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**Of Horror and Humor:
The Transformation of the Grotesque into the Gothic
in the Novels of Frances Burney**

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This year was ushered in by a grand and most important event,—for at the latter end of January, the literary world was favoured with the first publication of the ingenious, learned, and most profound Fanny Burney!—I doubt not but this memorable affair will, in future times, mark the period whence chronologers will date the zenith of the polite arts in this island! This admirable authoress has named her most elaborate performance “EVELINA, OR A YOUNG LADY’S ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.” (Ellis 212)

When 1778 dawned, twenty-five-year-old Frances Burney was not the egotist this pronouncement in her diary might suggest. She was nervous. Burney was a timid, prudish young woman who was concerned with her reputation and propriety. Though not even the publisher of *Evelina* knew her identity, she trembled, overcome by anxiety: Would the public know it was she who dared such an undertaking? Would they laugh? Scold? Would it be savored and applauded, or would it fall into ignominy, become three volumes of discarded ephemera? And what *would* the father she idolized say of his daughter’s secret venture?

Given the gendered barriers she stormed with *Evelina*, Burney had reason to fear. “An eighteenth-century woman writer, in order to be published at all and certainly to be read, was supposed to profess sensibility and womanliness, to avoid satire...and never to indite crude or low scenes,” Betty Rizzo writes. “*Evelina* broke all these strictures” (Rizzo 195). From Burney’s diaries, we know some early readers did not for a moment doubt the work was a man’s. Christopher Anstey, writer of the *New Bath Guide*, was bandied about as a strong possibility (Ellis 215-7). That supposition, so far from the truth, bolstered Burney’s confidence, and she began to giddily record the praise her novel received. Her chronicles were exhaustive. *Evelina* garnered “almost universal admiration,” and Burney’s anonymity held fast for six months, after which time she became something of a celebrity (Doody 39). Contemporaries found her work prodigiously entertaining and bewitching (Ellis 215, 220). *The Critical Review* called it “amusing and instructive” (202-3) and *The Monthly Review* said it was “one of the most sprightly,

entertaining, and agreeable productions” of its kind (316). They applauded the diversity of the characters (particularly the Branghtons) and “the great variety of natural incidents, some of the comic stamp” (*The Monthly Review* 316).

Such praise would not be the standard for Burney’s thirty-six-year career as a novelist. Contemporaries and critics, present and future alike, became more and more displeased with her work. The characters seemed to be caricatures of individuals she had already crafted. The plots became more chaotic and the novels themselves, at five volumes and upwards of one thousand pages, were too long. As George Saintsbury noted in 1895, *Evelina* was delectable; *Cecilia* admirable; *Camilla* estimable; *The Wanderer* impossible (212). While *Evelina* remained popular, if not a favorite, Burney’s last three novels fell out of print through the nineteenth century and clean copies of the trio proved difficult to find. It wasn’t until scholars professing an interest in women’s studies in the mid-twentieth century knocked the dust from the jackets of *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer* that Burney’s works were plumbed for more than what met the eye of her peers.

The superficiality with which the quartet has been viewed is deceptive. Alternatively labeled sentimental novels, social comedies, conduct books, and “picture of manners” (McK. 360), Burney’s canon had, for a century and a half, been taken at face value. The satire was obvious, the comedy was inspired—but that was all. As meaning was slowly teased from the pages, critiques reflected the analytical trends of the time: domesticity, psychoanalysis, marginality. And then, in 1976, *Modern Philology* published an essay by Susan Staves titled “‘Evelina;’ or, Female Difficulties.” During a time when domestic violence was at the forefront of second-wave feminist concern, Staves observed a painfully obvious trend, one that she found peculiarly absent from the critical consensus on *Evelina*:

Descriptions of the novel make it appear to be a combination of the usual romance with cheerful, albeit occasionally malicious, satire. The primary criticism of the book is that it is hopelessly trivial. Yet Evelina's predominant emotion seems to me to be an acute anxiety which is painful, real, and powerful. (368)

Staves argues that Evelina's anxiety is "partly provoked by physical violence and threats of violence," which "we may notice immediately" (369). Julia Epstein's 1989 book, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*, also discusses the pervasive violence, as does Barbara Zonitch's 1997 *Familiar Violence: Gender and Social Upheaval in the Novels of Frances Burney*. These analyses probe deeply into a glaring characteristic of Burney's novels that contemporaries and reviewers have historically evaded, but they still fail to grasp the full picture. While her peers saw largely comedy, these critics see largely violence. It has only been passingly suggested that there exists in all four novels a union of the two.

This is pure understatement. In this paper, I shall argue that the coexistence of comedy and violence is an essential characteristic of Burney's novels. One cannot be ignored in favor of the other for Burney does not merely alternate humor and harm. The two mingle in her works, merging rather than dissociating to create the effect of the grotesque, a delightful form of horror that has readers gasping with laughter even as their minds reel from the terrific situations she crafts. Burney diverges from the early formula of the gothic novel, with its atmosphere of mystery and horror and the inevitable medieval castle setting ("Gothic"), choosing instead for her first three novels selectively to embrace a genre that is meant to repulse readers. For the last, she builds upon the gothic aesthetic established in the horror novels of the late-eighteenth century, with doses of melodrama and social satire lightening the realistic if not grotesquely abhorrent terror of her early novels. Her variety of the grotesque is that of the macabre, or black humor, and she makes use of the "gliding scale" Dieter Petzold describes, "from the almost purely humorous to the deeply shocking." The result is disturbing, prompting readers to question

why such a “delicate” girl would write such “boisterous” books, as Elizabeth Montagu, an arts patroness and bluestocking society leader, commented (Lynch).

Why indeed? Let us first consider these events as repeating instances within a pattern rather than as anomalies. The majority of the events occur in public places intended for polite socialization, such as the pleasure garden Ranelagh, the opera house, or the carriage. When this does not hold true, they serve as the climax to a long-building emotional dilemma caused by society; the expectation of moneyed splendor despite the realities of debt is a favored motif. Nearly without fail, all of the grotesque events Burney pens show the subjugation of women at the hands of men and a society that overwhelmingly favors their gender, legally, theoretically, and culturally. I read these events, then, as part of Burney’s social commentary. Given the revulsion she inspires through her use of the grotesque rather than through pure comedy or violence, the extreme inferiority of women to men and the violence that is a product of such a relationship seems to be her greatest complaint. Her heroines and the supporting female characters are second-class citizens—perhaps even third or fourth, depending upon their age and socio-economic status. Without restitution they are abused, both domestically and otherwise, often under the guise of safety—in the presence of a protector or guardian or in a so-called social haven for innocents. Burney seeks not to cajole, not to educate, not to suggest such things *might* be objectionable. By employing the grotesque, she strategically seeks to appall her readers.

The comic violence is blatant in *Evelina*, making it at once the most easily entertaining novel of the four and the most eyebrow-raising. The titular heroine is inserted into the most disturbing of situations in this first work, which has never been out of print (Straub, Introduction 3) and until relatively recently, the violence found in its pages has seen little discussion, critical or otherwise. “This dearth of contemporary outcry against the violent comedy of the novel points

perhaps to a greater tolerance among eighteenth-century readers for this kind of humour,” notes Susan Kubrick Howard (Introduction 51). More notable than her contemporaries’ lack of outcry, however, is their gleeful and endless consumption of jestbooks and other comic miscellany.

“What is remarkable to modern readers about these jokes,” writes Simon Dickie, “is their sheer callousness, their frank delight in human suffering. They suggest an almost unquestioned pleasure at the sight of deformity or misery—an automatic and apparently unreflective urge to laugh at weakness simply because it is weak” (Dickie 2).

The most notorious example of such an incident in narrative fiction of the eighteenth-century is the footrace in Burney’s *Evelina*. While at the resort town of Clifton Heights, two men in Evelina’s social circle, Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley, arrange a race to settle a bet, a race between two women above the age of eighty. Young, naïve Evelina is the only one among the spectators to feel pity for the pair; the others greet the spectacle with laughter. Old women were favorite items of derision during the eighteenth century. “I don’t know what the devil a woman lives for after thirty,” Lord Merton says in an undertone to Evelina. “She is only in other folks’ way” (275). He speaks here about Mrs. Selwyn, Evelina’s brassy companion during the novel’s final venture away from Berry Hill. It was not an unusual sentiment; Cindy McCreery cites a letter “To the Editor of the London Magazine” that proposed a tax on old maids, arguing that “no single women should be allowed to marry after age thirty-five, ‘as at the period they shall be deemed incapable performing any of the necessary functions incident to such happy state’” (McCreery 114). After a woman is past her sexual prime, she is worthless to society except as the “maiden aunt” variety of protector of young women. In that capacity, the elderly serve their charges by preventing the raillery and assault that men like Lord Merton would impose upon them if they remained unchecked. This role as the foil to masculine tomfoolery places them in a

position of contempt. The footrace, then, shows Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley symbolically enacting “the anxiety of a perceived loss of status and power,” Zonitch argues. “This scene lends itself to an allegorical reading: aristocrats are trying to kill women who are either useless or threatening to them” (41-2).

It seems fitting that the organizers of the race arrive drunk to an event that takes place in the otherwise prim location of a lady’s garden. “For some time, the scene was truly ridiculous,” Evelina writes, her almost-continuous first-person narrative in this epistolary novel swaying readers’ own views of the scene in a sympathetic manner. “The agitation of the parties concerned, and the bets that were laid upon the old women, were absurd beyond measure” (311). When given the signal, the women, “feeble and frightened,” run into each other and collapse in shock (311). They fall together onto the gravel, and are said to be quite bruised; “however,” Evelina writes, “as they seemed equal sufferers, both parties were too eager to have the affair deferred” (311). The race is restarted only to have one of the women fall again, this time too injured to return to the race. Lord Merton’s protests prevent Evelina from aiding the women. “No foul play!” he calls (312), perhaps signifying his desire to fully control the events taking place as the dominant male figure in his social circle. He will not allow her to help because providing relief to the fallen woman would negate the symbolic slaughter of the infertile female. When Mr. Coverley repeats Merton’s words, he seems to echo the sentiment that female entrapment is a natural element of this society. Burney here defines a woman as man’s plaything, a doll to be adored or abused as he pleases.

Instead of pushing against these norms, Evelina chooses to respect them as being the rules by which she must abide. Though Evelina’s conscience urges her to assist, she is held back, physically and socially, trapped by a paradigm that will not allow her to aid the two women

without questioning the patriarchy at work—something too dangerous for the vulnerable heroine to risk (Zonitch 42). Evelina doesn't have the social standing to defy the system, nor the lack of concern for her status simply to disregard it, as Mrs. Selwyn does. Grateful though Evelina may be for Mrs. Selwyn's protection, she is embarrassed by her loudness, her brashness, her lack of concern for social constructs and polite manners. So, though she hates to see the abuse that befalls the feeble old competitors, she allows it because she does not see for herself another alternative. The injured woman's "possessor" then continues unchecked: Mr. Coverley "swore at her with unmanly rage, and seemed scarce able to refrain even from striking her" (312).

The terrific comedic violence of this scene is striking, and so makes it memorable (if bizarre) to a modern reader, though as Dickie points out, the incident, which would have been called a "freak run," was typical mid-century fare. Elaborate "freaks" or "frolicks"—orchestrated public pranks—were put on by men of fashion, like Mr. Coverley and Lord Merton. "These pranks frequently enlisted the deformed and disabled, who would be paid to perform some physical task with hilarious clumsiness, or simply for their sheer entertainment value" (Dickie 15). Yet, the eighteenth century was one of an increasingly self-conscious politeness. Though the period was a time of reform and much attention was paid to many social issues by moralists, politicians, aristocracy, and lay people alike, change did not happen overnight. Like Lord Orville, a reader may be disturbed by the gambling yet inured to acts of common violence, as this ludicrous footrace surely is. It is rather like an offensive joke, evoking contrasting reactions of glee and repulsion that cannot be suppressed. As observers, we are no doubt entertained by the fantasy of two old women racing. Yet, just like Evelina, we are also disgusted by the actions of Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley: their zeal, their drunkenness, their insistence that the race continue after the first fall, their lack of concern after the second.

