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Fanny Burney and *The Wanderer*

KATE CHISHOLM

It's a nerve-racking business publishing a book—and not just because of the critics. Far more unsettling is the way that as soon as you have signed off the last proof, chosen the cover illustration—and organised the party—you start thinking of all the different ways the book could have been written.

Worse still are the nagging questions that wake you during the night: Have you given an accurate portrait of Fanny? Should you have followed the feminist historians and referred to her as Frances? Have you been fair to her as a person? Have you done her novels justice?

If I'd had the courage, I would have asked my publisher to stop printing so that I could spend another year *re*writing. Not least because I

felt then—and now, a year later, feel even more strongly—that I did not focus enough on Fanny's radicalism; on the way that in her writing she was quite prepared to tilt windmills at the establishment. Even to go so far as to satirise the very people on whose good opinion she was supposed to be reliant.

Several of you will perhaps have seen the staged readings of *The Witlings, by a Sister of the Order,* in London and in Bristol. For the first time ever, Fanny's wry observations on the literary scene—on its pompous pretentiousness and its many hypocrisies—were given a public hearing. A 1990s audience found itself laughing uncontrollably at the lines that Fanny wrote some 200 years earlier, such as Censor's acidic description of the aptly named Mrs Voluble: "She will consume more Words in an Hour than Ten Men will in a Year; she is infected with a rage for talking, yet has nothing to say, which is a Disease of all others the most pernicious to her fellow Creatures, since the method she takes for her own relief proves their bane. Her Tongue...vies, in rapidity of motion, with the circulation of Blood in a Frog's Foot."[1]

But Fanny's most vicious wit is reserved for the members of her fictional "Esprit Club"—a collection of dabblers in literature, who "decide upon Books & Authors with the most confirmed confidence in their abilities for the task." Her special targets, however, are Lady Smatter, the Club's President, and her arch-rival Mrs Sapient, who is vilified by Censor for her "consummate folly...[for] When she utters a truth self-evident as that the Sun shines at noon Day, she speaks it as a Discovery resulting from her own peculiar penetration & Sagacity."[2]

Fanny began work on *The Witlings* in the summer of 1778, shortly after the huge success of *Evelina*. She was staying at Streatham Park with Mr and Mrs Thrale, and revelling in the attention given her by their other guest, Dr Johnson, who seems to have understood and appreciated both Fanny's mature understanding of the ways of the world, and her love of language.

One evening, for instance, Mrs Thrale announces that she has invited Mrs Montagu, by then regarded as the Queen of the Bluestockings, to dine with them on the following afternoon. Dr Johnson's response, Fanny writes to her sister Susan, was to begin "to see-saw, with a Countenance strongly expressive of *inward fun*,—&, after enjoying it some time in silence, he suddenly, & with great animation, turned to me, & cried '*Down* with her, Burney!—*down* with her at once! *You* are a *rising* Wit,—*she* is at the *Top*,—& when *I* was beginning the World, & was nothing & nobody, the Joy of my Life was to fire at all the established Wits!'"

According to Fanny's account, Dr Johnson does go on to admit that Mrs Montagu "diffuses more knowledge in her Conversation than any Woman I know,—or, indeed, *almost* any man." But he then turns to Fanny and persuades her, "Come, Burney—shall you & I *study our parts* against Mrs Montagu comes?"

After such preparations is it surprising that the dinner was not a success? On arrival, Mrs Montagu confessed that she had not yet read the most talked-about book in London, *Evelina*. Anyway, she believed it to be "the work of a Young lady," and so had decided that "though I expected a very pretty Book, I imagined it to be a work of mere Imagination."

She was, surprisingly, still ignorant of the identity of its author—until Mrs Thrale mischievously announces it to be Fanny, who, blushing furiously, then "abruptly took to [her] Heels, [and] ran out of the Room with the utmost trepidation," refusing to reappear until dinner was on the table.

Mrs Montagu, "a great Coward in a Carriage," then left almost as soon as the dishes were cleared: strange now to think that the drive back through Brixton, Kennington and Lambeth to the West End would have taken her along some very isolated roads.

