain of such conclusions reveals Burney's ability to explain the disappointments of her theatrical ambitions and to locate them in a theoretical context.

In her final novel, and in *Camilla* (1796), Burney circumnavigates the problems of spectacle associated with female playwrights by embedding scenes of dramatic performances in her prose narratives. In *Camilla*, she describes an amateur production of *Othello* which goes ludicrously wrong (317–24); in *The Wanderer* she describes the mixed performances of Juliet and Elinor in a private theatrical production of *The Provok'd Husband*.

Thus, Burney slips dramatic writing under the radar of her familiar and critical watch-dogs without drawing negative attention to herself, fulfilling, in part, the "golden dreams," that she had, "all [her] life intended, [of] writing a Comedy."[21] In addition, both dramatic episodes allow Burney to vindicate the failure of her only play to be performed, *Edwy and Elgiva*, in 1795.

In a letter dated 15 April 1795, Burney describes the disastrous performance of her play, and although she is quick to recognize her own inexperience and the need for revision, the bulk of her blame falls on the performers, "save only Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kemble." Criticizing poor preparation, also noted by contemporary reviews, Burney writes:

> The Performers, too, were cruelly imperfect, & made blunders I blush to have pass for mine,—added to what belong to me—the most important Character, after the Hero & Heroine, had *but 2 lines* of his part by Heart! he made all the rest at random--& such nonsence as put all the other actors out as much as himself—so that a more wretched performance . . . could not be exhibited in a Barn. (*JLB* 3: 99–100)

In a letter to her brother written shortly afterwards, Burney mocks her own play, inviting him to "'Write me down an Ass'!" before passing quickly on to "*The* business," "my Grand Work" (*JLB* 3: 110 and 111). The "Grand" work is *Camilla*, published a year later in 1796, which includes a scene wherein strolling buskins turn a Shakespearean tragedy into farce. Implicit in Burney's scene is the suggestion that the work of even a great and established writer can be generically changed and, as she depicts the episode, ruined by lack of acting skill. This is a theme she returns to in *The Wanderer* when she pits the natural and gifted acting of Juliet against the over-performance of Elinor, who, unable to learn the lines of Lady Townley's part, is forced to play Lady Wronghead. Nevertheless, Elinor "piqued herself upon producing new effects, and had the triumph, by her cleverness and eccentricities, her grotesque attitudes and attire, and an unexpected and burlesque manner of acting, to bring the part into a consequence of which it had never appeared susceptible" (99). Defined by Dr. Johnson's dictionary as "*adj*: Jocular; tending to raise laughter, by unnatural or unsuitable language or images," the word "burlesque" invokes Burney's earlier comments on the performance of her own play in which principal players made up their lines. Burney's narrative goes further

to mediate acting theory debates concerning "passive" and "natural" or "learnt" performances. But the point to be made here is that these episodes allow Burney to revisit the disappointment of her early work and, to some extent, explain it and absolve herself of blame. Her final "epic" novels, then, allow her to have the last word.[22]

Burney's publishing of her ideas relating to the problems endemic in writing for the theatre registers her interest in the question of authorial agency, a question that continues to engage twenty-first century writers of fiction.[23] Rehearsing the words of her later character, Elinor Joddrel, who professes she loved to range "without a guide" (68), Burney explained in a letter to her father that she took his example in her own writing by "ranging" from genre to genre.[24] Ultimately, however, it is the novel form which allows her more control over her work, the form to which she returned after the disastrous production of her play and the form which allowed her to defend her dramatic writing with impunity.

With Elinor as a vehicle, Burney explores her art and the artist/writer further. Elinor insists on relating her own background, pre-empting imperfect representations when she says "'I shall tell you my story myself; for all that you have heard from others, you must set down to ignorance or prejudice . . . Now hearken'" (152). Driving much of the narrative in the novel, her responses influence the reader's interpretation. Elinor "reads" other characters frequently. Misreading Juliet's clothes on first meeting (30), she contributes to the mystery of her presentation and increases suspense; later, her readings are more accurate, as when she "caught" the "silent, yet speaking expression" of Juliet (71) or is "struck with the glow of satisfaction which illumined the face of Harleigh" (104). Like an author herself, Elinor names Juliet and creates her identity by bequeathing clothes, even coining the title of the book when she calls her "a Wanderer,—without even a name!"[25] She enjoys unusual characters and categorizes them in Burney fashion, aptronymically, as when she alludes to "'that quiz, Harleigh'" or "'that nothingly Ireton'" (53). There is a sense also that Burney writes with authorial self-irony when, on page 67 of a five-volume novel, she assigns Elinor the remark "'I hate a long story'"; Burney is mindful of reviews which criticised *Cecilia* for Johnsonian style when she has Elinor challenge Juliet with the accusation, "'What an old fashioned style you prose in!'"(78). Going further than defending Burney's dramatic writing, these self-referential statements reflect Burney's confidence in her own work as a novelist. Emily Allen has argued that even in Burney's first novel "we have a narrative that thematizes the triumph of the novel as a