However, the point at which this scene transitions from being reprehensible but amusing to being truly repulsive cannot be ignored. It is shortsighted to categorize this event simply as an entertainment of the day. Mr. Coverley's vituperation of the fallen dame pushes this event from humor to the realm of grotesque horror. This action is thrown into sharp relief by the bastardized chivalry that precedes it: when first the ladies fall, the two gentlemen rush to their assistance but only in order to make sure they are able to continue the race. The juxtaposition of the ideal gentleman and the harsh reality of the would-be woman-beater is a difficult one for readers to process. It is akin to the contrast between the polite society preached in courtesy books and adopted by the ladder-climbing middle class, and the one that we know to exist thanks to the preservation of joke books and novels such as *Evelina*. That Burney should transition so neatly from this act of near-violence to the tea room only serves to emphasize how this scene is meant to be taken. It is not included solely for comic relief. It is, rather, a blunt criticism of the amusements of eighteenth-century society. This scene—like many offensive jokes—is made more effective because of its social truth. Like *Evelina*, Burney wonders how two such oppositional dynamics could exist in one society.

That such events should be humorous and uncontested must also surely be questioned. “The victims of these jokes are as helpless and vulnerable as it is possible to be,” Dickie laments. “Those who mock them are simply delighting in their immense superiority and good fortune” (Dickie 2). The blind, the crippled, the weak, the destitute—all were easy targets. Of particular concern, however, are the jestbook jokes about rape and wife-beating, illustrating “the maltreatment or helplessness of women” in a society that also idolized the innocent (Dickie 3), the women that Burney uses as patterns for each of her four heroines and a number of their companions. The innocent, as we see in Burney's novels, are made constant targets, most

typically of sexual advances. While an older, more mature woman, married, widowed, or otherwise, seems to have more weapons in her arsenal to fight back against such attacks, the young innocent lacks the language, the physicality, and the social presence to ward off and survive such victimization. The solution to this very real threat to a lady's virtue was her companion. Evelina is provided with three such individuals: Mrs. Mirvan, Madame Duval, and Mrs. Selwyn. All fail to protect her fully from the dangers of the world she is entering.

Mrs. Selwyn is perhaps the most successful, but her success comes at a price. Her abrupt manner is characterized as unfeminine. "In a society in which women have little legal or social agency," Zonitch writes, "the outspoken, satiric, and 'masculine' woman is the only one who can shield herself verbally and physically without the help of a father, brother, or lover" (51). Anxious not to be called such, Evelina avoids her resort town guardian, and so requires a male protector. Mrs. Selwyn herself is mocked by the men in her social circle, but she doesn't seem to care. She banters with them instead, trading abuse as if she were an equal rather than an underling. Yet, though Zonitch argues that the spurning of orthodox notions of femininity can create a potentially effective guardian for a young woman (51), Mrs. Selwyn is still limited by the rules imposed by society. While she can debate to her heart's content, she cannot become physically combatant. When Lord Merton captures Evelina's hand, for example, while the group is walking in the garden after the footrace, none of the women can force him to set her free. The other women advise him to do so, but are irritatingly polite and nonchalant about the whole thing, though Evelina is visibly distressed. It is not until Lord Orville physically disengages her from Lord Merton, bestowing upon himself the title of brother and thus of protector, that she is given over to true safety (314). If all men conducted themselves chivalrously, as Evelina has been schooled by Mr. Villars to expect, she would not be in such a fragile position. But the

eighteenth century, as Evelina discovers, is far removed from her romantic notions of courtly love, and she is thoroughly unprepared to deal with reality. As Evelina says to Lord Orville at the moment she accepts his protection, “in a situation that calls for protection, to meet only with mortifications,—indeed, I am but ill formed to bear them!” (314). There are no true white knights to shield women from abuse; even saintly Lord Orville does nothing to disband the footrace. What is truly frightening is that there is no certainty when it comes to honor-bound protection. Some who promise it, like Lord Orville, are not always there or willing to enact it. And some who offer it, like Sir Clement Willoughby, are wolves dressed in gentlemen’s clothing.

Young women do not even have the guaranteed protection of other females. Would-be protectors such as Mrs. Selwyn are also innately flawed beings that appear incapable of safely guiding Evelina through society. At her first ball, for example, Evelina refuses the hand of a fop but later gives it Lord Orville; the fop proceeds to dog her every step as revenge for the perceived slight.¹ While this was occurring, “Mrs. Mirvan was conversing with the lady of the house” (31). Later, her attention is diverted from her charges by a game of cards and she is completely unaware of Evelina’s distress: “And then I was more uneasy than ever; I would have given the world to have seen Mrs. Mirvan, and begged of her to make my apologies,” she writes to Mr. Villars (32). She cries that she wishes she knew where Mrs. Mirvan “had hid herself” (35). The woman is absent, and as she herself confesses, negligent: “She good naturedly blamed herself for not having better instructed me, but said she had taken it for granted that I must know such common customs” (35). While in Mrs. Mirvan’s company, Evelina is introduced into the highest and most respected social circles readers are given to see in the novel, but she is still not

¹ “It was considered the height of bad manners for women to accept an invitation to take part in any dance for which they had already refused another partner’s invitation” (Burney, *Evelina* 416, footnote to 35).

shielded from the abuses that occur within these circles, such as those propagated by Captain Mirvan, nor is she kept from the antics of those outside it. The Mirvans can do nothing to keep Evelina away from her low-class relations, the Branghtons, and Madame Duval.

However inattentive Burney colors Mrs. Mirvan, Madame Duval is worse. “The former tavern girl can buy herself a Lyons silk gown,” Kristina Straub writes, “but she cannot transcend the class differences that cast her affluence as ridiculous” (Introduction 10). In addition to the abuse she attracts for her character and appearance, she is also under siege by society at large and Captain Mirvan in particular because of her francophone heritage. Though she is a native Englishwoman, she speaks with an obvious accent and puts on Parisian airs. At the time *Evelina* was written, a strong anti-French sentiment pervaded Britain, spurred on by the Seven Years War and France’s role in the American Revolution. “By the 1760s, England was entering a period of unprecedented advantage in naval trade and military domination, and France was among its rivals,” Straub writes (Introduction 16). As England asserted its military dominance, captains, both naval and merchant, often took French vessels hostage, confiscating their property as war booty. In this light, the relationship between Captain Mirvan and Madame Duval is that of conqueror and unwilling prisoner of war. There is no doubt that the Captain will win the battle. He is, as society dictates, the one with the upper hand.

Disregarding Madame Duval’s “frenchification,” as Burney would call it, socioeconomically she is characterized as an upper-class poser. Her grammar is poor and her manners uncultured and impolite. Evelina continually defines the experiences she has with Madame Duval as somehow less than those she had with the Mirvans. At the opera, they sit in the cheapest seats available. Instead of visiting Ranelagh, a more high-class pleasure garden that Evelina raves about to Mr. Villars, she is taken to Vauxhall by Madame Duval and the

Branghtons, where she is assaulted by numerous men. While in her grandmother's company, we see Evelina as a constant victim. She was not untouchable while in the care of the Mirvans, but with Madame Duval, the abuse becomes far more physically threatening.

The increase in comic violence can be pinpointed to the moment at which Evelina's guardianship transitions from the Mirvans to Madame Duval. Evelina embarks on a crazy carriage ride through the country at the behest of the old woman in order to save her companion, Monsieur DuBois. "Hang him!" she cries, "they can't,—they shan'n't,—let them at their peril!...I'll go to town this very moment, and see M. Du Bois myself;—I won't wait for nothing" (140). That the journey begins with the fury filled intent to stop the hanging of a man via the wrath and influence of an old woman, only to end with the mock-hanging of that same woman, symbolizes Burney's vision of her society victimizing women. When the reader knows the outcome of this incident, all other mentions of hanging appear ironic, especially as they come not from the mouth of the mischievous Captain or scheming Sir Clement, but from that of the hanged, of Madame Duval: "I know he is innocent; and to be sure they'll never be so wicked as to hang him for nothing?" she says to Lady Howard. "This is not a country where punishment is inflicted without proof," the lady responds (143). The question, then, is what have women done wrong and what proof does society have of their wrongdoing?

The answer, perhaps, comes in a brief note sent to Evelina from Sir Clement midway through the journey: "Whatever happens, be not alarmed,—for *you* are safe,—though you endanger mankind!" (145). The idea of Evelina endangering mankind is intriguing, particularly if it's interpreted sexually, which the near-rape and other sexual encounters between Evelina and Sir Clement retrospectively encourage. The possibilities of what a man can do to a woman are never so degrading or destroying as when they are considered in a sexual light. Such abuse of

power is arguably the most extreme form of action a man can take against a woman, the most demonstrative of his own ability to act and her incapacity to stop him. In his appeals to Evelina, the masked Sir Clement speaks the words of a suffering romantic hero (147). She begs him to “change his style,” but he refuses, not understanding her terror, as she was forewarned that something was going to happen, nor her displeasure. His language shows that he believes her to be the charmer, the actor, in this romantic entanglement.² Just as Madame Duval “deserves” the Captain’s displeasure, enacted in whatever manner must be tolerated, so too does Evelina attract Sir Clement’s advances. But the socially enforced passivity of womankind can be observed in Evelina’s own language. Hours into the journey, Evelina writes “I began to flatter myself we should be suffered to proceed to Howard Grove without further molestation” (145). Note the language. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the phrase “to flatter oneself” as to “choose to believe something favorable about oneself, typically when this belief is unfounded” (“Flatter,” emphasis added). Evelina knows that such a thing is unlikely, as emphasized by her use of “molestation,” which has a sexual connotation today, but would have been synonymous then with aggressive harassment or pestering (“Molest”). The passivity of “we should be suffered” marks the supremacy of Sir Clement and the Captain, the men, the actors of the verb, who are able to do whatever it is they please.

When Sir Clement and Captain Mirvan, masked liked robbers, assault the carriage, Evelina shrieks though she knows it is coming, terrified in spite of herself. Madame Duval is torn from the carriage and Evelina detained by one of the robbers. “I was really frightened, and trembled exceedingly,” Evelina writes (147). She knows that it is Sir Clement holding her, but

² A pattern of recreating the female as the aggressor in improper, potentially sexual situations is established in an earlier carriage ride that Evelina takes with Sir Clement. She allows him to escort her home from the opera, eager to escape Madame Duval’s company. When they are alone, he begins to grasp her hands and pull her close. As soon as she rebuffs his advances, he lays the blame for his own forward actions upon her, rewriting her as an enchantress rather than an innocent. See Burney’s *Evelina* 96-102.

from past experience, she also knows that she is not at all safe in his arms. Evelina cannot remove herself from his embrace. When he eventually departs, though not before seeking her assurance of more quality alone time after this tete-a-tete, Evelina climbs from the chariot, full of concern for her grandmother. None of the servants have offered assistance to Madame Duval, nor asked Evelina if she is all right. It is all the footman can do to silently point the direction of Madame Duval when Evelina goes in search of her herself. They are quite obviously unconcerned by the treatment of the two women. The violence has been committed unnoticed. All that remains is the humor, and boy, is this scene funny.

