

**FRANCES BURNEY AND
SARAH HARRIET
BURNEY: A
COMPARISON
BETWEEN *THE
WANDERER* (1814) AND
THE RENUNCIATION
(1839)**

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Abstract

The British novelist Sarah Harriet Burney (1772-1844) achieved great popularity at the beginning of the nineteenth century, although she was always overshadowed by her half-sister, the celebrated Frances Burney (1752-1840). This paper aims to throw some new light on both novelists and revises how each Burney sister dealt with three key issues in Burney Studies (female identity, the young artist's position in society and cultural alterity or "Otherness") in their works *The Wanderer* (1814) and *The Renunciation* (1839). It will also provide the opportunity to introduce to current readers an outstanding novelist who has much in common with later British women writers, such as George Eliot. Thanks to her experiences and her narrative craft, Sarah Harriet incorporated new elements to the domestic novel or the novel of education, and she registered the important changes affecting early

Resumen

La novelista británica Sarah Harriet Burney (1772-1844) alcanzó una gran popularidad a principios del siglo diecinueve, aunque siempre estuvo a la sombra de su hermana, la aclamada Frances Burney (1752-1840). Este trabajo intenta arrojar nueva luz sobre ambas novelistas y reexamina el tratamiento de tres temas clave en los llamados Burney Studies (la identidad femenina, la posición social de la joven artista y la alteridad cultural) en sus novelas *The Wanderer* (1814) y *The Renunciation* (1839). También ofrece la oportunidad de presentar a los lectores actuales a una novelista destacada que tiene mucho en común con escritoras británicas posteriores como George Eliot. Gracias a sus experiencias y genio narrativo, la hermana menor incorporó nuevos elementos a la novela doméstica o novela de educación y plasmó los importantes cambios sociales de principios de la época

Victorian society.

victoriana.

Key Words: Sarah Harriet Burney, Burney Studies, nineteenth-century literature, gender studies, British novel.

Palabras clave: Sarah Harriet Burney, Burney Studies, literatura del siglo XIX, estudios de género, novela británica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Apart from the achievements of her father, Dr. Charles Burney, as a musicologist (*A General History of Music* [1776-1789]), no other Burney has attracted so much interest in the realm of eighteenth-century studies as the British novelist Frances Burney, Fanny Burney or Mme d'Arblay (1752-1840) has. Jane Austen paid homage to Frances in *Northanger Abbey* (published posthumously in 1818), where a lady states that she only reads if:

It is only Cecilia, or Camilla or Belinda', or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.³⁹ (Austen 1990:22)

The publication of *Evelina* (1778) was followed by three novels,⁴⁰ an essay,⁴¹ and several comedies⁴² and tragedies,⁴³ which meant Frances's consolidation as a canonical authoress. Thanks to her wit and experiences, the British novelist had material enough to present the complex lives of women at the close of the eighteenth century, and she touched on subjects still relevant for women nowadays. Feminist scholars –such as Julia Epstein (1989), Katherine Rogers (1982), Kristina Straub (1987), Catherine Craft-Fairchild (1993), Barbara Zonitch (1997) or Audrey Bilger (1998)– have already stressed and praised Frances's social dimension in their monographs, and they have tried to

³⁹ Austen also appreciated Sarah Harriet's *Clarentine*, which was read aloud to the family (Clark 1995:17).

⁴⁰ *Cecilia* (1782), *Camilla* (1786) and *The Wanderer* (1814).

⁴¹ *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793).

⁴² *The Witlings* (1779), *The Woman Hater* (1802), *Love and Fashion* (1798) and *A Busy Day* (1800-2).

⁴³ *Edwy and Elgiva* (1788-9), *Hubert de Vere*, *The Siege of Pevensey* and *Elberta* (all of them composed between 1789-91).

dismantle her traditional image as the proper lady who spent five unhappy years at Windsor as Second Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte and later married the French *émigré* Alexandre D'Arblay. Researchers have extensively worked on Burney's prolific corpus and they have also contextualised her in her family (see Clark 1995, 2000 and 2007; Frankus 2007). Now there is even an internationally recognised Burney Society (BS) –a competitor of The Jane Austen Society, and with scholars as eminent as Peter Sabor and Margaret A. Doody, Burney's main biographer–, and the publications *The Burney Journal* and *The Burney Letter*.