struggle between a newly emergent genre and the residual forms it must displace and, on some levels, embrace" (435). However, the narrative of *The Wanderer* personalizes such thematization, allowing Burney to reflect on the novel and also on her own fiction in the context of other forms.

Burney and "the republic of letters"

The masculinization of Elinor through her clothing, behaviour, and modes of speech evokes the comments directed at Wollstonecraft and other "female philosophers" in the aftermath of the French Revolution. But Elinor's self-directed androgyny also invokes the arguments of Wollstonecraft and other writers, who called for a cessation in distinctions of education for the sexes and an end to inequalities arising from gendered judgements. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft advises that women had much to gain from scholarly engagement with men, a practice which distinguished many of the intellectual pursuits in her own life (76). Writing in a context where "compliment [to] the appearance of a more than ordinary energy in the female mind" was called "masculine,"[26] and where masculine values dominated the understanding of moral virtue, Wollstonecraft and other thinkers understood the dangers of women writers being marginalized. Squaring up to a literary tradition already being canonized by the time she started writing, Burney's preface to *Evelina* indicates her keenness to align herself with established writers, naming men of letters like Johnson, Marivaux, and Fielding and stating in an androgynous, anonymous voice that "no man need blush from starting at the same post" (6). Thus, although Burney evoked Wollstonecraft in her fictional female philosopher to highlight, by contrast, the culturally preferred model of womanhood represented by Juliet, she also embraced some Wollstonecraftian tenets in her attitude to her own writing. *Cecilia* (1782) was praised by Laclos as being written by a "masterly hand," a gendered assessment reinforced by his crediting Burney as the only female novelist in his brotherhood of writers.[27] In spite of her reluctance to refer to her work as "novels," Burney had fulfilled her early ambitions to enter "the republic of letters" as a novelist. Later critics would exclude her from their evaluations of the form, Hazlitt, for example, condemning her "consciousness of her sex" as limiting (*Lectures* 245). Such criticisms confirm that Burney's attempt to penetrate the province of authorized literature was founded on a realistic understanding of a domain defined by male-dominated values.

Nevertheless, Burney's efforts to enter the literary establishment have not been seen as courageous but, rather, censured by modern critics, who have seen her failure to "la[y] a wreath on the grave of Jane Barker or Delarivier Manley" (Clarke 7) as a calculated act of self-representation which contributed to the "Great Forgetting" of women writers. However, in a climate of literary reviews mediated by debates on gender, it is likely that Burney's responses were as much self-protective as self-defining. The educative and moral content of Burney's work was consistently a principal topic in her letters and literary prefaces, and in the letter prefixed to *The Wanderer*, Burney continues to cite male authors, evoking Fielding's views that the novel should instruct and entertain when she writes that the novel should "make pleasant the path of propriety."[29] Promoting "the excentricities of human life" as "an exteriour" to "enwrap illustrations of conduct," Burney asserts that fiction "has always been permitted and cultivated, not alone by the moral, but by the pious instructor" (9). Such an attitude to her role was articulated three decades earlier in the preface to *Evelina* (1778) where she distances herself from "the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination, [and] where Reason is an outcast" (7). It is likely, therefore, that Burney's engagement with the potential of the novel's formal structures for moral purposes was founded in her desire to break free of older associations between the novel, women, and amatory themes. Ros Ballaster identifies the period in which Burney wrote as one in which writers tried to refine and purge the novel "of its disreputable associations with female sexuality and the subversive power of female 'wit' or artifice" (3). Burney seems to have been sensitive to such pressures, confessing her "dread" of "censure" when she writes that an "*Authoress* must always be assumed to be flippant, assuming & loquacious."[30]