If we were not conditioned to dislike her, we might pity the poor woman who has been shoved upright into a ditch. Madame Duval is silent but sobbing when Evelina finds her, as though Captain Mirvan has robbed her of her voice as well as of her dignity, a pattern that Burney establishes in *Evelina* and revives throughout her later novels. Her feet have been bound with a rope that has been fastened to the upper branch of a tree, an image reminiscent of a hanging, particularly when the reader learns that her wig has also suffered abuse. This wig, a symbol of Madame Duval's social status, has been dragged through the mud. She is exposed, thanks to the violence done to her clothing, like the villain in a moral story, and then forced to appear before the servants as though this gantlet is a punishment for some unknown crime. Madame Duval appears like a savage, beating the ground with her hands "almost bursting with passion" (149):

She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her face was really horrible, for the pomatum and powder from her head, and the dust from the road, were quite *pasted* on her skin by her tears, which, with her *rouge*, made her look so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human. (150)

Indeed, she is a figure deserving of sympathy, if not for the turn that signals the situation's transformation from grotesque comedy to pure horror. Madame Duval *slaps* Evelina hard across

the face after the young lady cuts her from the tree. The blow confounds and surprises Evelina so much that she suffers the woman to rave. When she again becomes conscious of the situation and all the abuse Madame Duval has taken in the last few minutes, her anger dissolves into compassion.

Because Burney includes the slap midway through the scene rather than at the end, we are encouraged first to laugh at the jest and then to comprehend its violence. Like Evelina, we are a bit dazed that Madame Duval would do such a thing to a young woman whom we know to be innocent and undeserving of such treatment. But we recover and, unlike Evelina, view Madame Duval with the contempt of the Captain. It is for this reason that Burney wrote Madame Duval as a sort of other-worldly being here, describing her as inhuman. When we take in the details of her dishabille—her torn linen, her tattered negligee, her disordered petticoats—she appears to be the victim of sexual assault. “Madame Duval becomes a debauched witch,” Julia Epstein writes; “the Captain has literally undressed her” (“Writing the Unspeakable” 133). Rape victims, Dickie tells us, were frequent characters in jestbook jokes, and violent and often sexual punishment was certainly not unusual (3). Burney’s decision to remove the negative associations readers have already established with Madame Duval by temporarily recreating her as inhuman allows us to understand her criticism. Burney suggests here that something is clearly wrong if this can happen to a woman and we can find it funny.

Restoring Madame Duval’s character to the scene, contemporary readers would have thought she deserved punishment. Cindy McCreery writes that “while both young women and old women were satirized for independent behavior that transgressed customary limits, old women received a double dose of criticism” (113). Howard argues that she proves herself to be the stereotype of the widow that dates back to Chaucer: “a sexually promiscuous, disorderly,

non-maternal, generally shrewd and conniving woman, intent on marrying another husband as quickly as possible” (53).

That she embodies the stereotype to such an extent allows Captain Mirvan’s positioning her as the butt of his jokes...Even his brutality may be acceptable to readers who see him as an agent of the status quo...Madame Duval is offensive because she is an independent woman—self-centered and self-assured, unable to compromise, lacking feminine submissiveness—who thereby threatens the patriarchy. (Howard 57)

Captain Mirvan chooses to ridicule her in order to prove her absurdity to the world. By destroying her façade, he leaves a woman who is very much of the lower class. He strips her of all of the superficialities that have allowed the middle class to move up the social ladder and adopt a pretended elitism, thus performing a sort of public service. He both exposes Madame Duval for what she is, socially, and solidifies his superior status. That both Lady Howard and Evelina should so willingly go along with the joke indicates that they, like Captain Mirvan, Sir Clement, and the servants, take some comfort in Madame Duval’s exposure. While Lady Howard’s truce-of-sorts with Captain Mirvan suggests the reason for her compliance, Evelina’s is more troublesome. Howard writes that “Evelina may participate in Captain Mirvan’s joke because she shares his attitudes toward Madame Duval or because she has adopted these attitudes in order to be a part of the community he controls, the social hegemony his joke purports” (73).

The joking violence or sport, as Captain Mirvan calls it, becomes much more physical and much more personal for Evelina when she is put solely into the custody of Madame Duval during a second trip to London that pales in comparison to the first. “O Maria,” she writes to Miss Mirvan. “London now seems no longer the same place where I lately enjoyed so much happiness; every thing is new and strange to me; even the town itself has not the same aspect:—my situation so altered! my home so different!—my companions so changed!—But you well

know my averseness to this journey” (173). Evelina’s outings to the pleasure gardens shall be our focus in this discussion of the changed London. The peaceful riverboat trip to Vauxhall is soon disrupted by the Cascade, a water display. Mr. Smith snatches up Evelina’s hand and drags her across the garden so that she might not miss it. He is here reminiscent of other hand-snatchers, namely Sir Clement and Lord Merton. This pattern of action creates foreshadowing: we know something untoward is about to happen. Burney further increases her expectations through a speech given by Mr. Smith about the closing evening at Vauxhall: “Why, Lord, it’s the best night of any; there’s always a riot,—and there the folks run about,—and then there’s such squealing and squalling!—and there all the lamps are broke,—and the women run skimper scamper” (196).

A proposal is made for the girls to go walking, and Madame Duval, poor guardian that she is, allows it, though she declares that she would not go anywhere herself without a gentleman’s escort. Because servants did not accompany their masters into the gardens and those who paid for admittance were of the polite elite, young women could theoretically walk in groups sans chaperones without distress. This, as we shall see in *Evelina*, is not a reality. Evelina reluctantly follows Biddy and Polly Branghton on a ramble down the dark walk, which is known for being a scene of adult rendezvous. The trio is accosted by a riotous group of young men, who “seemed to rush suddenly from behind some trees, and, meeting us face to face, put their arms at their sides, and formed a kind of circle.” Evelina, “terrified to death,” flies up the walk “hoping to secure my safety by returning to the lights and company we had so foolishly left” (197). She is then caught by another group of young men and “rescued” by Sir Clement, to whom she unfortunately entrusts her safety. To her detriment, as Zonitch observes, Evelina believes in “a lost idealistic world: ‘From you, who know me, I had a claim for protection—not to such treatment as this’ [E 182]. The allusion is to a time and a place where a Sir Clement was

supposed to have defended her” (Zonitch 41). But he leads her not to the safety of light and her sought-after party, but back to the dark alleys, where, he says, they shall not be observed, implying an intended romantic liaison (198). Sir Clement assumes she will follow his lead simply because she allows him to take her there.

When Evelina refuses to go further, he cries out about the impropriety of her situation: “Is this a place for Miss Anville?—these dark walks!—no party!—no companion!—by all that’s good, I can scarce believe my senses!” (199). Not only is her body at risk, but so too is her reputation. When she returns to her party, this impropriety is again highlighted, first by Madame Duval and then by Mr. Branghton. “I sha’n’t let you leave me again in a hurry. Why here we’ve been in such a fright!” cries the former, while the latter reinforces the notion of Willoughby’s less than appropriate intentions, saying, “The long alleys!...and, pray, what had you to do in the long alleys? why, to be sure, you must all of you had a mind to be affronted!” (201). It is, as always, the women who are at fault. McCleery notes what appears to be a general opinion printed in a December 1785 issue of *Town and Country Magazine*: “We consider chastity in a man, if a virtue, as a very subordinate one” (117). Men were expected to be lusty and vigorous, and it was surely not their fault if they should exercise such basic instincts.

Evelina’s experience in this atmosphere of a publicly expressed, hearty sexuality is not unique. Polly “was really very frightened, and declared she would never go into the dark walks again” (204). Nor is this incident isolated to Vauxhall itself. At a later visit to Marylebone Gardens, Evelina is again separated from her party and similar abuses occur. Once she realizes she has lost her companions, she is terrified and walks distressed. “Every other moment, I was spoken to, by some bold and unfeeling man, to whom my distress, which, I think, must be very apparent, only furnished a pretence for impertinent witticisms, or free gallantry” (234). Just as

Captain Mirvan considers his cruel jokes on Madame Duval sport, these men find Evelina's terror to be a game. Zonitch writes that "one of Evelina's tormentors abusively jokes that if she should run away from him, he would 'accompany [her] in the race' [*E*, 181]. Her wildly panicked search for safety is but a mere 'race' to these men" (41-1).

The attacks upon her body remain constant, and despite her best attempts to avoid or derail them, Evelina begins to realize that she needs a protector. Mrs. Mirvan and Madame Duval have proven themselves both to be unfit, and Mrs. Selwyn is deemed unsuitable. Who is left but a man? We see this when Evelina is assaulted by a drunk Lord Merton: "Would to heaven that I too had a brother!—and then I should not be exposed to such treatment," she cries (296). She has faith in the patriarchal system that men will protect her, and she has gained enough experience to know that not just any man will do. A family member, the closer the better, is essential in her mindset, but when she is introduced to her father, we see that blood ties are not the only considerations a young woman should have. Lord Belmont troublingly identifies Evelina as her mother, sexualizing even the most basic and what ought to be the most innocent of familial relationships. This stands in stark contrast to the mentoring relationship Mr. Villars shares with Evelina, who reveres him as an oracle of truth and virtue. Evelina throws herself into her father's arms in a scene that is as tedious as it is melodramatic. To be claimed as his heiress is all she could ever hope for, as it legitimizes her place in society and makes it acceptable for her to marry a man such as Lord Orville.³ Her life becomes entirely about this trio of guardians: Mr. Villars, to whom she returns in the final letter; Lord Belmont, who claims her as his child; and Lord Orville, who, by choosing her as his mate, lifts her above all other women. After three volumes of continual subjugation as a woman without male protectors, she clings desperately to those

³ Shaffer writes that "a truly illegitimate heroine should be as little likely as one who is sexually active to receive heroines' conventional rewards; such a woman represents, after all, the same potential for the sexual laxness that can lead to social chaos as does the premaritally sexually active women." (299)

bestowed upon her. In realizing that she must depend upon this triumvirate to safeguard her femininity and body, she further subordinates herself.

This isn't an unusual conclusion for a novel of the period. Julie Shaffer writes of eighteenth-century novels that "modest, tractable, self-effacing, and above all chaste heroines gained the reward of a loving, titled, wealthy husband as their stories moved to a euphoric close" (Shaffer 287). But most of these novels, written by women, also conformed to the idea of female authors protecting their own reputations by "avoiding language or events, such as rape, that might offend a polite audience" (Shaffer 286). Any woman writer who did not follow this prescription must have been extremely devoted to her politics, Shaffer argues. But Burney does not make many overtly political comments in her works until *The Wanderer*. Though *Evelina* absorbs much of the politically infused culture of the late eighteenth century, as we see with the treatment of Madame Duval, it is *not* a political novel, not in the way that the fictional works of Wollstonecraft, Hays, Inchbald, and Robinson clearly were, "evidenced by their publishing political tracts in addition to belletristic texts" (Shaffer 287). While Burney certainly did conceal her identity during the early life of this first novel in order to secure its public acceptance before she risked her reputation, she didn't avoid the indecorous. Scenes of potential rape and hanging and situations involving extreme violence and sexuality are quite obviously present. And, unlike the fairy-tale endings common at the time, Burney doesn't conclude with her golden couple riding off into the sunset.