It is time to turn our attention to Frances's sister, Sarah Harriet Burney (1772-1844) –“Sall” in the family circle–, whose work has recently been rescued from oblivion thanks to Dr. Lorna Clark, the editor of her letters and her most famous novel, *The Romance of Private Life* (1839), comprised of *The Renunciation* and *The Hermitage* (see Fernández 2010). For Walter Savage Landor, Sarah Harriet was “one of the most agreeable and intelligent women I have met” (Sadler 1869:521); however, her life was marked by the scandal of having maintained an incestuous relationship with her brother, the circumnavigator James Burney, who provided the model for the hero in some works (Burney Sarah Harriet 2008: xiii). Educated in Switzerland (1781-83), Frances's sister was fluent in French and she had some skill in music. Like her sibling, Sarah Harriet suffered the early loss of her mother, and, during the last years of Charles Burney's life, she nursed and helped him to transcribe his manuscripts. A lover of Italy and frequent visitor to Rome and Florence, where she lived for some years, Sarah Harriet always resorted to literature as a means to raise her income and as a therapy against boredom (Clark 2003b:42-3). Her first novel was *Clarentine* (1796), followed by the epistolary work *Geraldine Fauconberg* (1808); *Traits of Nature* (1812); *Tales of Fancy* (1816-20) – including *The Shipwreck* and *Country Neighbours; or The Secret*– and *The Romance of Private Life*, exemplifying how the feminocentric romance could be fused with sensationalist elements and satire (Clark 2003a:165). Though Frances's sister lost her appeal for readers afterwards, she was an authoress as well-known as Frances was during the nineteenth century, and her merits cannot be underrated. Several novels by Sarah Harriet ran to second editions, they were translated into French and German and pirated abroad. What is more, sometimes Sarah Harriet's works were openly preferred to Frances's ones (Clark 2000:122), and, according to Clark, the former's novels are of interest “not only for the light they shed on her sister-novelists with whom they share common issues and concerns but also *in and of themselves*” (2000:131, my italics).

Nineteenth-century reviewers used to relate Sarah Harriet and Frances. *The Monthly Review* perceived “A family likeness” in their works,⁴⁴ in *Critical Review* resemblances of character were discovered as “old acquaintances only in different situations”,⁴⁵ and, for another critic, “[T]hey share the same taste for romantic and improbable adventures” (qtd. in Clark 2007:49). Clark explains that the youngest sister’s novels were regarded as inferior copies of old favourites (2000:122), and later she still sketches in an article (2007) and in her introduction to *A Romance* (Burney 2008:xi-xxvii) some parallels between Agnes Danvers’s adventures and Juliet Granville’s ones in Frances’s last novel, published twenty-five years earlier. According to this critic, Agnes is a less pragmatic heroine –even sentimentally– than Juliet and a woman who maintains herself with her work (Clark 2007:50-1). Far from disagreeing with Clark, we will re-examine these points in common and analyse how Frances and Sarah Harriet approached four key issues in Burney Studies, namely female identity, the young artist’s position, cultural alterity or “Otherness” an affection in *The Wanderer* and *The Renunciation*.⁴⁶ We will see that Sarah Harriet dealt more extensively with affection and presented a less interested view of society than the one portrayed in *The Wanderer*. By adding some dimensions to Sarah Harriet’s work, the ultimate goal is to vindicate this novelist’s individual worth and to introduce her to current readers, who frequently assimilate all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers to a single pattern. Due to the limited research on Sarah Harriet, we will take as a reference the existing criticism on Frances.

2. “WHO ARE YOU?”: JULIET GRANVILLE’S SLIPPERY IDENTITY

Though *Evelina* has traditionally been more praised, *The Wanderer* is Frances’s most mature and most explicitly feminist work (Skinner 2001:197), and it raised diverse reactions since its publication. Most reviews were negative

⁴⁴ Second series 21 (1796): 452-56 (see Clark 2007:56, note 43).

⁴⁵ Third Series 16 (1809): 104-5 (qtd. in Clark 2000:122).