Burney and female writers: "the attachment in which [she] ought to glory"

In Burney's final novel, she employs the ambiguous figure of Elinor Joddrel to represent ideas articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft and to represent herself as a writer responding to such ideas. Thus, applying Elinor's expression of liberty and equality to the position of the woman writer, we can deduce Burney's real response to her art and role in spite of her denial of interest in political issues outlined in her prefatory letter:

> "Why, not alone, is woman to be excluded from the exertions of courage, the field of glory, the immortal death of honour;—not alone to be denied deliberating upon the safety of the state of which she is a member, and the utility of the laws by which she must be governed . . . Must every thing that she does be prescribed by rule?
>
> Must every thing that she says, be limited to what has been said before?" (177)

The prescription of women's lives by rule is exactly what Burney explores in all her novels, but in *The Wanderer* she delineates the episodes of her female protagonists' lives against the wider backdrop of international, national, and social upheaval, a feature of her final work which earned her the opprobrium of such contemporary critics as Hazlitt. Read in the context of such imminent condemnation, Elinor's utterance reveals Burney's anticipation of what is to come. Aware that she has wandered from "the beaten tracks" of literary custom, Burney, through Elinor, suggests that her critics "may conclude [her] a mere vapouring impostor," preferring others who, "poor cowards, yoked one to another, always follow the path of their forefathers; without even venturing to mend the road"; and aware that this will be her final novel, she assigns to Elinor the observation, ""'Tis therefore I have studied how to finish my career with most effect'" (586).

However, the authorial anxieties underpinning much of Burney's work are never far from the surface of her writing, and Burney's narrative retreats from overtly supporting views that she knew would be criticised as "free-thinking" and political and, therefore, "unfeminine." Thus, revisiting an extract of Elinor's speech quoted earlier and locating it in the context of these author anxieties, one can read it as a metacommentary on Burney's own work, an expression of authorial shame in her retreat:

> "Who should have told me . . . that, at an instant such as this; . . . *of defiance to all forms; its antique prescriptions* should retain their power to confuse and torment me? . . . that . . . I *should blush to pronounce the attachment in which I ought to glory*? and hardly *know how to articulate*." (174, my italics)

Using history to comment on "the present times" in *The Wanderer* (6), Burney suggests her regret that she *still* lacked the courage to be more

overtly political, and either in spite of or because of the French Revolution, she *still* felt constrained to use the novel form to "enwrap illustrations of conduct" in such a way that even "the most rigid preceptor need not deem dangerous."[31] Elinor Joddrel's laments can be read as a projection of Burney's consciousness that the tyranny of custom still "clings to [her] practice," confounding her authorial "free will" (174).

* * * * * * *

The character of Elinor Joddrel is complex and multilayered, in the heteroglot and intertextual language making up her dialogue and in the public and private, political and literary ideas that she articulates. In his recent study of the female reader in the novel, Joe Bray has posited that by the time Frances Burney wrote her final two novels, she was engaging with Adam Smith's theories of spectatorship in the delineation of her characters' developments. Commenting on Smith's theory of sympathy as "a 'dramatic', even 'theatrical' quality," Bray further highlights how Smith's "'impartial spectator' also examines and judges his own behaviour" (48). Bray's understanding of Burney's final two novels supports the view developed here, which sees *The Wanderer* as engaging with theories of literature and reads Elinor Joddrel not simply as a monologic, dissonant voice in the novel, not purely as an antithesis to Juliet, nor exclusively an embodiment of Wollstonecraftian principles, but as the complex site of Burney's self-spectatorship and a consciously fashioned conduit enabling her to reflect on her literary life. Exploring Burney's professional self-assessment in the novels written or drafted in the 1790s, such a view emphasizes Burney's agency as a writer and highlights the skill and ingenuity with which she hoped to navigate prevailing critical opinion in order to promote and defend her work.

NOTES

[1] See Doody, "Burney and Politics,"106, and Jones, "Burney and Gender," 126.

[2] "Spectatorship" and "self-spectatorship" are concepts developed by Adam Smith who posited that "our first moral criticisms are exercised upon the character and conduct of other people," but that then "we suppose

ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour" (130 and 131).