The final scene is a grotesque one, another appalling joke played by Captain Mirvan on Mr. Lovel, the fop who plagues Evelina throughout her entrance into society. The Captain brings in a monkey dressed like a fop and dubs him Mr. Lovel's twin. In retaliation, Mr. Lovel strikes the monkey with a cane, not daring to beat the actual source of the jest. The monkey retaliates by

leaping upon him and biting his ear, disfiguring the appearance Mr. Lovel had worked so hard to perfect. Though the scene pokes fun at Mr. Lovel for his insipid, consumerist behavior and punishes him for his treatment of Evelina, it does something much more notable. Burney removes him from Evelina's social circle, thereby enacting a sort of feminine autonomy and authority within the male-dominated power structure. As Epstein writes,

Evelina does not, of course, triumph fully over the patriarchal social order that commands her submission and her duplicity. She does not manage to overturn that order; what she achieves is a measure of personal autonomy and control *within* the confines of "acceptable" social behaviour for women in the last third of the eighteenth century. (*Iron Pen* 118)

Four years later, Burney returns to the literary scene with a heroine who is noticeably more independent. Cecilia is another orphan, though a legitimate one, at the onset of the 1782 novel. She is an heiress in her own right, and her story sets the pattern that will be followed in both *Camilla* and *The Wanderer*, that of the young woman who risks censure from her lover and is abandoned at every crucial juncture (Epstein, *The Iron Pen* 118). As Lillian and Edward Bloom discuss in "Fanny Burney's Novels: The Retreat from Wonder," Burney's heroines mature just as she does herself. Evelina was an idealized reflection, the young lady whom Burney, very much a shut-in during her twenties, would have liked to see in the mirror. Once she became recognized as the author of *Evelina*, however, Burney began attending the social events into which she had initiated her first heroine and began to grow as an individual. And so "where Evelina had been a social novice, dazzled and excited by every London excursion, Cecilia, an heiress, is very much at home in fashionable circles. Though a stranger to London, she has not been kept remote from the ways of the world with all its intricacies" (Bloom 226).

But *Cecilia* does not present just the image of the author as a more mature and socially experienced woman. This second novel is a projection of Burney's psyche. Undertaken in the

wake of the suppression of her first play, *The Wiltings*, by her domineering though adored father along with favored critic Samuel “Daddy” Crisp, *Cecilia* expresses the resentment Burney felt. “She apparently never questioned the right of her male mentors to direct her,” Straub observes, “but she was clearly annoyed at their interference” (*Divided Fictions* 109). The novels’ double plotline, per Straub’s reading of the five-volume tome, illustrates this annoyance at the intrusion of a patriarchy she willingly upholds, though she longs for greater autonomy within it. Romantic love duels with the search for “a course in life,” begging the question of “what women can or should safely and virtuously do with themselves besides falling in love or being loved” (110). As her writing career continued, Burney sought an alternative to the lot of traditional womanhood. It is not that she is actively trying to subvert her femininity or defy patriarchy. She and her heroines are rather exploring the limits of female independence and occupation while upholding both womanly virtue and social expectation.

Cecilia offers a more clearly articulated account of this divided purpose than *Evelina*. A number of scenes illustrate the warring thoughts and emotions triggered by such disunity, but none are more notable than that of the Harrel’s masque ball. Before the figurative doors are thrown open upon the masquerade scene, we are given to understand that this social ritual is one defined by consumerism, given the expense of the Harrels’ preparations, and by custom: “Mrs. Harrel,” we are told, “by whose direction she was guided, informed her it was not necessary for ladies to be masked at home” (106). Though Cecilia arrives in London well equipped to face society without appearing a country bumpkin, this is not an experience with which she is acquainted. She eagerly and somewhat naively enters the world of the masquerade. Though embarrassed by the blatant observation her lack of mask attracts, she is overcome by curiosity. Watching the dominos and sultanas, shepherdesses and gypsies mingle and trade witticisms

amuses Cecilia greatly, and while the narrator herself seems bored by the events she is describing—the explanation of the characters in attendance, for example, is list-like, routine and without excitement—Cecilia’s attention remains unwearied (106).

But as the crowd grows, her entertainment slips and the public violence becomes evident: “When the rooms filled, and the general crowd gave general courage, she was attacked in a manner more pointed and singular” (107). The sudden change in tone is blatant. The repetition of “general” implies that a mob mentality is at work, while “attacked” and “pointed” are harsh in contrast to the elegance of the room and jovial nature of the gathering. Cecilia is immediately approached by a man dressed as the devil. The way that Burney describes him makes his satanic features seem almost natural: “two red horns seemed to issue from his forehead...his feet were cloven” (107). He waves a flame-colored wand as he advances upon her, adopting a combative attitude toward the woman he will hold hostage for the rest of the evening. Like an idolizer, he bows at her feet. Like a beast, he “thrice turned himself around with sundry grimaces” (107). Like a protector, he plants himself fiercely at her side. This trio of actions cements him as the sort of symbol of the patriarchal system that we have seen earlier with Sir Clement.

Cecilia’s amusement at his “mummery” fades, but when she wishes to change her seat, the “black gentleman” blocks her way with his wand (107). For the time being, she cedes to him and the patriarchy he represents, “preferring captivity to resistance” (107). The devil wards off each potential suitor that approaches with demonstrative violence in order to keep Cecilia isolated. He raps Mr. Arnott on the head with his wand when the man tries to release her from confinement, raising “a general laugh” (108). The repetition of “general” again brings to mind the public violence, but now we see it entering the home, mixing social violence with the domestic. Burney uses words like “invade” and “imprisonment” to convey the gravity of the

situation. That she then lightens the scene with the entrance of a Don Quixote, complete with the requisite rusty armor and impossible dream, is of note. The Cervantes look-alike makes a number of ridiculous gestures and romantic speeches that garner the laughter of his lady love. When a mock fight ensues, Cecilia makes her great escape.

The relief does not last, however, for the devil returns. His wand has been broken in the battle with Don Quixote and so he adopts a new weapon, a repulsive growl that sends the ladies running to avoid him and the men into an aloof circle to observe the proceedings. "Cecilia now became seriously uneasy," Burney writes. Disturbingly, she is silenced, unable to speak and unable to be spoken to (111). Joanne Cutting-Gray uses Foucault's history of madness to "show that when woman is denied both speech *and* action her only access to a rational mind is also denied" (33). The masquerade is, then, a crisis moment. Not far into the second volume of the memoir, she approaches the hysteria that eventually overcomes her. Cutting-Gray's analysis of the event is one I affirm. It upholds my argument that Burney depicts social gatherings in a grotesque manner when they begin to truly threaten the body and mind of the heroine. The awakened terror is very much psychological. Here, she appears suspended in this mindset as she is symbolically bound and gagged by a society that forces her to surrender.

Time passes and eventually a white domino "rushed upon the fiend" and calls upon the service of an on-looking harlequin. The domino grabs one of the devil's horns while the harlequin beats him with a wooden sword. "The rage of *Don Devil* at this attack seemed somewhat beyond what a masquerade character rendered necessary," Burney writes. "He foamed at the mouth with resentment, and defended himself with so much vehemence, that he soon drove poor Harlequin into another room" (111). From room to room the devil and domino go, each retreating and advancing. Meanwhile, Cecilia, delighting in her release, hurries into a

corner and watches the action unfold, an activity in which we can suppose the other onlookers are also occupied.

In thanks, Cecilia says to the domino, “I was so tired of confinement, that my mind seemed almost as little at liberty as my person” (112). Such confinement looks forward to Cecilia’s visit to Delvile Castle, where a drawbridge which “fronted the entrance was every night, by order of Mr. Delvile, with the same care as if still necessary for the preservation of the family, regularly drawn up” (457). Burney’s tone in both cases suggests that such archaic means of imprisoning a woman are no longer necessary (if ever they were). Lady Honoria, with her characteristic brashness, speaks jokingly of suicide to escape Delvile Castle and the confinement it represents: “I really think I should pretend to lose my way, and instead of going over that old draw-bridge, throw myself into the moat” (467). Returning to the masquerade, we find that such restriction under male authority is once again manipulated to recreate the woman as the provoker:

There are many who would be happy to confine you in the same manner; neither have you much cause for complaint; you have, doubtless, been the aggressor, and played this game yourself without mercy, for I read in your face the captivity of thousands: have you, then, any right to be offended at the spirit of retaliation which one, out of such numbers, has courage to exert in return? (112)⁴

Unlike Evelina, Cecilia does not cower and give herself over to guilt. “I protest...I took you for my defender!” she cries. “Whence is it you are to become my accuser?” (112). The conversation is interrupted by the raptures being exchanged nearby. Though the romantic words are mocked here, Burney uses this disruption to foreshadow the relationship that will develop between Cecilia and her nondescript white domino, who, the reader learns, is Mortimer Delvile, son of

⁴ The argument is brought up again by Mr. Gosport: “And pray, madam, after playing the devil with all mankind, what right have you to complain that one man plays the devil with you?” (116).

one of Cecilia's three guardians. That she describes the overheard snippet as "violent," however, indicates that the romance will be colored such a shade (112).

When the devil returns, Cecilia depends upon the valiant domino; Mr. Gosport, masked as a school-master; and Mr. Arnott, to barricade her from the "old tormentor" (115). The social event has taken on the flavor of a military campaign. The domino becomes the "commanding officer," assigning to each protector his "station." Positions are appointed, with Mr. Gosport as Cecilia's left guard and Mr. Arnott as her center "centinal" and the quartet is besieged by the still-growling devil (115). The winged defense, however, serves only to fortify Cecilia's confinement, much like the crumbling walls of Delvile Castle. Never do they attempt to rescue her. Rather, they reinforce the system that upholds their power as men to imprison her as they so choose. It is her stingy guardian Mr. Briggs who fulfils this duty, but his is not the rescue she looks for. When he enters, he gains the immediate repulsion of the crowd in attendance. Mr. Briggs is the image of grotesque comedy, dressed as he is in the costume of a chimney sweep complete with a bag of soot. He is dirty and smelly, laying waste to Cecilia's reputation by his insistence upon association as easily as he musses her gown in his triumphant attempt to free her from the prostrating devil. Cecilia evades him, disdainful of his conversation, which offers slivers of truth. Mr. Briggs tells her that the devil is "a sweet-heart in disguise" (120)—and indeed, he is soon revealed to the reader as Mr. Monckton (123)—mixed in with classless comments on her marriage prospects and the excessive consumerism of the middle-class social circle she inhabits.

Cecilia is recaptured by the devil, who unhappily considers his poor reception, and she is saved only by the destruction of the elaborately erected awning. The glass flying through the air shows the first cracks dealt to a splintered consumerist society and predicts the downfall the Harrels will face, thanks to their vast indulgences. The extinguished lights indicate the abrupt

end of the gathering. That it should conclude with this ruinous display brought about by masculine mischief illustrates Burney's judgment of such social pleasures. Her tone, as I have discussed, drips with boredom. She criticizes outrageous consumerism through the voice of Mr. Briggs; laughs at male raillery by punishing the harlequin, who lies on the floor covered with oil and papier-mâché; and humiliates the devil, who slinks off to some unknown destination to remove his disguise in peace before continuing home, so that no one might know of his behavior.

The masquerade takes up *Cecilia's* longest chapter and offers a number of hints at the coming events. Consumerism is the novel's theme, most critics agree, but the subordination of women, seen here in the persecution of Cecilia at the wand of the devil, and their ability to be so easily silenced by both physical means and social mores has also been much discussed in critical circles, particularly those concerned with feminist theory. As the climax builds toward Cecilia's bout of hysteria rather than happily wedded bliss, the notion of muting becomes paramount. She has lost her inheritance and her name through an undisclosed marriage to Delvile and we watch as she begins to lose her mind while running through the streets of London. To and fro she rushes, first to Mrs. Belfield, then to St. James Square to beg to the protection of Mr. Delvile. The man, her former guardian and current unacknowledged father-in-law, refuses to see her, not allowing her the chance to speak. We are told that he is the "author of this scene of woe" (912). Her dignity begins to dissolve: she leaves a message for Delvile "with a servant who knew not her connection with his young master" and finds the act "extremely repugnant" but necessary to ensure his safety and their reunion (893). She returns to Mrs. Belfield's home, then revisits the coffeehouse, from which place she is informed that he has just departed. She orders the coach driver to gallop on, and when the man refuses, she moves to leap from the carriage and continue on foot. The drunken man seizes her, insisting that she not leave the carriage without paying him.

The violence mounts. Cecilia would offer him her entire purse, but for the tedious judiciousness of Mr. Simkins, her protector so far on this goose chase.⁵ She begs to be freed, but the inebriated driver holds her fast. She becomes increasingly agitated, as Burney indicates with long sentences comprising passionate pleas for the driver's payment, no matter the sum, and her subsequent release. "Let me go! let me pass!" cried she, with increasing eagerness and emotion; 'detain me at your peril!—release me this moment!—only let me run to the end of the street,—good God! good Heaven! detain me not for mercy!'" (895).