⁴⁶ Burney scholars have already analysed these aspects in *The Wanderer*, where the best explored issue is female identity, recently revised by Kate Chisholm (1999) and Emily Anderson Hodgson (2005). On art, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace (1994), Leya Landau (2005) and Carmen María Fernández (2007). On nation and nationalities, see Tamara Wagner (2004) and Marie Antoinette Sol (1997).

because critics expected a portrait of Parisian life instead of a critique of British society (see Hemlow 1958:338). Nowadays the novel is still attacked, but primarily due to stylistic reasons (see Taliafero 1916:34; Hemlow 1958:339-42; or Daugherty 1988:18). On the other hand, Edward W. Copeland regards *The Wanderer* as one of the most interesting works of its age as a document on women's reaction to post-revolutionary economy (1976:34), and Bugnot appreciates its satiric and humoristic vein, the echo of new ideas, the variety of scenes and portrait of manners (1962:232). For Janice Farrar Thaddeus, though there are many characters, they constitute the best part of the novel (2000:157), and Doody praises Juliet as Frances's best heroine (1988:319). The work contains an explicit feminist critique, and most articles have been centred on Juliet's lack of social recognition –discussed at different levels and including her identity as a foreign woman– and on the opposition between Juliet and the much more attractive anti-heroine, the Jacobine Elinor Joddrel. Therefore, the first feminist readings, such as Patricia M. Spacks's one (1976), perceive a change in the novelist's production, and Kristina Straub (1987) considers *The Wanderer* a critique of patriarchal power purposefully articulated through the victimisation of the heroine.

Structurally *The Wanderer* is an Aethiopic novel and a “travelogue” with certain touches of Gothic intrigue. It deals with the adventures of a mysterious outcast who leaves France under a false identity and faces the incomprehension of ultraconservative English people who do not value her efforts to earn her bread. *The Wanderer* offers a wide spectrum of women of the upper and middle classes with whom Juliet speaks and who reveal their experiences and various ideologies. Towards the middle of the novel, it is discovered that she is an aristocrat's daughter and that she was forced to espouse an awful French commissary. Juliet finally marries the man she loves, Albert Harleigh, after recovering her legal position. Juliet is a woman of multiple identities with two main names through the narrative: Ellis –resembling the French pronoun *elle* and encapsulating the feminine essence– and Juliet –which reveals her French filiation. Despite appearances, the protagonist is an aristocrat on her father's side, and, as Doody argues, patriarchy is hyperrepresented through three fathers: Lord Granville, Lord Denmeath and the Bishop (her biological, legal, and moral fathers respectively) (1988:323). Juliet's story has all the ingredients of a Gothic novel: an absent dominant father, her mother's early death, the lack of legal recognition and her education in a convent. The recovery of her status depends on a document, and she has an abominable husband who only seeks her wealth (6,000 pounds).

Critical reactions to *The Renunciation* were mainly negative (Clark 2000:122; 2007:49) with the exception of *New Monthly Magazine*, whose reviewer considered *The Renunciation* “a capital production in its way, and

claims the very first rank in the class to which it belongs” (qtd. by Clark 1997:442, note 2). For Clark, one of its most relevant features is “the ways it doubles back upon itself in multiplied motifs of lost or kidnapped heirs, unloved, abused children, and fraudulent guardians, enveloped in clouds of bankruptcy and ruin” (2001:77). This kaleidoscopic narrative called “my little booky” by the authoress (Clark 1997:440) focuses on the experiences of a young girl, Agnes Danvers, who is kidnapped and taken to Paris to be educated there and to live as the aristocrat Lucy de Vere. Agnes undergoes little development as a character while Juliet is always represented as an experienced woman. In spite of her comfortable life, Agnes feels alone and tries to communicate with her brother William. She travels to Rome, where she supports herself as an artist and meets Mr. St. Hubert, until the painful mystery surrounding her existence is unravelled. Agnes turns out to be the daughter of Mr. Wharton, whose deceased wife had a daughter called Lucy de Vere by a first marriage. Mr. Wharton has made Agnes pass for Lucy in order to maintain his gentleman position, and it is thanks to Mr. St. Hubert’s generosity that the protagonist and Walsingham finally get married.