However, for Fanny the meeting was like sparking a tinder. No

sooner had their distinguished guest left than Mrs Thrale and Dr Johnson began discussing Fanny's talent for depicting "Life, manners, & Characters," and suggesting that she should next "attempt a Comedy."[3] In less than six months, Mrs Thrale was writing in her diary that "Our Miss Burney is big with a Comedy for next Season... The Play will be a good one too I doubt not—She is a Girl of prodigious Parts."[4]

Sadly, Fanny was never to know whether *The Witlings: By a Sister of the Order* would have been the success that Mrs Thrale predicted. The story of how Dr Burney and his old friend Mr Crisp ganged up together to ensure that *The Witlings* was never staged has become part of Burney mythology—a story well known, but, precisely because of that, given little attention (that is, until recently).

It would take the rest of my allotted span to discuss the intriguing puzzle of why Fanny was so ready to obey her father, and to hide her Comedy from public view—but yet never to destroy it in one of her many bonfires. Among her papers when she died, she left a pristine manuscript of the play, with pencil markings in the margins to indicate how long each Act would take, *if* performed rather than read, as if she wanted 'posterity' to know her other side, to know what she *could* have become. (Perhaps Karin Fernald, who played Mrs Sapient in the London staged reading of *The Witlings,* and who has far more understanding of the play than I ever will, *and* who is in our audience, can be persuaded to talk on this subject?)

But it is important to recognise just why *The Witlings* could never have been staged in 1779. Fanny's new-found confidence as a writer—and in herself socially—had encouraged her to risk all and reveal just how subversive she could be. In *The Witlings*, Fanny was just being *far* too observant, far too honest, far too outspoken—for a woman of her somewhat awkward social status in 1779.

So, to *The Wanderer.*

In late 1779, Fanny turned back to novel-writing—first to *Cecilia*, then *Camilla*, and lastly *The Wanderer*, in which, I believe, Fanny at last returns to the confident vision and irrepressible radicalism of *The Witlings*. Yes, it is *far too* long; yes, the plot is *far too* complicated; and, yes, the hero, and even the heroine, have none of the spirit and sheer exuberance of Fanny's most favoured characters. Indeed, the hero, Albert Harleigh, is another of Fanny's passive, earnest, stuffed-shirts, and there is absolutely no believing that anyone could possibly have wanted to kill themselves for love of him.

Yet I cannot agree with the reviewers of my biography of Fanny who thought that I had overstated my case in arguing that *The Wanderer* is her best and most thought-provoking novel. "While it is fascinating as an item of intellectual history, for its equivocal attitude towards the question of women's rights, as a piece of fiction it is dead water," said one writer, who considered that *Cecilia* is the best of the novels.[5] Certainly *Cecilia* is the most dramatic of Fanny's books. But it is essentially a continuation, a development of *Evelina*; a portrait of London society in the 1780s that is so vivid that the reader can almost hear the rustle of silks, the sound of hooves on cobbled streets, and catch those whiffs of cinnamon, candle-wax, coal-fires—and excrement.

But by 1814, when *The Wanderer* was published (along with Walter Scott's *Waverley* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*), Fanny was 30 or more years older. She had experienced the absolute misery of her life at Court: the loss of "self-dependance"; the humiliations of being little more than a domestic servant; the embarrassment of falling for the charms of a courtier, Colonel Digby (alias Mr Feignwell), who suddenly drops her to marry instead an aristocratic heiress worth £10,000 a year. She had also met and married the man who would be her "dear Master in all," her "Conquering Hero," Monsieur d'Arblay, with whom she declares she has at last found happiness, living in their humble cottage within view of Box Hill, Surrey. But marriage had also introduced her

to the implications of defying received English opinion by choosing for her husband a Frenchman and a Catholic; to the strain of maintaining appearances with only Fanny's income from her books and her pension from the queen to live on; and to the fear, insecurity and violence of being a refugee in war-torn Europe.

In 1814, *The Wanderer* was eagerly awaited by readers who still remembered the startling impact of Fanny's first novels, who had so enjoyed the light-hearted spirit and original "take" on English society of *Evelina*. Byron, for example, was so keen to read it that he persuaded the printers to give him a proof copy in December 1813: he did not like it. He would probably have agreed with the critic who so memorably likened Fanny to "an old coquette who endeavours, by the wild tawdriness and laborous gaiety of her attire, to compensate for the loss of the natural charms of freshness, novelty and youth!"[6] (Literary criticism in the 1990s is a damp squib when compared with the viciousness of John Croker and company.)