Cecilia is trapped and momentarily silenced by her horror. "A mob was collecting; Cecilia, breathless with vehemence and terror, was encircled, yet struggled in vain to break away" (895). Her hand is seized by a stranger who promises "he would himself take care of her" (896). The hand-seizing seems to be what pushes Burney's heroines over the edge, for at this moment, "she was wholly overpowered; terror for Delvile, horror for herself, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, all assailing her at once, while all means of repelling them were denied her" (896). Again she speaks, but this time it is with madness: "He will be gone! he will be gone! and I must follow him to Nice!" These exclamations send the strange gentleman into retreat. The coachman grows abusive and Mr. Simkins does not heed her words, her frenzy, or her madness. "With a strength hitherto unknown to her," Cecilia pulls herself free from her persecutors and runs off, Delvile's danger consuming her disoriented mind entirely (896). By forcibly disengaging herself from the men who would hold her, she realizes the strength that has lain dormant within her, present but unacknowledged because it would have been socially

⁵ As a protector, Mr. Simkins fails miserably. When Cecilia later runs away, he gives up a useless attempt at following her and returns quietly home, "determining to acquaint Mrs. Belfield with what had happened the next morning" (897). His pursuit is delayed by the socially mandated need to pay the carriage driver, which apparently surpasses in urgency the need to chase the disturbed woman.

unacceptable to do so. Here, she is able to throw off the fetters of society and embrace the passionate spirit she has quashed for the last 800 pages.

As Cecilia runs through the streets, Burney gives us access to the fancies flashing through her mind, images of Delvile dead or bleeding. The scene becomes surreal: “She scarce touched the ground; she scarce felt her own motion; she seemed as if endued with supernatural speed, gliding from place to place, from street to street” (897). When she arrives at an open shop, she is exhausted. Cecilia sinks upon the floor, where she “sat for some time without speaking,” silenced, once again (897). The people of the house make a few inquiries, and only when it is suggested that she is a Bedlam escapee does she speak: “No, no—I am not mad,—I am going to Nice—to my husband,” she wildly exclaims (897). The man of the house writes her off as crazy and insists they must “get rid of her before she grows mischievous” (897). She is distinctly viewed as unfeminine here. Mischief is purely masculine, as we saw early with the masquerade-closing antics of the harlequin. Another man asserts that she must have broken out of a madhouse, though he suggests a reward is likely to be had if the shopkeeper takes care of her. It is the mistress of the house who reclaims her proper feminine heritage by calling her a gentlewoman because of the “good things” she wears (898). We learn that the mob has rifled through her pockets, taking from her any identifying material. But such treatment is not a one-way street, for she had earlier given her purse to Simkin to pay the carriage driver, and that, too, may have provided her with a name. This duality of being the victim of name-taking and the free giver of her identity show that women are not simply sufferers, though they are not the aggressive persecutors that would imprison would-be lovers, either, which Delvile as the white domino had earlier suggested.

As before, Cecilia is forcibly confined, much as she would have been in Bedlam. The shopkeepers carry her upstairs and after an attempt to force her to lie down, leave her locked in a dark room wholly alone. As these things are acted upon her, Cecilia tries to call out to Delvile to rescue her, but finds that she cannot. She is once more silenced, “so wholly bereft of sense and recollection [that] she could give no account who she was, whence she came, or whither she wished to go” (898). After a period of rest, the fever that has overtaken Cecilia leaves her quite cool and she regains her senses. Imagine, however, the real horror that would have accompanied the discovery of her confinement. Though she calls out to be released, “nobody, however, came near her: some slept on notwithstanding all the disturbance she could make, and others, though awakened by her cries, concluded them the ravings of a mad woman, and listened not to what she said” (899). When she is checked upon in the morning by the woman of the house, she is found raving, having been made truly hysterical by the actual captivity she faces and the lack of response to her violent cries throughout the night. As the situation drags on, Cecilia begins to lose herself entirely; her raving mind seems to have been turned over entirely to Delvile and Mr. Monckton. In her fashion, Burney injects grotesque humor into the disastrous situation. The mistress of the house brings Cecilia a quantity of straw as an indulgence, “having heard that mad people were fond of it; and putting it in a heap in one corner of the room, she expected to see her eagerly fly to it” (900). This slight bit of repulsive comedy closes the chapter if not the scenario. It turns Cecilia into jestbook fodder, but having spent four extensive volumes sympathizing with her quest for love and a course of her own in life, we the readers cannot so easily allow her to be transformed into an object of derision.

This change in tone is difficult to digest. Cecilia is not a simple victim; her hysteria has come about through her own self-suppressive behavior, meant to protect herself from public

exposure, but destructive nonetheless. As Epstein argues in “Writing the Unspeakable,” this self-suppression is a coercive measure that society forces women to take in order to protect themselves from something “worse”—humiliation and brutality. The episodes of mental and physical violence that Burney includes in her novels, either blatant or lurking problematically just beneath the surface, “reveal a complicated relationship between decorous propriety and its potential for unexpected explosion” (132). It’s an “edgy, precarious diplomacy” that Burney creates in *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, with violence abusing “the façade rather than the edifice, the hair rather than the head” (133). In the author’s second novel, however, we see a certain depravity beginning to tint the pages a darker, more disturbed hue. The public suicide of Mr. Harrel and the devolution of Cecilia into madness “introduce a connection between physical pain and silence, horror and speechlessness” (133). It’s a connection that deepens in *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth*, Burney’s third novel, which was published in 1796 after a miserable five years spent in the court of King George III and Queen Charlotte, her marriage to French émigré Alexandre D’Arblay, and the birth of her only child. In a letter to her sister Esther shortly after her reception at court, she recounts the physical pain that results from the oppressive social codes that restrict an attendant’s behavior. One must choke rather than cough. One must not sneeze: “You must oppose it,” she writes, “by keeping your teeth grinding together; if the violence of the repulse breaks some blood-vessel, you must break the blood-vessel—but not sneeze” (qtd. in Epstein, “Writing the Unspeakable 132). An exhausting amount of physical control over one’s self and one’s circumstances is demanded. The lack of self control present in *Camilla*, then, presents the nightmarish fantasy of the author, who wonders what would happen if her control slipped.

It doesn’t take long for this to occur. In the second chapter, delicate Eugenia, the youngest of the Tyrold sisters, is exposed to smallpox at the county fair. With a 30 to 40 percent

mortality rate, the virus's lethality was a very real threat at the time of the 1796 publication of *Camilla*. Edward Jenner had just begun his successful testing of a vaccine for the disease, which Camilla and eldest sister Lavinia have received while their weakly constituted sister does not ("Smallpox"). The scene itself is one the reader can imagine occurring in slow motion. Eugenia, her skirts held out, apron-like, to hold a pile of toys she'd collected in a stall, calls out to an illness-scarred child, "Little boy, what's the matter with your face, little boy?" (24). Her naiveté is countered by her accompanying uncle, indulgent as ever, and Edgar, *Camilla's* hero. Edgar lifts Eugenia in his arms—the playthings, we can imagine, are crashing to the ground in ironic disarray—and carries her to the coach. Lavinia runs up to the boy and cries, "O go away! go away!" before she drags him from the booth (24). She then thrusts his head under her skirts and holds him there, completely unconscious of her behavior. This reaction of the oldest child displays a sense of perverted sexuality and female dominance. Lavinia tries to gain control of the situation by making this male child and his illness disappear, as if this bizarre game of peek-a-boo could erase Eugenia's exposure to the virus. This is the greatest role Lavinia plays throughout the novel; indeed, her failure to protect her sister here, first by allowing Eugenia to come out on the carriage ride and then by not stifling the disease with her frock but rather becoming a carrier of it, seems to be punished with a lack of action throughout the rest of the story. Like Cecilia's unrestricted behavior prior to her bout of madness, Lavinia here experiences a moment of what might be liberation, but results in confinement to her father's household.

Before Eugenia can succumb to the disease, she is indulged to her detriment once more by the bumbling Sir Hugh. The children place a plank on the trunk of a tree where it divides into two branches, and take turns riding upon it. Sir Hugh joins the fun, carefully placing Eugenia on his lap so that he may ensure her safety. Then, so giddy does he become, he lets her fall to the

ground. She is rescued once more by Edgar Mandlebert and carried inside, screaming all the way. She has dislocated her knee and put out her shoulder. Eugenia then falls prey to the smallpox fever, which scars her visage permanently. To make matters more worse, the injuries she sustains from the fall cause one leg to grow shorter than the other. So Eugenia, who was once the prettiest of the trio, emerges “diminutive and deformed,” though an heiress, thanks to her uncle’s sense of guilt (33). But the grievance doesn’t disappear when the threat of fatality dissipates. When she is introduced into society, Eugenia becomes a social victim, disdained because of an appearance she cannot help nor hide. She is made more naïve than Evelina thanks to the protection confirmed upon her by her family, who doesn’t wish her to know how ghastly she appears. Eugenia becomes a laughingstock for daring to bring her pock-marked face and wobbly stride out into society with a quiet confidence that does not humbly bow to the derision the general public would foist upon the infirm or the crippled. She is rejected by her affianced cousin and very nearly murdered by the man who kidnaps and forces a hasty elopement upon her in order to gain her inheritance.

Eugenia is a perpetually passive character in *Camilla*. Though she might have the independence offered to Cecilia and enjoyed by Lady Honoria in Burney’s second novel, she is made into a puppet. She follows the bidding of her uncle to become learned—education in a woman becomes another repulsive characteristic to potential suitors—so that she might better suit her superficial cousin. When he writes her off, verbally abusing her for her poor appearance, she enters into a contract with Indiana and Mr. Melmond, giving up her own chances at love in order to indulge Melmond’s infatuation with her cousin. When the wicked Bellamy absconds to Gretna Green with Eugenia in tow and then attempts to kill her once he has secured her fortune, she dutifully refuses to lay charges or speak out against him. The practiced submission Eugenia

assumes suggests that such events are normal in the eighteenth-century household. Burney creates her as a pathetic figure by allotting her both a sweet, charitable nature and a resignation to the abuses acted against her, creating an editorialized illustration of the common violence present in the domestic sphere and the expected deference, even servility, of women before their male superiors. Camilla, we see, is perpetually the victim of her brother, Lionel. He forces her into debt, embarrasses her in public, and plays cruel jokes on her with the absurd Mr. Dubster. Remarkably more disturbing than the treatment of women at the hands of men in *Camilla*, however, is the treatment of animals.

One of the first amusements Camilla observes in the resort town of Tunbridge is the “Consort of Musics.” No less than twenty monkeys are shown playing a number of crude instruments, “one dreadfully scraping a bow across the strings of a vile kit, another beating a drum, another with a fife, a fourth with a bagpipe, and the sixteen remainder striking together tongs, shovels, and pokers, by way of marrowbones and cleavers” (429). This odd assortment is at once bestial and anthropomorphic,⁶ connecting this horrendous performance and the expectations of the male conductor to the life led by women, governed as it is by the acquisition of unimportant accomplishments and the overwhelming influence of the patriarchy. The reference to marrowbones and cleavers, a footnote tells us, suggests the “instruments traditionally responsible for ‘music’ produced by English and Scottish butchers on festive occasions.”⁷ The onlookers “stopt their ears, though no one could forbear laughing at their [the monkeys] various contortions, and horrible grimaces” (429). That is, until the master of the booth “dealt about such fierce blows with a stick, that they [the monkeys] set up a general howling...not more stunning to the ear, than offensive to all humanity” (429-30). This abuse is

⁶ Earlier, Mrs. Albery makes the connection between the monkeys and humans: “Mrs. Albery confessed it would be an amusing sight to see so many representations of the dear human race,” (421).