[3] The phrase, "proper lady writer," alludes to the concept explored by Poovey.

[4] Bakhtin 33. See also Frye 40 and Macovski 3–4.

[5] Polwhele extract in Jones 1990, 186.

[6] Rev. of *The Wanderer*, by Frances Burney, *La Belle Assemblée* (185); Croker 129.

[7] See Craft-Fairchild 123–62, especially 129–36 and 160. Epstein sees Elinor as "Juliet's mirror image and alter-ego" (186). Bilger notes the characters' similarities, positing that Elinor, "like Juliet, must accept a diminished position as a result of social conventions," but argues that Elinor also plays a double role, which should render her tragicomic (217). Ross calls Elinor a "Wollstonecraft figure" (120).

[8] Mrs. Freke proclaims "'whatever is, is wrong'" (Edgeworth 230) exploiting the slippage which Pope satirizes in *Essay on Man*, Epistle iv, l. 394, cited by Kirkpatrick (Edgeworth 496).

[9] Burney was viewed as "rather partikler" by Sarah Harriet Burney who employed a range of colloquial and coined phrases but changed her register when writing to her sister and was keen for "Sister d'Arblay" not to see the informal letters written to Anna Grosvenor (Sarah Harriet Burney 371).

[10] *The Wanderer* 53 and 70. Lionel uses the word "fogrum" in *Camilla* (100).

[11] For a discussion of these types see Showalter 11–17. Saggini discusses intertextual dramatic allusions in *The Wanderer* and offers a view of the novel as "the theatricalizing of Elinor's folly" (151).

[12] For the view that Burney's model was *The Tempest*, see Thaddeus 166.

[13] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.111: the ghost explains to Hamlet that his visitation is "but to whet thy almost blunted purpose."

[14] Showalter notes that Hamlet's is a more "universalized metaphysical distress" (10–11).

[15] Ussher notes that madness in male characters often represents "access to truth" (87).

[16] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*, 5.2.88–90: "His delights / Were dolphin–like; they show'd his back above / The element they lived in."

[17] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 5.2.20–21: "Now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe."

[18] Burney described how "the whirlwind" of Burke's "eloquence nearly drew [her] into its vortex" in a 16 February 1788 letter (Burney, *Selected Letters* 264).

[19] See Sabor's and Sill's remarks in their introduction to Burney's *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater* (33–34).

[20] Sabor and Sill identify Joyce with "that revolutionary and romantic spirit that had overturned the social order in France a decade earlier and was bringing rapid social change to England" ("Introduction" 25). Darby's discussion of the Joyce and Wilmot binary evokes readings of Elinor and Juliet alluded to in n. 6 above (Burney, *The Witlings* 156–57).

[21] Burney justified her ambitions in a letter dated 11 February 1800; see *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, 4: 395. This work will be referred to subsequently as *JLB*, followed by volume and page number, in the text and notes.

[22] Burney accepted her late work as "epic"; for example, she was flattered at Mr. Twining's description of *Camilla* as being in "*the prose Epic Style*" (*JLB* 3: 129).

[23] For example, see McEwan, *Atonement* (2001).

[24] "[Burney] took my example in writing—She takes it in ranging . . . to frisk from novel to Comedy" (11 February 1800) (*JLB* 4: 395).

[25] *The Wanderer* 33. First Elinor doubted Juliet could be a "heroine" (17); then, she referred to her in terms of an eponymous heroine, "'the Fair Maid of the Coast'" (20).

[26] Macaulay, Letter XXII, "No Characteristic Difference in Sex," *Letters on Education* 204.

[27] The defence of the novel by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, originally published in *Mercure de France*, April and May 1784: cited in Brock 128.

[28] Schellenberg sees this act as contributing "to what Clifford Siskin has called 'The Great Forgetting . . . that became . . . The Great Tradition'" (160). See also Brock 114.

[29] *The Wanderer* 9. In the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding criticizes Romances for containing "very little Instruction or Entertainment" (3).

[30] Hemlow 63.

[31] *The Wanderer* 9. Writing in a different genre in 1793, Burney was more overtly political, asserting that although women live within "allotted boundaries" it does not follow "that they are exempt from all public claims, or mere passive spectatresses of the moral as well as of the political œconomy of human life": see *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy*, iii.

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