Five years later, Hazlitt in his "Lectures on the English Comic Writers" accused Fanny of being "quite of the old school, a mere common observer of manners, *and also a very woman.*" He continued, condescendingly: "It is this last circumstance which forms the peculiarity of her writings, and distinguishes them from those masterpieces which I have before mentioned [i.e. Fielding, Smollett, Richardson and Sterne]. She is a quick, lively and accurate observer of persons and things; but she always looks at them with *a consciousness of her sex.*"[7]

In some ways he was right: there is no denying that, on the surface, *The Wanderer* appears to be a conventional woman's romance, which takes almost 900 pages before our hero and heroine are allowed to walk off into a rosy sunset. But, if you look more closely at what is being said by Fanny through some of her characters, you will come to quite another understanding of the book. You can also begin to

sooner had their distinguished guest left than Mrs Thrale and Dr Johnson began discussing Fanny's talent for depicting "Life, manners, & Characters," and suggesting that she should next "attempt a Comedy."[3] In less than six months, Mrs Thrale was writing in her diary that "Our Miss Burney is big with a Comedy for next Season... The Play will be a good one too I doubt not—She is a Girl of prodigious Parts."[4]

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Fanny had heard at first-hand the stories of those who had suffered under Robespierre's Terror, first here at Juniper Hall in Surrey, where she had met Madame de Staël and the friends whom that extraordinarily valiant 26-year-old woman had helped to escape from Paris, and then later in France, where for ten years she experienced what it was like to be an exile in a foreign land. She understood all too well the impact of the Revolution, having lived in fear of being suspected as a spy, and subjected to accusations by Napoleon's secret police, his "mental diving-machine" as she called them.

These experiences confirmed and deepened Fanny's convictions, which were very firmly in support of the established order of things, founded on the constitutional monarchy. But she now had insight in what it was like to be cast out from that establishment, first because of her marriage to a foreigner, then because they were so poor, and finally because she had become state-less by living as an enemy alien in France. Just a few months after the publication of *The Wanderer*, she was herself to become homeless, to be "wholly ignorant even of where I shall fix my residence! Whether in Paris, or London—at Montpellier, or at Bath—or upon the banks of the Loire,—or at the foot of a Welsh mountain!"[10] And for the next year, while her husband endangered his life by volunteering to serve the restored French King, Louis XVIII, Fanny's life was to resemble that of her heroine as she became a "wandering emigrant," alone, unprotected, and forced to travel without her husband by stage-coach through war-torn Europe.

We do not know precisely when Fanny began writing *The Wanderer*. After finishing her previous novel, *Camilla*, which was published in the summer of 1796, Fanny seems to have turned away from fiction to attempt once more to write for the stage, determined perhaps to obliterate the memory of that awful night in March 1795 when she had had to endure the humiliation of hearing the audience at Drury Lane crying with laughter—and not tears—at the first night of her

tragedy, *Edwy and Elgiva.*

At the end of 1799, we find her writing letters to Thomas Harris, actor-manager of the Covent Garden theatre (or at least she wrote to him via her brother Charles who was still acting as her agent: Fanny never challenged convention by acting for herself in business matters). She had offered Harris a new comedy, "Love and Fashion," which he accepted immediately, surprised that Fanny had "never turned your thoughts to this kind of writing before; as you appear to have really a genius for it."[11] He offered her £400 for the play (about £20,000 in today's money), vindicating Fanny's belief that *if* she wrote for the stage she could make enough money to provide for Alex (the d'Arblays' son, born in 1794) and make their lives more comfortable. In 1799 their cottage in West Humble was still without some of its curtains and carpets.

Needless to say, Fanny kept her project secret from her father, who, unfortunately for Fanny, saw a newspaper advertisement for the play and wrote to her expressing his severe disapproval. Fanny's response is illuminating. She could not understand, she says, why Dr Burney should have accused her of being "guilty of a crime in doing what I have all my life been urged to, & all my life intended, writing a Comedy. Your goodness, your kindness, your regard for my fame, I know have caused both your trepidation, which doomed me to *certain* failure; & your displeasure that I ran, what you thought, a wanton risk. But it is not wanton, my dearest Father."

She then goes on to explain to him exactly why it is not "wanton." "*My imagination is not at my own controll,*" she says, "or I would always have continued in the walk you approuved. The combinations for another long work [i.e. a novel] did not occur to me. Incidents & effects for a Drama did. I thought the field more than open—inviting to me. The chance held out golden dreams."[12]

Herein, I believe, lies Fanny's manifesto: from the time she

could read, she had felt *compelled* to write, and, more often than not, what she wrote was dramatic in form—if not always dressed up as a play.