⁷ Footnote to *Camilla*, see page 946 in reference to page 429:2.

reminiscent of *Evelina*'s closing scene during which a monkey is caned. But that monkey is able to rebel; these twenty are prisoners, beaten into tune as though such abuse could turn a band of beasts into a group of accomplished musicians. What is worse is that the audience, comprising men and women, applauds this treatment "by loud shouts" (430). Mrs. Arlbery and Camilla appear to be the only ones who attempt to quit the show, disgusted.

This event would not be so singular if it was not followed sixty pages later by a scene of a similar nature involving a learned bullfinch. Camilla is amazed to see the bird sing "various little airs, upon certain words of command, and mounted his highest, and descended to his lowest perch...with wonderful precision" (492). But the young woman is disturbed by the manner in which the bird's keeper orders the bullfinch about and inquires "by what means he had obtained such authority" (492). We can envision this as a questioning of the patriarchal system that confines and commands her, as the master confines and commands the bullfinch. The connection is made more clear when the man responds:

"By the true old way, Miss; I lick him." "Lick him!" repeated she, with disgust; "how is it possible you can beat such a poor delicate little creature?" "O, easy enough, Miss," replied the man, grinning; "everything's the better for a little beating, as I tells my wife." (492)

We learn that for every bird he is able to train, he kills six or seven by beating or pinching them into submission. Camilla wishes to buy the bird its freedom, but does not have enough money to pay up the ten guineas the man asks for. Sir Sedley Clarendel purchases the bird for her as a gift, establishing another form of slavery, though this one human rather than animalistic, by creating a debt, whether he expects to be repaid or not. To thank him for his kindness, Camilla alters her behavior, treating him favorably and so innocently crafting an illusion of love that later embarrasses her. This sort of slavery is hinted at by Mrs. Albery, who tells Camilla that "a Baronet, rich, young, and amiable, is upon the very point of becoming your slave for ever" (509).

Sir Sedley writes “have you taken a captive only to see him in fetters? Allured a victim merely to behold him bleed? Ah! tomorrow, at least, permit the audience that today is denied, and at your feet, let your slave receive his doom” (529). This sort of language further brings to light the idea of the twisted power structure between men and women in what we might call love. Women are postured as authority figures while the men recreate themselves as victims, though they, as the rulers of society, dictate the behavior of their female “entrappers.”

One of the most memorable scenes in *Camilla* illustrates this concept. Camilla, staying at an inn close to Etherington, begins to hallucinate. She is near the end of her troubles, but believes herself to be fully to blame for it all: her own debt, the kidnapping of Eugenia, the elopement of Indiana, the alienation of Edgar, the imprisonment of her father. Though, like Eugenia, she is often passive, ceding to the whims and wants of others rather than giving way to her own desires, Camilla envisions herself here as a villain. Convinced that she will never again be welcomed home by her mother, she makes herself ill, refusing to take food. She is haunted by grotesque dreams that repulse her into wakefulness. Of note is the way she envisions the various reproaches to her failed femininity, which are “conveyed through hideous forms” (861). That the manner in which her subconscious shapes social and personal condemnation should be grotesque implies that the shame she feels would inspire both laughter and terror, as though the failure of a woman is at once funny and pitiful. Hours later, she picks up a pen, determined now to confess all of her misdeeds to her mother in hopes of forgiveness. But she is ill, “her head was confused,” and she rejoices, thinking herself closer to Death than she had expected (867). Her writing is interrupted by a buzzing, “stifled sort of noise from without” (867). From the window, she perceives an immense crowd. The scene becomes surreal, as the noise does not increase when the people come closer. The description of the scene becomes ambiguous; there is “the general ‘hum of

many,” Burney writes, but “they were silent though numerous” (868). Such confusion lends to Camilla’s increasing hysteria. The crowd carries with them a dead man. Camilla, however, instead of realizing that someone has already died, envisions this moment as Death coming for her.

Hours later, after the crowd has dispersed, Camilla wanders downstairs and confronts the dead body. Through some sort of self compulsion, she reaches down to remove the linen square that covers the man’s face. Just as her fingers make contact, however, she draws her hand back in horror and covers her eyes. When she dares to look again, however, she finds that face partly exposed; the dead gentleman is Eugenia’s husband, Mr. Bellamy. Camilla’s psyche cannot handle this very abrupt realization of her own mortality. Her limbs are shaky and when she spies the “splashes of blood” on Bellamy’s coat, she collapses (871). A hired woman helps her to her bed, where she is “seized with an aguish shivering fit, while her eyes seemed emitting sparks of fire” (872). In her fevered delirium, she dreams that “Death, in a visible figure, ghastly, pallid, severe, appeared before her, and with its hand, sharp and forked, struck abruptly upon her breast” (875). With this oddly sexual touch, the beast-like figure freezes her heart and oppresses her lungs. Summoning Death appears to be the only active thing she has accomplished, yet this is but a dream. Camilla follows him to the Records of Eternity, where she is to write her claim for mercy. “Unlicensed by her will,” her hand seizes the iron pen, but she can make no mark (875). Try though she might, the page remains blank. This form of female silencing might be the ultimate nightmare for Burney, whom Epstein calls a compulsive writer.⁸ We have seen this muting earlier, when she tries to pray but can only utter “incoherent ejaculations” and when “she

⁸ Though her prolific collection of letters and diaries make this descriptor comprehensible, Epstein and other critics also cite her account of her mastectomy in 1811. Similar to the iron pen in *Camilla*, the tumor in her breasts made it painful and nearly impossible for her to continue writing. It is also rare to find an account of a surgical procedure of this nature from the period. Her writing of it suggests that it was something she *needed* to record.

approaches the bleeding corpse of the novel's villain with 'speechless apprehension'" (*Iron Pen* 124). This is in contrast to the noise of the crowd, whose voices return "by hundreds, by thousands, by millions, from side to side, above, below, around, called out, echoed and re-echoed," entreating her to her doom (876).

Camilla remains perfectly still, once again embracing the passivity that defines her sex in socially acceptable contexts. She is afraid "to call, to move, or almost to breathe" (876). It appears that this fear comes from a conscious realization of her wandering senses.

Comprehending what she considers to be her villainous behavior enacted while completely rational, she is terrified of the improprieties she might commit while hysterical. As Epstein writes, "Burney's heroines...prefer to remain silent. For Burney, the female voice speaks only when spoken to, its words always defensive, challenged, and challenging" (*Iron Pen* 123).

Unlike Cecilia, who cries out for help all night long during her hysterical confinement, Camilla refuses to lose control of her rigid sense of decorum, which is very closely tied to her speech.

Epstein writes that "Camilla's silence itself imprisons her" (*Iron Pen* 149). The violence and violation she experiences intersects with her impaired language, here, so that the iron pen becomes "an instrument and a weapon of patriarchal social ideology; only when Camilla domesticates it," by writing letters, for example, rather than truly speaking out, "can she use it to give herself a voice" (Epstein, *Iron Pen* 150).

In *Camilla*, scenes of violence perpetrated in the domestic sphere and in public spaces are still tinged with the grotesque, though that, too, lessens throughout the novel. In this final climactic scene, we see only trace elements of the grotesque remaining. It is terror-filled, but the comedy is absent. That it is a dream rather than a reality lessens the blow, but it is still telling of the direction Burney's writing takes at the dawn of the nineteenth century. As she begins to

eliminate the comedic element of the grotesque, leaving to her readers only the horror, she lessens the repulsion but increases the gravity of the various situations in which her characters find themselves. No longer do these scenes merely present passing threats.

With Burney's fourth novel comes the complete elimination of the grotesque in favor of the gothic. The sense one has when one begins reading *The Wanderer* is that something has changed. It is as if the authoress has experienced a growth spurt in her eighteen-year absence from the literary market. Biographers have noted the difficulties in pin-pointing this metamorphosis; it is said that Burney began writing *The Wanderer* in 1802, but as we have few records of its genesis and no early manuscripts as exist in the cases of her three earlier novels, it is difficult to say when and how the author's style and focus began to shift (Doody, Introduction viii-x). Much of Burney's charm remains: the same flair for social satire, the same caricatures, the same plot devices. But these familiar glimpses have gained a certain maturity. Burney is revolutionarily sympathetic to the plight of the working class, while before she had been snobbish, in *Evelina*, and charitable, if critical, in *Cecilia*. Though her novels have always shown an awareness of popular philosophy and morality, this five-volume work is very much politically driven. And it is a reflection of the culture of the time; like *Camilla*, it is of the Romantic age, if somewhat less of a traditional genre romance than the earlier trio. Of greatest concern to this paper, however, is the alteration Burney has made to the pattern we have seen of interlocking humor and horror. The grotesque ordeals experienced by *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla* have been replaced by a theatrically comical gothic subplot featuring Elinor Joddrel that perhaps winks at the grotesque tradition, and a distinct shift in the treatment of the heroine from comedy-infused violence to a very real terror.

Traditionally, as we have seen, the grotesque has been an outward phenomenon in that it has been acted upon a character and translated from text to reality in the mind of the reader. In the case of *The Wanderer*, such a use of the grotesque is conspicuously absent. So too is the classic villain. There is no Captain Mirvan, no Harrel, no Lionel, and while we learn retrospectively of the misdeeds of the French commissary, his presence is fleeting and actions are not at all humorous. The descendant of the blatantly grotesque in *The Wanderer*, then, is that which can be found only in the subplot of a suicidal Elinor. Newly won to the philosophy of the French Revolution, Elinor is “the most defiant and most ‘liberated’ of Burney’s female characters,” Rose Marie Cutting writes (525). She is a champion of her sex, a believer in the full equality of women, who, she thinks, could easily become self-sufficient if they tried (Cutting 526). She throws off the feminine recourse of waiting for a man’s courtship—which Camilla considered but decided against, per the advice of her father (358)—and declares her passion. But she is rejected, and her love for Albert Harleigh, the brother of her former fiancé, is very nearly her downfall. Instead of wallowing, however, Elinor decides to become a martyr for love.

It is ironic that a woman who considers herself liberated from a society defined by male domination should suddenly submit her life to the will of a man. Even before she takes up her blade, she demands of Ellis, “Speak! say Yes, or No, at once! Give me no phrase—Let me see no hesitation!—*Kill me, or restore me to life!*—Has Harleigh...ever made you any declaration?” (151, emphasis added). Unto Harleigh she extends the choice of whether she will live or die by her own hand. Such capitulation is out of character, given her history. While still flirting with the idea of marrying Harleigh’s brother, she is boldly antagonistic:

He delighted to tell me his causes, state their merits, and ask my opinions. I always took the opposite side to that which he was employed to plead, in order to try his powers, and prove my own...Enchanted with a warfare in which I was certain to be always victorious,

I grew so fond of conquest, that I was never satisfied but when combating; and the joy I experienced in the display of my own talents, made me doat upon his sight. (153)

She goes on to explain to Ellis that her attraction to the brother was narcissistic, driven out of a love to see herself, a woman, admired by a man and indeed his apparent superior. When she found herself in love with Albert, she broke the engagement, her willfulness still in place. Elinor attributes her ability to defy convention to the continental Revolution: “But for the late glorious revolutionary shake given to the universe, I should, at this very moment, from mere cowardly conformity, be the wife of Dennis!” (154).

But where does this strong-minded fury go? An analysis of her first suicide attempt shows that she is not as unshackled as she had imagined herself to be. Upon her first declaration of love, “shame crimsoned her skin. ... ‘How tenacious a tyrant is custom!’” she cries. “How it clings to our practice! how it embarrasses our conduct!” (174). She perseveres, her cheeks flaming, a stark contrast from the livid paleness that had overcome her complexion just moments prior. Though first she speaks of Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Elinor falls in “a sort of wild rapture” to the hyperbole of romantic love:

Harleigh! dearest Harleigh! you are the master of my soul! you are sovereign of my esteem, my admiration, my very feeling of tenderness, and every idea of perfection!— Accept, then, the warm homage of a glowing heart, that beats but for you; and that, beating in vain, will beat no more! (175)

Despite her notions of female liberation and independence, Elinor is overcome by the insatiable pull of true love, “the neurosis most likely to infect women in Western culture” (Cutting 527).