Like Juliet, Agnes is given numerous names: from the French Agnes –the name of maids– (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:29), to Lucy De Vere (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:34) and Miss Wharton. In *The Renunciation*, Agnes’s social status is different from that of Juliet because she marries an aristocrat, Frances’s vital obsession, which she eventually achieved in real life. Agnes Danvers is simply a trademan’s daughter, and she is reluctant to use the surname “de Vere” (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:137). On the other hand, the novel is as endogamic as the one by Frances, and both heroines regain their real families. In *The Wanderer*, Juliet meets her maternal uncle and her half-siblings, Lady Aurora and Lord Melbury. Likewise, in *The Renunciation*, William Danvers, the painter, and Mr. St Hubert are respectively Agnes’s cousin and uncle whereas Harry turns out to be Mr. Wharton’s son –and Agnes’s half-brother–, and he unsuccessfully declares his love to Agnes (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:44).

One of the traits of women’s literature is the tendency to use doubles, or characters who are very close to the protagonists, and function as mirrors or projections of what could have happened to them under other circumstances. In Frances’s novel, women of different social classes assimilate to Juliet in certain aspects: the British Lady Aurora and the French Gabriella have been brought up as aristocratic ladies, and Flora works side by side with Juliet, for example. What interests us is that this also appears in *The Renunciation*, but regarding two dead women. The first one is the sick heiress Lucy de Vere, on whom Agnes mournfully reflects:

Why has a stranger been substituted in thy place? Wretch that I am! How I hate myself for having been so long the unresisting usurper of all thy rights!

How many indications ought ere this, to have pointed out to me that Lucy de Vere was no imaginary personage! But I shut my eyes against conviction, and have been living contently upon the reward earned by my silent and base acquiescence. Oh, forgive me, gracious heaven, and vouchsafe to aid me in the task of extricating myself from this guilty path. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:46)

According to Walsingham's account, his half-sister and mysterious travel companion, Georgiana, has died, and she declared her desire to live concealed and to be buried discreetly (Burney 2008:215). Sarah Harriet used to ask their relatives about her work (Clark 1995:17). Her timid attitude towards the novel greatly departs from the one in Frances's fiction where self-effacement always becomes a strategy to affirm oneself and heroines struggle to live in the world as much as Frances insisted on being a novelist in her prefaces to *Evelina* and *The Wanderer* and in her journals through the figure of "Nobody" (Spender 1986:282; Doody 1988:41; Hemlow 1958:26, 30).

3. "MORE ENGAGING THAN BEAUTY HERSELF": A YOUNG ARTIST'S ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD

The Burneys lived in an artistic household where art was commercialised and self-display was continuous. During her childhood and adolescence, Frances met diverse artists and intellectuals, such as the lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson, the playwright Richard B. Sheridan, or the actors David Garrick and Samuel Foote. Frances was always attracted by the stage –she wanted to be a dramatist–, and Juliet is an accomplished artist who can play the harp, dance and draw. The upper classes favoured these social graces, and a lady could also excel at penmanship, deportment and have some knowledge of French. Nevertheless, Latin and Greek –the ticket for entering medicine and the Anglican Church– were effectively closed to females, as well as the newer commercial skills and scientific subjects. As for portrait-painting, it was condemned by Johnson for "Publick [sic] practice of any art [...] and staring in men's faces, is very indelicate in a female" (qtd. in Boswell 1980:625-6). History painting, the noblest form of artistic expression in the eighteenth century, was considered unsuitable for women because it placed men at the moral centre of painting and because it required a strong classical education which women lacked. Therefore, women devoted themselves to portraiture,

landscape or still-life. According to Anne K. Mellor, one of the most remarkable features in British culture at the turn of the century was the feminisation of literary discourse and of “sister arts”, such as painting or music (1993:5-7). However, a woman who set out to have a career fought against the accepted definition of feminine nature and male prerogative in terms of profession and success.⁴⁷ That is the reason why Juliet avoids performing in public. She is also critical and accurately discriminates:

Wide is the difference between exhibiting that which we have attained only for that purpose, from the knowledge of dispensing knowledge to others [...] to disseminate knowledge, by clearing that which is obscure, and explaining that which is difficult; to make what is hard appear easy, by giving facility to the execution of what is abstruse to the conception; to lighten the fatigue of practice, by the address of method; to shorten what requires study, by anticipating its result; and, while demonstrating effects to expound their cause: by the rules of art, to hide the want of science; and to supply the dearth of genius, by divulging the secrets of embellishments [sic]; –these were labours that demanded not alone brilliant talents, which she amply possessed, but a fund of scientific knowledge, to which she formed no pretensions. (Burney, Frances 1991:288)

Her concern for keeping her virtue intact is directly linked to Juliet’s problems as a professional. On the one hand, Juliet works as a seamstress, she has a haberdasher with her friend Gabriella and is a milliner and a governess, some of the professions open to middle-class women, as well as teaching or owning a retail business (Davidoff and Hall 1987:272-315). Nevertheless, Juliet is constantly ill-treated by the upper classes, and, if Miss Bydel and Miss Arbe advance some money to her, it is solely to take advantage of “The Ellis”.⁴⁸ On the other hand, William Hazlitt believed that the novel presented women as physically and mentally weak human beings:

They learn the idiom of character and manner, as they acquire that of language, by rote merely, without troubling themselves about the principles. Their observation is not the less accurate on that account, as far as it goes; for it has being well said, that ‘there is nothing so true as habit.’ (1815:336)

According to Hazlitt, Frances had formed a romantic and impracticable image of how a lady should behave and this leads her to create faulty heroines. As for the subtitle of the novel, “Female Difficulties”, Hazlitt pointed out “*The Wanderer* raises obstacles, ‘lighter than the gossamer that idles in the wanton

⁴⁷ On women artists and patriarchal art, see Nancy Armstrong (1987:77), Davidoff and Hall (1987:309), Diaconoff (1988:202), and Johnson (1995:62-3).

⁴⁸ Fernández has analysed how Juliet’s difficulties as an artist are directly voiced by Giles Arbe (2007:142-3).

summer air' into insurmountable barriers" (1815:338). Juliet aspires to sustain herself, aware that "[t]he least mistake, the smallest imprudence might betray me to insupportable wretchedness" (Burney, Frances 1991:36) and that "[a]ll public appeals are injurious to female fame" (Burney, Frances 1991:146). *Theatrical Review*, could not accept that a virtuous lady endured so much: "the vulgarity of her [Mrs Maple's] habits, subjects the fair incognita to insults and embarrassments which a strong mind would have repelled with spirit, and by which a weak one would have subdued" (1814:237). For *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, Juliet's behaviour was inconsistent because she allowed insults and lacked "strength of intellect and all sense or propriety" (1814:350). Juliet insists on paying her debts instead of resorting to a man (Burney, Frances 1991:282, 604), but people frequently take her for an actress or a prostitute and find her in compromising situations. In *The Renunciation*, some doubt is cast on Agnes's virtue when the protagonist corresponds with Harry, and Bertha makes her realise what this implies: "Break it off, dearest, whilst it is yet time; unless, indeed, you think it possible that the tired fidelity of your lover, aided by your own compassion for him, may eventually, soften your feelings in his favour" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:76). Similarly, the bachelor St Hubert, who is very similar to Sir Jaspar in *The Wanderer*, relates his life to Agnes (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:153-5), who prefers to travel through Italy in the company of a lady to avoid any comment (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:156).

Agnes has an artistic side and is conscious of the power of beauty and of being a producer of beauty. Unlike Juliet in *The Wanderer*, Agnes is not forced to perform in public, and she is a charitable artist willing to help others with her vocation and whose work is rewarded in an age of incipient consumerism. Thanks to the paintings she gives to the old painter, he gets some money (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:110), and Agnes becomes an independent woman because they share profits (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:133). In Rome, happiness and self-realisation join because, instead of being regarded as a passive aristocrat or a neglected art-producer, Agnes achieves recognition as an artist:

She was courted in societies where none could gain admittance, who had no recommendations far superior to any than mere wealth or personal attractions could bestow. She was here introduced to individuals rendered eminent either by genius –by conversational powers of a high order, by brilliant accomplishments or by some other distinguished endowment, calculated to give charm and interest to their presence. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:181)