In fact Fanny had already withdrawn "Love and Fashion" from rehearsals at Covent Garden because of the tragic death of Susan, her younger sister, in Parkgate, Cheshire, on 6 January 1800. And, by the time, her spirits had revived enough to begin writing again, the d'Arblays' secluded lives in Surrey had been unsettled by events in France.

In April 1800 Monsieur d'Arblay's name was deleted from the Revolutionary list of exiles, and he began to think of returning to France, in the hope that he might be able to recover some of his family money. For much of the next couple of years, the d'Arblays were to be separated as Monsieur d'Arblay ferried between Paris and West Humble. At the end of 1801, while in Paris, he was offered a new army post by no less than Napoleon's chief-of-staff. Needless to say, his insistence that he would *never* take up arms against his wife's native country did not appeal to his new boss, Napoleon, and he was retired, somewhat in disgrace, and with a passport that did not allow him to leave France for at least a year.

Fanny, very reluctantly, decided that she must go and join him. She packed up their cottage, and arranged for it to be let, putting an advert in *The Times*:

> a small Modern COUNTRY RESIDENCE, fitted up in the cottage stile, with 5 acres of garden, orchard, pleasure, and meadow land, in a rural and healthy situation, between the Town of Dorking, and the beautiful Vale of Mickleham, in the centre of many romantic and extensive prospects, 22 miles from London, and a quarter of a mile from an Inn on the London Road, where horses, &c may stand at livery,

there being no coach-house or stables on the Premises;
for the term of 12 or 18 months.

She and Alex sailed from Dover on 16 April 1802 and arrived in Paris four days' later (it was the first time that Fanny had crossed the Channel). It would be ten years before she was able to return, trapped in France by the Napoleonic wars against Britain.

Fanny took with her to Paris the first drafts of her new novel, but after her arrival in France she wrote very few letters, and only scrappy memos in her notebooks, anxious not to risk accusations of being a spy. Since Monsieur d'Arblay had been a loyal servant of Louis XVI, and Fanny had been a member of the English Court, her precautions were indeed necessary. So it is not until she begins to make her way home again in the summer of 1812 that we find mention of this "Fourth Child of my Brain." While delayed in Dunkirk, waiting with their son Alex for a ship that had been given permission to sail across the Channel to Dover, she asked Monsieur d'Arblay, who had remained behind in Paris in the hope that he could still be of service to his country, to send on a valise filled with her papers—her "ouvrage."

Perhaps she had not told him what she had been writing, for in this letter she explains, "It is utterly unfinished... The papers *rolled* were only materials of uncertainty... They are placed not as they follow, but according to particular intentions of changes, revisals, &c."[13]

In fact, she brought back with her to England three of the eventual five volumes of *The Wanderer*, and in less than six months she was ready to negotiate terms with a publisher, once again using her brother Charles as her agent, just as she had done with *Evelina*, almost 40 years earlier. (Charles, of course, on that occasion, had been dropped in favour of her cousin Edward because he was in disgrace for having stolen books from the library of his Cambridge college.)

In December 1813, Fanny's half-sister Sarah Harriet wrote to a friend: "My Sister d'Arblay's first Vol. is in the press. We do not know

ourselves yet, what its title is. She says that half the bloom of novelty is taken off an expected work, by mentioning its name, extent, or any thing relating to it before it is published."

A few weeks' earlier she had written to their niece, Charlotte Barrett (who was later to edit Fanny's diaries): "My Sister has a lodging in Little Sloane Street, & in coming backwards & forwards [to Chelsea College, where Sarah Harriet, aged 41, still lived with her parents], has hitherto escaped cold. But the nights are terribly damp, & I tremble for her [only two years' earlier Fanny had endured that horrific mastectomy without anaesthetic]."

Sarah Harriet continues (in a fascinating new insight into Fanny provided by Lorna Clark's recently published edition of the letters): "She reads Newspapers from morning till night; but Newspapers of three or four weeks back, & will not let you say a word to her of present events. ' "O, don't tell me—I shall come to it—I am reading up to it!' And by the time she has read up to it, some newer intelligence will probably have arrived, which will make what we are now rejoicing at appear stale, & put it all out of our heads. Thus she loses to herself and others all the pleasures of participation; for who can take great delight in hearing her conjectures and exclamations relative to matters which are now decided? Who can be much interested to hear her talking of a partial skirmish, who knows that a momentous general engagement has so recently taken place?—These are oddities that are—that are—rather—odd!"