This ongoing plotline illustrates the tense coexistence of the male-favoring social hierarchy Elinor seeks to defy, and the equality theories she espouses that in reality give way to another form of political and social tyranny. Perhaps her decision to die by her own hand, should her suit be rejected, is fueled by frustration, revulsion, even, at this internalized paradox between her

ideal world and her reality. So, instead of pining, like Eugenia, Camilla, Cecilia, and the like, she boldly asserts her desires, shoving aside conventions of propriety and female delicacy.⁹ Time and time again, she believes her mission will be successful, but in her first attempt, she faints. In her second, the self-inflicted wound isn't fatal. In her third, she is thwarted. The resolution of the plotline comes at the awe-inspiring site of Stonehenge, where Elinor finally submits to Harleigh's rationale, throwing off her atheist mantle and embracing once more the conservative, religious morality that defines Burney's society.

As we begin to understand Elinor's character and her machinations through her long-winded, philosophical diatribes, we view her as something of a Byronic hero—self-destructive, intelligent, cunning, world-weary, and, eventually, reformed. Yet she is primarily a sympathetic character, as Cutting observes (527). She is likeable and spunky, and it cannot be forgotten that she is the Incognita's first friend in England.¹⁰ Then there is her great flair for the dramatic. Indeed, it is the theatricality of the trio of suicides and Elinor's predictably timed reappearances that lend the sober events a comic edge, bringing them closer to the grotesque situations in Burney's earlier novels. The monologue-prone Elinor envisions herself as a larger-than-life figurehead of a movement, though which, her emotionally divided mind cannot seem to decide. She scripts the suicide attempt in the gazebo, much to Ellis' bewilderment, pronouncing in vague foreshadowing that “the rest of my plot is not yet quite ripe for disclosure. But all is arranged. And though I know not whether the catastrophe will be tragic or comic, I am prepared in my part for either” (157). She then disappears, and Burney, certainly not one for brevity, ends the chapter in four words—“she then went away”—that stand in distinct contrast to Elinor's series of speeches, illustrating how little Ellis knows or understands of the matter. It is truly Elinor's

⁹ See Staves

¹⁰ The titular Wanderer assumes a number of names throughout the novel, including Incognita, Enigma, Ellis, and Juliet.

production, but the humorous element in this entire situation is that though she sets the events in motion, she is not the one in control. She, the playwright, the director, and the actor, is perpetually foiled to the point that the reader, irritated by her lack of success, begins to wonder why she cannot keep to herself, given that fate is so determined to see her fail.

The transition between the visible remnants of the grotesque and the gothic can be pinpointed to Elinor's second suicide attempt, which occurs at the moment of Juliet's concert debut as Miss Ellis. Before Juliet enters the hall, she is confronted with a glimpse of a stranger "with something foreign in his appearance" (356). This figure walks "with a menacing air, as if purposing to impede her passage" (356). The foreshadowing is blatant; the reader knows it just as well as Juliet, who startles at the sight of this person. The person enters the hall, and when seated, his eyes pursue her. The man appears to be deaf, dumb, and foreign, all derision-worthy characteristics in this early nineteenth-century society. But it is fear rather than humor that Juliet indulges. Her nerves are so shattered that the sound of the orchestra, "loud however harmonious," makes her start (357). She is dazzled by the lights, but not enough that she cannot see that the strange man has settled himself in easy view of her. Burney spends a fair amount of time describing his appearance, from the hat pulled low that he refuses to remove to the cravat that swathes his neck and chin. The time comes for Juliet-as-Ellis to perform. She is dressed not in the gaudy pink sarsenet purchased by Miss Arbe but a white satin that screams innocence and purity. By changing the color of the fabric in such a manner, Burney seems to be pushing for a change in the public perception of a young woman on display, who is not a professional performer, from improper to decorous. Juliet herself acknowledges that her performance is not in keeping with social expectations, yet she tries to rationalize it as something that must be done. The white satin is part of this rationalization. It is an attempt to persuade onlookers to

sympathize with and accept her cause. This effort is undermined, however, by the reveal of Elinor just as Juliet reaches her place. She is “*struck* with the sight of her deaf and dumb *tormentor*” who is “exposed” in the full light (358, emphasis added). She realizes after seeing a “glitter of steel” that this figure is a masked Elinor, and she is “agonized with terror at the idea” but curiously silenced (358). “Her voice refused to obey her” and even her sight fails as she sinks to the floor, looking like death as she faints (358-9).

Our attention is turned to Elinor. We hear her speech, first, declaring herself a “willing martyr” and then watch as she throws aside her disguise (359). In contrast to the virginal Juliet, Elinor appears in deep mourning. The scene she writes is of upmost impropriety per Juliet’s code of social manners. Her hair hangs loose, “her eyes were fierce rather than bright, and her air was wild and menacing” (359). She cuts a harpy-like, repulsive figure as she plunges a dagger into her breast. Burney writes the act as gruesomely as she can manage: “The blood gushed out in torrents,” we are told, while Elinor lies in Harleigh’s arms, smiling with triumph (359). As in *Evelina*, with the fop monkey scene, and *Cecilia*, with the devil’s antics at the masquerade, the women attempt to escape while the men gather round to witness this appalling sight. Burney has managed to have her heroine avoid the humiliation of playing in public by sacrificing Elinor. Though one would think that the attempted suicide of a niece would be a scene of horror and shame for Mrs. Maple, she is more embarrassed by the words of unrequited love Elinor speaks to Harleigh as she is attended by the doctor. Both performances, then, are made socially acceptable because they can be written off as illnesses. A fainting woman was a matter of course during the era, and Elinor’s actions could be considered a symptom of hysteria brought about by desperate love. Society treats the state of “madness” in which women in Burney’s last three novels discover and speak of the reality of their situations as something that can be cured rather than as

a natural state. There is nothing natural about the women created by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social mores; their behavior is imposed by patriarchy and adopted because there is no alternative. If women in any way oppose the instituted norm, they are deemed crazy, incognizant, and in need of treatment.

Burney's use of the grotesque in this instance and throughout her earlier novels shows the ways in which her peers struggle with this reality. But her transition at this moment, eliminating the grotesque at points of climax in favor of the gothic, signifies a change in her perspective. Repulsion—the effect of the grotesque—is no longer effective, she seemed to declare. The grotesque was not real enough. It is a representation of an “estranged world” rather than the actual realm. Though it made “an attempt to invoke or subdue the demonic aspects of the world,” the grotesque could not be used as a literary device to confront the issues Burney desired to address (Novak 57). Terror was essential for spurring recognition, if not change, of the situation of women in a male-dominated society. But how to go about it? Burney's gothic novel is very much of the present day. It does not, like Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, take place the Middle Ages or even in a particularly medieval setting, like a number of Radcliffe's novels. She merely nods at this genre motif by featuring the “venerable” Arundel Castle as a prominent setting with its “ancient chapel” and “antique citadel” (537). Given the ecclesiastic background of the gothic aesthetic, religion in the form of churches as settings and monks or priests as primary characters is common. But Burney, once again, refuses to adhere so submissively to the genre's norms. Though Elinor's final suicide attempt does take place in a church, the majority of the religious elements in *The Wanderer* are present not monastically but theoretically; much of the discussion between Elinor and Harleigh following the woman's suicide attempts and sudden reappearances revolves around religion. Juliet's ramble through the New Forest is an acknowledgement of the

typical return to awe-inspiring nature, but Burney twists this, as well. Though the jaunt begins like a typical pastoral, with a “good old dame” singing to her grandchildren as she offers the exhausted wanderer sustenance and rest, Juliet is turned out time and time again, and with each removal from a domestic haven, the forest becomes darker, more twisted and more tangled. The pastoral is transformed from a safe haven to a place from which to escape.

Such manipulation of traditional gothic elements has much to do with Burney’s need to make *The Wanderer* utterly real. This is not a novel to be parodied ala *Northanger Abbey*, she seems to say. Toward this purpose, she is careful to avoid the supernatural so as to preserve the feeling of absolute reality. To maintain terror and mystery, however, she sprinkles the novel with obscurity, which according to Burke, “seems in general to be necessary...to make any thing very terrible” (114). Taking a lesson from *Otranto*’s eerily dripping and pooled blood, Burney makes this bodily fluid reason enough for her heroine to abandon rationality and give in to her base human nature, that is, to flee. Awakened before dawn by a bizarre exchange occurring in a meager New Forest cottage, Juliet is already on edge, wondering why a pair of presumably good people would be conducting business at such an hour. Feigning sleep, she waits for the husband and wife to return to their loft abode before opening her eyes and taking in the scene before her. She is confronted by “a large clot of blood” on the door which she had not spied earlier (682). Believing it to be a consequence of the muttered discussion she overheard, she is “struck with terror” (682). She “perceived that the passage from door to door was traced with bloody spots,” and her mind leaps to murder and she determines to make a fresh escape (682). She leaves the house, and while deliberating on what to do next, her hand brushes a wicker basket. The moment seems to happen in slow motion: first she touches the basket, then she finds that it is wet. She holds it in the light “and saw that it was besmeared with blood” (683). As soon as our attention is

drawn to the wetness on the basket, we foresee the outcome; we know it is blood, we know she will be terrified, and we sympathetically feel that same terror. Whose blood was it? we wonder as she dashes through stinging brambles. What is this odd couple up to? we ask. And whatever will Juliet do?¹¹

This is not an isolated attempt at creating an aura of obscurity. Elinor's fate between suicides is largely unknown, as are the whereabouts and wellness of Juliet's guardian, the Bishop. Gabriella's son dies and her husband takes ill. Confusion abounds on the Continent during the Reign of Terror. And then there is the mystery of the heroine herself: Who is this Wanderer, this Enigma, this Incognita?

Identity is a key element in *The Wanderer*, as it is in many gothic novels. "In its inarticulate way, Gothic worries over a problem stirring within the foundations of the self," writes Robert Miles (1). On an individual level, Juliet is continually reevaluating her persona and how much of it she can share with her peers. We see her first on the boat to England, where she is disguised, soot on her visible skin and bandages on her face temporarily altering her ethnicity and appearance. When she arrives to Mrs. Maple's home outside of Brighton, she is dressed in Elinor's castoffs. There, she acts in a play, taking on a lead role, and plays upon Selina's harp, which thrusts upon her the music profession. In Salisbury, she trades her clothes with Debby Dyson, which causes her to be mistaken for the light-mannered woman. Clothing is a key identifier, and as a seamstress who works under a milliner for a period of time, Juliet is often defined by what she wears. The wanted ad placed in the Salisbury newspaper, for example, describes what she was last seen to be wearing, and so she is required to change her clothing in order to remain unknown. Clothing often takes on a sexualized connotation in Burney's works

¹¹ These strangers, Juliet later learns, are poachers, not murderers.

and in her contemporary society.¹² A milliner's shop is often a hotbed of sexual immorality, with wealthy beaux and rakes flocking to notable shops where they might find the most innocent and lovely young sempstresses in order to accost, flirt, and cavort with them (Campbell 513). We see this in the case of Flora, whose rendezvous with Sir Lyell Sycamore is scuttled by a protective and outraged Juliet.