Sarah Harriet worked as a governess herself, and, like Juliet in *The Wanderer*, Agnes experiences a professional travelogue in *The Renunciation*. When Agnes was a child, she helped to sew caps, and Monsieur Leroux, whose family temporarily lodges the girl, is a florist and a *plumassier*, a man who

trades with ornaments as milliners and mantua makers do in *The Wanderer*. Agnes's sensibility and intelligence do not pass unnoticed: "superadded to her capacity of attaining accomplishments, she possessed a vigour of understanding, a clearness of judgement, and a soundness of practical good sense rarely to be met with even in the most intelligent of her own sex" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:36). She becomes proficient in French and dancing, and her portrait of the Dupuis children is revered:

There was so much nature, ease, and grace in the attitudes of the two children –they were both so pretty, the girl especially, and they seemed to have been stuck off with such admirable facility, that Lady Glenfeld protested, she had scarcely ever seen any drawings that had given her so much pleasure. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:131)

St Hubert is so surprised by her talent (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:152) that he offers to be his patron in Florence and discusses some paintings with Agnes in the Palazzo Pitti (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:170), which provides the opportunity to introduce some reflections on art in a novel produced by an artist's daughter:

The eye requires to be gradually exercised and educated before it can appreciate the attainments of real genius of any description. In poetry, for instance, an ignorant man, or child (which is nearly synonymous) will delight in a familiar ballad, and turn from a sublime ode, or a classical epic with indifference; a wax figure, coloured, and gaudily decked out will please a peasant more than the noblest marble statue; and where has there ever been a servant, or an uninformed mechanic, that has not found more amusement at a shewy pantomime, or a vulgar farce, than at a regular dramatic production, however admirable? It is the same with painting and music, and every other talent, the produce of a high degree of civilization and refinement; and I fear there are many who class themselves amongst the really well-educated, who, if they were honest, would own that the portrait of a favourite horse, or fox-hound, or the minute finish of a Dutch green-stall, gave them a thousand times more gratification, than the works of all the Italian masters put together. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:170-1)

On another occasion, Agnes expresses her aesthetic taste to St. Hubert and vindicates the beautiful or the picturesque, considered as less important than the sublime or the transcendental:

How glad I should be if you would comfort me with the assurance that it is not very unpardonable to prefer the *beautiful* to the *sublime*. To tell you the honest truth, I almost hate the more tremendous features of nature, and find inexpressible pleasure in surveying scenes of cheerfulness, cultivation and fertility. It is unjust to say that such scenes are deficient in variety. No two landscapes –no two points of view in which the same landscape can be seen, are ever alike; some bend in a river; some new appearance in lights and

shadows upon the distant hills; some change at every turn of the road in the disposition of the trees, and a thousand other accidental causes, occasion a perpetual diversity, and are quite sufficient to enchant us without the accompaniment of roaring torrents, unfathomable precipices, threatening avalanches, or any of the other horrors that constitute the bleak, desolate, and terrific characteristics of the sublime. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:205-6)

The attention to detail and the emphasis on the emotional and the particular is related to women's world in *The Renunciation*. Instead of focussing on the kind of artistic subjects or on the kind of artistic approach, what we find in *The Wanderer* is a brave assertion of the artist as a professional:

She had here time and opportunity to see the fallacy, alike in authors and in the world, of judging solely by theory. Those who are born and bred in a capital; who first revel in its dissipations and vanities, next, sicken of its tumult and disappointments, write or exclaim for ever, how happy is the country peasant's lot! They reflect not that, to make it such, the peasant must be so much more philosophic than the rest of mankind, so as to see and feel only his advantages, while he is blind and insensible to his hardships. Then, indeed, the lot of the peasant might merit envy!