Two days later, Sarah Harriet wrote to her brother Charles (he of the book-stealing business, but by 1813 a respectable cleric and Greek scholar): "Mother Dab is still at Windsor. All the worse for us!"[14] Fanny had been away on a visit to Queen Charlotte. Sarah Harriet makes no further reference to *The Wanderer*: she was preoccupied with her own *Tales of Fancy*, the first volume of which appeared the following year.

So, here we are, at last, at the dramatic opening scene of *The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties* (it is difficult not to be as garrulous as Fanny when attempting to tell the story of her life!).

"During the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre, and in the dead of night, braving the cold, the darkness and the damps of December, some English passengers, in a small vessel, were preparing to glide silently from the coast of France," it begins.[15] Suddenly, a cry for help, in French, pierces the silence: "Oh, leave me not to be massacred!" Most of the passengers, in fear of their lives, want to ignore it. But our hero, Albert Harleigh, realising that here is a woman in distress, insists that she be taken on board.

But who is she? Wrapped in a strange assortment of clothes, bandaged in one eye, with only a tiny patch of her "dingy complexion" visible beneath her layers of veils and scarves, she confuses her fellow travellers by refusing to tell them her name, or anything about herself. How should they treat her? Is she a well-born *émigré* or a vagabond? Why does she have the "beautifully white and polished teeth" of an aristocrat, but hands and arms "of so dark a colour that they might rather be styled black than brown"? Why is she alone and unprotected? And what does she throw into the sea, cursing in French before praying in English?

The mystery of this "Fair Incognita" is kept up for three volumes as she struggles to survive without money, without protection and without a name or classification in society. Finally, she agrees to be known as "Miss Ellis," which Fanny intended, some scholars have most believably suggested, to be read as "Miss *Elle-is*."

Miss Ellis, then, is our heroine—a beautiful, gifted, musical, "feeling" young woman, whose "difficulties" arise because she refuses to reveal her identity, her place in society. Also in that boat of refugees from France is her rival for the heart of Albert Harleigh: the outrageous and outraged Elinor Joddrel, who must, I think, qualify as the most

richly drawn of Fanny's fictional characters.

The very model of a free-thinking, post-Mary Wollstonecraft, post-Revolution woman, Elinor accuses the poised and commonsensical Miss Ellis of being too subservient, too complaisant:

> You, Ellis, and such as you, who act always by rule, who never utter a word of which you have not weighed the consequence; never indulge a wish of which you have not canvassed the effects: who listen to no generous feeling; who shrink from every liberal impulse; who know nothing of nature, and *care for nothing but opinion*—you, and such as you, tame animals of custom, wearied and wearying plodders on of beaten tracks, may conclude me a mere vapouring impostor, and believe it as safe to brave as to despise me![16]

I am sure that we, too, as readers are meant to "despise" Elinor. But—and this is a very big but—to our 1990s sensibilities she is a far more interesting character than Miss Ellis. Intrigued we may be by the mystery surrounding Ellis; impressed, too, by her courage as she struggles to survive her "female difficulties." But it is Elinor who has all the best lines.

From that opening scene, for example, we are shown that Elinor has been influenced by the "revolutionary beverage" of ideas that she has encountered in France. She warns Ellis of what she will face when she arrives in Britain, of "how she will be choaked by our foggy atmosphere." By this, she means not just "the foggy air that she must inhale but the foggy souls whom she must see and hear."

When Elinor is reminded by her fellow passengers that a "foggy atmosphere" might be preferable to the "wild excesses" of the nation from which she has just so thankfully fled, Elinor ripostes: "The opening essays here [in France] have certainly been calamitous: but...