Andrea K. Henderson divides her analysis of *The Wanderer* into a discussion of Elinor as a political activist and Juliet as an economic activist. She writes of the fetishism of consumerism, which a number of critics have discussed in relation to all of Burney's novels (104-11). The importance of Juliet's clothing as a defining characteristic of her identity is of importance here, as commodities during the time were given a sense of individuality. With the mass production of goods in the wake of the industrial revolution, items that were unusual in addition to being fashionable and of the best quality were highly valued. By identifying Juliet in such a manner, Burney recreates her as a commodity, a submissive item to be bought and sold with no autonomy whatsoever. She is objectified, first as a helpless curiosity on the boat, then as Miss Arbe's musical discovery. Upon seeing the pink fabric Miss Arbe has purchased for her protégée "with the unspoken aim of packaging and presenting her as a public performer" (Henderson 115), Miss Crawley remarks "Why then The Ellis will be The doll!" (314). Juliet herself rails against this, as we see by the continual exchange of goods and clothing she conducts, but she cannot escape it because she is restricted by her own self-questioned, self-imposed limitations as a woman of character, morals, and breeding. These limitations are very much in line with the codes of behavior present in *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*. I suggest that they are not merely self-

¹²The critical failure of the author herself is perplexing, as described in terms of appearance and attire by John Wilson Croker. He writes in the 1814 *Quarterly Review* that Burney is "an old coquette who endeavours, by the wild tawdriness and laborious gaiety of her attire, to compensate for the loss of the natural charms of freshness, novelty, and youth" (qtd. in Straub, Introduction 28-9).

imposed but rather developed by contemporary society, then internalized by women and so adopted as personal codes rather than being recognized as the rigid mores of a stubbornly patriarchal culture.

The power of male-dominated society over women is obvious in all four of Burney's novels, but perhaps seen most profoundly in *The Wanderer* because of the blatant political, economic, and social criticism it offers. Even Elinor, who views herself as liberated in means and mindset, disguises herself as a man to make a successful escape from the prying eyes of family and society. No realm is safe, though Juliet clings to the belief that the traditionally female space of the home will grant her the security she desires: "Alas! she cried, "is it only under the domestic roof,—that roof to me denied!—that woman can know safety, respect, and honour?" (666). Juliet herself has been assaulted verbally, psychologically, and sometimes physically in each of the homes she occupies throughout the novel, from Mrs. Maples' manor to the apartment she keeps in Brighton. We have seen such treatment before: in *Evelina* with the joke-playing Captain, *Cecilia* with the financially desperate Harrels, and in *Camilla* with Lionel, the agonizing brother. However, the degradation that dogs women's heels within the home and without is nowhere more poignantly and painfully illustrated than in *The Wanderer*. Here Burney offers a sharply written account of the puppet-like performance expected of the appropriately submissive wife. This abrupt exercise of husbandly authority is signaled in the way the reader enters the scene, through the eyes of Harleigh, whose room Juliet has just left. We are yanked from his ponderings in real time when he hears "a shriek of agony" and dashes to the unknown lady's rescue (726). He finds the woman, whom we know to be Juliet, trapped in the hall by the Pilot, whose arms stretch from wall to wall to block her escape. She is completely submissive, with her face "bowed down upon her hands" (726). When she attempts a wary retreat, backing up slowly

down the hall until her fingers grasp a locked doorknob, the Commissary, “wearing an air of ferocious authority,” strides down the hall, seizes her arm, and lifts her bonnet “to examine her face” to confirm her identity (726). The Frenchman is colored in a negative light, described as “diabolical,” “dressed with disgusting negligence, and of hideous countenance” with “horrible features” in contrast to the spic-and-span chivalry of Harleigh, who continues to look upon the trio (726-7).

Only when Harleigh is able to see her face and confirm that the damsel in distress is indeed his lady love does he interfere. But even he dares not intrude upon a legal engagement between man and woman. Harleigh is speechless when Juliet casts “herself at the feet of her assailant,” and though he is “thunderstruck,” he holds himself back (727). The verb “cast” is repeated in quick synchrony to create the image of Juliet caught as if by a net, trapped like a fish. When she will not walk with the Commissary downstairs, he drags her until she, doll-like, acquiesces to his demand. “The man roughly gave her a push; seeming to enjoy, with a coarse laugh, the pleasure of driving her on before him” (727). The Frenchman takes pleasure in the violence he views as his right to commit, but those looking on fittingly adopt Harleigh’s undisguised horror. By offering these dueling perspectives, Burney allows the Frenchman to recreate the scene as a grotesque joke in the style of Captain Mirvan. But because the audience watches this scene purely through the eyes of Harleigh, we empathize with his emotions and so perceive violence only. The Commissary’s rewriting of the scene is therefore unsuccessful, suggesting that Burney’s final judgment of grotesque scenes of comic violence perpetrated against women at the hands of men is inarguably unsympathetic. There is no humor here to dull the horror, she seems to say, and so turns our focus purely to the negative aspects of the atrocities

her early nineteenth-century society deemed acceptable as entertainment and as commonplace tools to confirm the power structure.

As the scene continues, Juliet's ability to speak evaporates. At first, she is able to speak "in broken accents, and in French" (727). Her later words of protest are "faintly uttered" (728). When the Frenchman dares her to speak and contradict his claim upon her, "she was mute" (728). Only her shrieks express her psychological agony. At last, she is rendered "utterly silent" and barely able to stand under her own power (728). Harleigh, now, begs her to speak:

Speak, Madam, speak!—Pronounce but with your eyes that he has no legal claim, and I will instantly secure your liberty,—even from myself!—even from all mankind!—
Speak!—turn!—look but a moment this way!—One word! One single word! (729)

Even for promises of eternal freedom, Juliet cannot turn her back on the indoctrinated acceptance of marriage vows, though hers were taken under threat of death. She has been contracted to the man and he may legally use and abuse her as he will. Her inability to speak a single word that might allow Harleigh to rescue her shows her recognition of this social, legal, and cultural fact. She has become property and as such, her free will is gone and she is trapped, leaving the Commissary to brandish the key in triumph.

Juliet does not remain in the Commissary's forceful grasp for long, but her liberation is through no effort of her own. She is freed not by Harleigh, but by the well-timed appearance of a peace officer who arrives bearing orders to arrest the Frenchman. Away he goes, kicking and cursing, too easily and too conveniently, perhaps, but as is the pattern for Romantic heroines, Juliet could not be so encumbered by the close of the fifth volume. She is not, however, as free as she seems. In the last chapter of *The Wanderer*, Juliet finds her French marriage annulled, and then herself first engaged and then married to Harleigh. Throughout all of this, she says not a word. There is no acceptance of the eager Englishman's proposal, no word of gratitude or

suffering or resignation. Though we find Burney aligning herself with the gothic instead of the grotesque in this, her final novel, *The Wanderer* is not so very different from the preceding three. As we see here and in both *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, though the men make speeches aplenty, the heroine finds herself ultimately silenced.

Though the majority of contemporary critics regarded *The Wanderer* as a work far inferior to her first literary ventures, in it Burney shows a keen grasp of genre characteristics, and more notably, an ability to manipulate them to create something new and resistant to singular classifications. As I have discussed, *The Wanderer* is a gothic text that diverges from its peers while retaining many of the genre-alluding signposts. Key among them is the use of the sublime, a theoretical element of the gothic that Edmund Burke wrote upon at length in 1757. The source of the sublime is extreme passion, he writes, and the most powerful passions are those that evoke concern for self-preservation, namely pain and danger. Such passion fills “the mind with strong emotions of horror” (Burke 112). In penning her beloved heroine as the tormented victim of such a villain as the Commissary, Burney is able to develop a profound a sense of the sublime, which moves her readers to a sympathetic experience of terror. The author is further able to heighten the experience of terrific sublimity by aligning readers with Harleigh, whose emotions of romantic love for Juliet compound his natural feelings of terror at seeing the woman he adores so abused. Such a combination of passions results in his astonishment at the situation—that Juliet could be married at all and to such a man, that she could be so treated, that he could be helpless to effect its cessation. Burke writes that “astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” (113).

More to the point, however, is Burke’s discussion of power and its relevance to the scene of Juliet’s absolute submission to the Commissary. “Pain is always inflicted by a power in some

way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly,” he writes, “so that strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together” (116). Burke asks us to “look at a man, or any other animal of prodigious strength” and consider if we would think him subservient. “No,” he answers. We would feel terror because of his ability to hurt us (116-7). Juliet recognizes the power the Commissary holds over her because he is “large made, tall, and strong” (727) and quite capable of asserting his rights “by force” (729). But the sublime emotion she feels is not simply created out of her fear of his strength being used for her own physical destruction. He also holds the institutional power similar to that of kings and other commanders. This type of power “has the same connection with terror,” Burke writes. “Indeed so natural is this timidity with regard to power, and so strongly does it adhere in our constitution, that very few are able to conquer it” (118). The dominance bestowed upon leaders through institutions mirrors the power of men over women in domestic situations—a power also created by social institutions. Juliet fears not just the Commissary’s fist or his French legal and military authority, but the institution through which he is able to hold her hostage. She is terrified of the marriage itself. Ironic, then, that the final pages of *The Wanderer* would find her once more entrapped, though subservient to a different man.

With the sometimes-comic violence that colors her marriage plots a questionable gray, it is curious that Frances Burney tied the matrimonial knot herself at forty-two years of age, making a love match that she rebelled against her father to secure. More curious, however, is the manner in which her marriage has been remembered. A memorial panel in the Poet’s Corner window at Westminster Abbey was unveiled on June 13, 2002. It’s a small dedication to the woman whom the Abbey eulogizes as the “mother of English fiction,” bearing only the years of her life and the name that has been most often associated with her novels: Frances Burney

(“Frances Burney”). The Abbey has settled critical dissent over what to call the “protean” author (Rizzo 195), settling on the more polite of her maiden monikers while throwing the dated and diminutive “Fanny” out the proverbial window. The vision of the old woman who died in 1840 as Madame D’Arblay has been divorced, it seems, from her fiction-writing self, though her career as a novelist spanned both her years as a young lady and a married woman and mother. Though the D’Arblay name still clings to the older volumes of her letters and diaries, her novels and plays have reverted to the holdings of one Frances—sometimes enduringly called Fanny—Burney.

Naming: it is a key element in all her novels and is always inextricably linked to economic concerns and social hierarchy. Though reality is often far less complex than the twisting plot lines Burney dreamed up, the ambiguity present in her fiction remains a hallmark of her life. She was the adoring daughter who resented but never questioned her father’s intrusion upon her work. She was the social critic who accepted against her will a post in Queen Charlotte’s court. She was the young woman who railed against marriage in her early diary and later married a poverty-stricken émigré. Like her heroines, she both upheld social restrictions upon women’s freedom and the power structures that created them, and pushed against the boundaries they imposed, seeking not a hole through which to escape but just a bit of breathing room. The comic violence we see steadily in *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla* comes at moments of climax. These grotesque situations highlight the habits, behaviors, and entertainments of late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century society that Burney would correct if she had the power to do so. She fears largely for the security of women, young and old, healthy and infirm, and the amount of power men of all ages and socioeconomic classes hold over them.

In her earlier works, she favors a revival of chivalry as a means of protecting womankind while still ensuring the continued existence of the patriarchal power structure. As early as *Cecilia*, however, she expresses a sense of resignation, a sort of exhausted acquiescence of the existing system rather than an affirmation of it. Man in the eventual form of the knight in shining armor always comes to her heroines' rescue in the end, but this result doesn't seem to make up for the abuse inflicted throughout the journey. The rescue is delayed longer and longer in Burney's later novels and the desperation of the heroines becomes more and more keen. She heightens the horror, eventually abandoning comedy in favor of the sublime passion created by ultimate pain and ultimate fear. In *The Wanderer*, the silencing of her heroine is absolute and final, as though this scripted reality is a representation of the inevitable. Hope is almost entirely lost. It would seem that Burney has, indeed, lost her wonder and become increasingly less convinced in the goodness of the social paradigm by which she lives and writes. She seeks an alternative; but alas, it seems there is none.

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