Can any thing be so absurd, so preposterous, as to seek to improve mankind individually, but bid it stand still collectively?" Echoing Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she asks, "What is education, but reversing propensities; making the idle industrious, the rude civil, and the ignorant learned?"[17]

Later, after Elinor has dared to defy convention by declaring her love for Albert *before* receiving any sign from him that her feelings are reciprocated, she declares, "You think me, I know, tarnished by those very revolutionary ideas through which, in my own estimation, I am ennobled." But, she says, "I owe to them that I dare hold myself intellectually, as well as personally, an *equal* member of the community; not a poor, degraded, however necessary appendant to it...I owe to them the precious privilege, so shamefully new to mankind, of *daring to think for myself.*"[18]

Powerful stuff! And, with Elinor, it is not just all hot air: she seeks to live by what she believes. Which gives Fanny an opportunity to discuss not just the new ideas surrounding the rights of women that came to the surface in the 1790s but also those which questioned the established beliefs on existence, the sanctity of human life, the possibility of an afterlife.

When Elinor realises that Albert will *never* return her love because he has fallen for the quiet, restrained charms of the Fair Incognita/Miss Ellis/The Vagabond/The Wanderer, she resorts to desperate measures, attempting suicide not just once, but twice (Fanny may not have written a stage hit; but she never abandoned drama, filling her novels instead with dramatic incident). Elinor is warned that she is transgressing not just life, but all hope of eternal salvation; she retaliates by launching into a justification for suicide, which echoes the debates that had begun in France during the Revolution.

In 1813, while back in London, Fanny had rushed out to buy a copy of Madame de Staël's *Réflexions sur le suicide*. To many it was

shocking proof of the corrupting effect of the Revolution. Fanny's half-sister, Sarah Harriet, wrote to a friend, "Do you agree with me in thinking, that with all her brilliant varnish, she [Madame de Staël] is corrupt at heart? Had Satan written "Pauline" [one of Madame de Staël's stories also published in 1813]...he could have produced nothing more offensive to decency—more detestably disgusting.'[19]

We do not know what Fanny made of Madame de Staël's thoughts on suicide (although she included extracts from her spiritual writings in the book of consolatory meditations that she compiled after Susan's death). But in the last volume of *The Wanderer*, Ellis (now revealed as the well-born Juliet Granville), Albert and Elinor meet within view of "that rude wonder of other days, and disgrace of modern geometry, Stonehenge." And in these somewhat unusual, Druidical surroundings, they begin to discuss the meaning/meaningless of Life itself. Juliet, after wandering for several days in the New Forest, lost and alone, and terrified of capture, has just escaped from the clutches of the evil Commissar who has chased her from France; while Elinor has just recovered from her self-inflicted stab wounds.

Elinor asks Albert, "Do you join in the popular cry against suicide, merely to arrest my impatient hand?... How is it, explain! that you can have been worked upon to believe in an existence after death?" She then pleads, "Oh Harleigh! what vain prejudice, what superstitious sophistry, robs me of the only solace that could soothe my parting breath?" Why, she asks him, do you think me mad "because I would rather crush misery than endure it? Mad? because I would rather, at my own time, die the death of reason, than by compulsion, and when least disposed, that of nature?"[20]

No doubt, we are meant to be shocked by Elinor's heretical beliefs. And yet, she speaks so strongly of "the great shake to the minds of men" that has been brought about by the French Revolution, that we cannot help but be impressed by her passionate defence of her rights to

self-assertion and independent thought. After all, it is Elinor who tells Juliet to "Put aside your prejudices, and forget that you are a dawdling woman, to remember that you are an active human being, and your FEMALE DIFFICULTIES will vanish into the vapour of which they are formed." It is Elinor who claims that the reason why men "would keep us from every office, but making puddings and pies for their own precious palates," who would "dare not trust us with their own education, and their own opportunities for distinction" is because "they dare not weigh [us]!"

> It is Elinor who goes on to complain:
>
> Yet what futile inconsistency dispenses this prejudice! This Woman, whom they estimate thus below, they elevate above themselves. They require from her, in defiance of their examples!—in defence of their lures!—angelical perfection. She must be mistress of her passions;...she must always be guided by reason, though they deny her understanding![21]

Elinor is here foreseeing the arguments of our own feminist heroes.

To all this "Juliet hazarded not any reply," but can only bewail Elinor's lack of judgement, her failure to observe "feminine propriety." And yet, Fanny makes clear from her "Dedication" to *The Wanderer* that she believes that the Novel should be used for "conveying useful precepts? It is, or ought to be, a picture of supposed, but natural and probable human existence. It holds, therefore, in its hands our best affections; it exercises our imaginations...and gives to juvenile credulity knowledge of the world, without ruin, or repentance; and the lessons of experience, without its tears."[22]

So why does Juliet/Miss Elle-is provide such a limp antithesis to Elinor? What "lessons of experience" are we meant to learn from *The Wanderer*? No doubt, that Elinor, who ends up without Albert, without belief, and without the respect of her peers, is misguided. "Alas! alas!

she concludes on the novel's last page, "must Elinor too,—must even Elinor!—like the element to which, with the common herd, she owes, chiefly, her support, find,—with that herd!—her own level?—find that she has strayed from the beaten road, only to discover that all others are pathless!"[23]

But that Fanny had a sneaking admiration for her anti-heroine there can also be no doubt. She, too, had always secretly rebelled against the constraints by which women were prevented from achieving "self-dependance." When she was a teenager, for example, she and her stepsister Maria Allen had dreamed up their vision of Utopia as being a land in which "that vile race of beings called man" had been "extirpated."[24]

Fanny was also not a simple believer: hidden within the many volumes of her diaries and letters, often obscured by her editing and only now retrieved by the use of X-ray techniques, are references to her own doubts, troubled as she was by the vividness and uncontrollability of her imagination. In a much-deleted section of a letter to her sister Susan, she confessed that she was "sometimes dreadfully afraid for myself, from the very different behaviour which Nature calls for on one side, & the World on the other." Later, when she was at Court, she admitted that she was "bewildered" by her dream world, and felt sure that therein lay the key to "deeper knowledge of the Soul & its immortality than any thing else that comes within our Cognizance."[25]

When Elinor questions the possibility of an afterlife, we are meant, like Juliet, to be shocked and appalled at such unbelief. But that Fanny dared to debate such controversial questions is a surprising development for the friend of Dr Johnson (who would have been horrified that his protégée was dabbling in such dangerous waters).

But it is not only Elinor and her attitudes to the Rights of Woman and to life itself that contribute to the subversiveness of *The Wanderer*. What Fanny achieves in her last novel is to cut a slice

through late Georgian society, revealing all its many layers. So we meet not just the upper crust of English life—the lords and ladies with their foppish sons and idle daughters—but also milliners, farmers, smugglers, poachers, admirals, innkeepers, foresters and a country Dame schoolteacher.

Juliet, for example, attempts first to make a living by using her musical gifts to teach the harp; she is also persuaded to appear at a benefit concert, intended to raise money on her behalf. But this exposes her to all the difficulties of a performer's life—well understood by Fanny as the daughter of Dr Burney and friend to the Garricks. Juliet's pupils forget, or refuse, to pay her; she is expected to sing even when suffering from a sore throat: "how little do we know either of the labours, or the privations, of those whose business it is to administer pleasure to the public!" she declares. "We receive it so lightly, that we imagine it to be lightly given."[26]

She receives a letter from Albert, who is anxious to dissuade her from performing in public, thereby, in his opinion, demeaning herself, and risking her reputation: "Wound not the customs of your ancestors," he pleads, "the received notions of the world, the hitherto acknowledged boundaries of elegant life!"[27]

Juliet does not comply with Albert's request; but neither does she perform—at least not on this occasion; she has already starred in a private performance of Vanbrugh's comedy, *The Provok'd Husband.* (We should not forget here that, in *Mansfield Park,* Jane Austen ensures that her heroine does not endanger her purity of heart by joining in with the amateur theatricals staged by the reckless Mary Crawford.)

Juliet, however, is saved from public scrutiny by Elinor, who disrupts the concert by rushing on to the platform and stabbing herself in the chest in full view of the entire audience—a scene which, incidentally, Byron feared might have been inspired by Lady Caroline Lamb's scandalous attempt in July 1813 to stab herself in the midst of a

crowded ballroom after she was rejected by him. Byron wrote to Caroline's mother-in-law, Lady Melbourne, two days after *The Wanderer* was published, telling her that he "thought the *coincidence* unlucky for many reasons. In the first place, everybody will read Mme d'Arblay."[28] (Actually, it seems that this was a "*coincidence*," since the scene occurs at the end of the second volume, which Fanny had completed by the summer of 1812; and in any case "everybody" did not read Madame d'Arblay.)

Juliet's next attempt at gainful employment is as a milliner and needlewoman, where she finds herself caught between the "selfish vanity" of the ladies who order bonnets, trimmings and petticoats without any intention of paying for them and the "cringing cunning" of her fellow workers. When she tries her luck next as the companion to the irascible Mrs Ireton, she discovers the indignity of being dependant on the whims of a foolish and utterly selfish woman.

Shocked by the rudeness with which the gentle, genteel Juliet is being treated, one of her gentleman-protectors declares provocatively:

> We all envy the great, when we ought only to revere them if they are good, and to pity them if they are bad; for they have the same infirmities that we have; and nobody that dares put them in mind of them: so that they often go to the grave, before they find out that they are nothing but poor little men and women like the rest of us.[29]

Juliet in her plight—and because of her well-bred demeanour—does invoke sympathy, *not* from the women who should have helped her, but from several elderly bachelors (reminiscent of Fanny's own friendships with her father's friends when she was a young girl in St Martin's Street). Sir Jaspar Herrington, in particular, is an endearing *hommage* to Mr Crisp, Fanny's "second Daddy," her mentor and inspiration.

Sir Jaspar, who describes himself as a "gouty old codger," a "whimsical Baronet," is tormented by "wicked little imps" who provoke him into behaving outrageously and with no concern for the proprieties. "You have but seen an old bachelor in his true colours," he confesses to Juliet. "Not with the gay tints, not with the spruce smiles, not with the gallant bows, the courteous homage, the flowery flourishes, with which he makes himself up for shew; but with the grim colouring of factious age, and suspicious egotism!"[30] But it is Sir Jaspar, and not our hero Albert, who rescues Juliet from her tormentors. Yet again, Fanny overturns the conventions.

In 1991, when the biographer and critic Jonathan Keates reviewed the new Oxford paperback edition of *The Wanderer*, he told his readers that "It was time to face up to the challenge of *The Wanderer*"[31]—which sounds like just the sort of rousing cry with which Elinor would have taunted Juliet. Perhaps, we, too, should forget the paltry difficulty of championing a writer who has been too much overshadowed by those who followed her along the path which she had trodden for them; we should advocate her right to be heard for what she is: a radical thinker, if clothed in the "gothic anglaise" of a true-born Englishwoman rather than the flimsy New Age petticoats of Napoleonic Europe.

Notes

[1] *The Witlings* (ed. Clayton J. Delery, East Lansing, Michigan, 1995) Act I, ll. 233-7.

[2] Ibid.

[3] The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney 1768-91 (ed. Lars Troide et al, Oxford, 1988-) iii, 147-63. (EJL)

[4] Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi) 1776-1809 (ed. Katharine C. Balderston, Oxford, 1942) i, 368.

[5] Claire Tomalin in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 21 June 1998.

[6] John Croker in the *Quarterly Review* (xi, April 1814) 123-30.

[7] *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt* (ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, London, 1902) 122-25. My italics.

[8] *The Works of Lord Macaulay* (London, 1898) iv, 1-70.

[9] *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (ed. by Margaret Doody *et al*, Oxford, 1991) 6.

[10] *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)* 1791-1840 (ed. by Joyce Hemlow et al, Oxford, 1972-84) vii, 359. (*JL*)

[11] JL, iv, 316n.

[12] Ibid., iv, 394-5. My italics.

[13] Ibid., vi, 693.

[14] *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney* (ed. Lorna J. Clark, Athens, Georgia, 1997) 174-6, 172-3, 178-9. (*SHB*)

[15] *The Wanderer*, vol I, chapter i.

[16] Ibid., vol IV, chapter lxii.

[17] Ibid., vol I, chapter i.

[18] Ibid., vol I, chapter xviii. My italics.

[19] *SHB*, 176.

[20] *The Wanderer*, vol V, chapter lxxxv.

[21] Ibid., vol lil, chapter xlii.

[22] Ibid., vol I, chapter i.

[23] Ibid., vol V, chapter xcli.

[24] *EJL*, i, 331-2.

[25] From her Windsor Journal for 16 August 1787 (read at McGill University, by kind permission of Professor Lars Troide).

[26] *The Wanderer*, vol II, chapter xxxiii.

[27] Ibid., vol II, chapter xxxvi.

[28] *Byron's Letters and Journals* (ed. Leslie A. Marchand, London, 1972-82) iv, 86-7.

[29] *The Wanderer,* vol III, chapter lvi.

[30] Ibid., vol III, chapter lviii.

[31] *The Observer,* 9 June 1991.