But who is that gives it celebrity? Is it himself? Does he write of his own joys? Does he boast of his own contentment? Does he praise his own lot? No! 'tis the writer, who has never tried it, and the man of the world who, however murmuring at his own, would not change with it, that give it celebrity. (Burney 1814:700)

Agnes is also perceptive and conscious of the artificiality of the world when she hears Harry declaiming and wittily retorts: "Must you either tear a passion to rags, or set us all to sleep?" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:41). Sarah Harriet takes artistic compromise further than her sister and also supports realism in the novel, an artistic approach far from over-sensationalism and excessive emotion. When Agnes cannot paint Lady Isabel, St. Hubert wisely advises to her: "You must try and accustom yourself to deal with as many different tempers as faces. The path you are now pursuing is not always strewn with rose leaves, so sew a garden for them in your own good-natured bosom" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:189). The moral tone resembles the Duchess's comforting letters in *The Wanderer*, and St. Hubert points out concerning the beautiful and the sublime:

Whilst you are a traveller [...] I would advise you to cultivate a taste for *both*, since it is impossible near the Alps and Apennines, to avoid encountering as many horrors as beauties. At the same time, I am ready to acknowledge, that I believe there is a vast deal of *humbug* in the enthusiasm so often professed on these matters. To a poet's eye, 'in a fine phrenzy rolling', sublimity may indeed be congenial, and in his verse he may give it shape and stamp it with the impress of his own genius, setting every image distinctly before his

readers; but that the common run of town-bred travellers should suddenly become such ranging admirers of these tremendous scenes, surpasses my powers of believe. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:206)

4. THE VIEW FROM ENGLAND

At this time of political unease in England, women were welcome on all sides into the arena of political discussion. Like Charlotte Smith (*The Banished Man*, 1794) or Elizabeth Hamilton (*Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 1800), Frances was one of those women writers of the 1790s who voiced her ideas about how the French Revolution had affected the life of individuals.⁴⁹ She had defended the French in her essay *Brief Reflections*, which is not at all strange after her marriage to the Constitutionalist D' Arblay. According to Todd (1989:196), with the Jacobines there was a period of radicalisation and the English began to define themselves in anti-French terms. In *The Wanderer* we find the prejudices of the English towards the French, particularly towards French women, who are branded deceivers as Riley points out (“They are clever beings, those French, they are, faith! Always playing fools’ tricks like monkeys, yet always lighting right upon their feet. Like so many cats” (Burney1814:17)), and the République is insulted by Mr. Scope:

I should wish to enquire, what good they [the French] expect to accrue by proclaiming, one day, that there is no religion, and then, the next day, making a new one by the figure of a woman. It is hardly to be supposed that such sort of fickleness can serve to make a government respectable. (Burney, Frances 1991:269)

The immoderate insularity and entrenched prejudices of the English middle and upper classes are particular objects of attack. *The Wanderer* contains many stereotyped images, and France becomes the synonymous with Robespierre and evil. For instance, Gooch and Mr. Scope criticise the manners and morals of the French and the perversion of democracy: “all made into generals, in the twinkling, as one may say, of an eye” (Burney, Frances 1991:79). According to this character, the French are seen as poor people who do not cultivate the fields: “they are such a boggling set of farmers, that they grew nothing but what comes, as one may say, of itself” (Burney, Frances 1991:467). Gabriella is one of the few positive portraits of France, and she illustrates to Sir Jasper the

⁴⁹ On the relationship between Gallophobia and the domestic sphere, see Mary Poovey (1984:16-7, 30)

penalties that French aristocrats endured during the Revolution, which, according to her, has had a levelling spirit:

Ah, Sir, the French Revolution has opened our eyes to a species of equality more rational, because more feasible, than that of lands or rank; an equality not alone of mental sufferings but of manual exertions. No state of life, however low, or however hard, has been untried, either by the highest, or by the most delicate, in the various dispersions and desolations of the ancient French nobility. (Burney, Frances 1991:639)

For Elinor, who espouses feminism and is an admirer of the Revolution and its principles, France has fortunately represented her awakening:

For myself I confess, from my happiness in going forth in the world at this sublime juncture, of turning men into infants, in order to teach them better how to grow up, I feel as if I have never awakened into life, till I had opened my eyes on that side of the channel. (Burney, Frances 1991:18)

Like her sister Frances, Sarah Harriet also lived abroad and had the opportunity to make contact with different European cultures. In *The Renunciation*, Agnes travels incognito from England to France, and she socialises there. Instead of resorting to direct criticism, Sarah Harriet does not question French culture and people, and she defends Englishness by offering a positive picture of everything related to her nation. Thus, English travellers appreciate what is English over what is Italian:

Why they came to a country they seemed to take Dutch pleasure in depreciating, it was not easy to divine. They undervalued in detail and in the gross, whatever was Italian; recounted a thousand extravagant and outrageous stories of the deliberate custom amongst servants of poisoning their masters for every provocation; declared they had never been engaged in any pecuniary transaction with an Italian, of whatever rank, without being infamously cheated; abused their houses, their soil, their productions, –their very climate! And exempted nothing from this sweeping censure but their oil and their ortolans! (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:162)

Criminals and people occupying an undeserved position are expelled from England while the English society portrayed in *The Wanderer* is not altered at all. Like Agnes, Juliet lives with the upper and the middle classes, and she is bilingual, but she cannot forget “the language in which she still thought, even when giving those *thoughts* in a foreign tongue” (Burney, Frances 1991:26). Class difference separates England and France and it is again linked to women when Agnes perceives that the Le Stranges want to be fashionable at any cost:

There was not quite the dissimilarity of appearance she had expected to see. But there were points of distinction that gradually became more and more perceptible. The English women wanted that conciliating, and almost benign amenity of expression a French woman of high breeding knows so well how

to throw into her voice and countenance, and which, duly modified, is so welcome an encouragement on a first introduction, to the young and the diffident. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:57)

Sarah Harriet had lived in Italy (1830-1833), but her opinion on the Italians was not as positive as it seems (see the letters to Frances Burney and Emma Wilbraham (Clark 1997:349, 381)). By 1832, the writer explained that Italy has “become now rather a hackneyed subject” (Clark 1997:375). *The Renunciation* affords some picturesque paragraphs, and Agnes is shocked by certain Italian customs, which are always regarded with certain detachment:

That lady [la Signora Romanelli], though an early riser, was never supposed to be visible till one or two o'clock. There was no general re-union of the company at breakfast, but each person took coffee in his own apartment. The magnificent drawing-room, except in the evening, was useless; morning visitors if there ever came any, were received, Agnes could not tell where, for the truth is, she never saw any place properly adapted to such a purpose; neither was the attire of the lady of the house, till the moment of going out, at all better suited to admit company. She often wandered from room to room, in a loose wrapping gown, with her hair in papers, or wholly concealed under a silk handkerchief, seeming entirely unemployed, yet looking lively and good-humoured [...] In the evening, there was generally a numerous circle assembled, and cards, conversation, or music furnished amusements for the guests. Refreshments there were none, except *eau sucrée*, not even fruit; and tea was never thought of but as a *tisane* for a fever. [...] every body knew French, and was favoured, from motives of politeness, with so much of that language ill-pronounced, that she would have rejoiced to meet with any one who spoke only Italian. One of the things that disappointed her most in this ‘land of music’, was the harsh, discordant, and loud voice of a large proportion of the Italian ladies she conversed with; the very children rasped her ears, and when she compared these accents with the sweet tones of Lady Glenfeld, and even with those of Isabel and her sisters, she could not but lament that custom and example should give to the organs of one set of people, inflections so dissimilar to those of another. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:161)

5. “NO ONE TO LOVE, NO ONE TO TRUST”

The point where *The Wanderer* and *The Renunciation* mostly diverge is affection, which, together with disinterestedness, is a key word in Sarah

Harriet's production. According to Clark, Sarah Harriet had stated: "I never insert love but to oblige my readers" (Clark 2008:xvi). In fact, there is no love story in *The Renunciation* though feelings are very important. Likewise, *The Wanderer* was about female economic difficulties, and love is never uppermost mainly because if Juliet admitted needing affection, she would be a suspicious woman for any reader, and the secret concerning her identity is revealed towards the middle of the novel. The protagonist feels at ease by enjoying simple life among farmers, the opposite of refined society:

Here, retirement would be soothing, and even seclusion supportable, from the charm of the scenery, the beauty of the walks, the guileless characters, and vivifying activity of the inhabitants of the farm-house; and the fragrant serenity of all around. Here, peace and plenty were the result of industry; and primitive, though not polite hospitality, was the offspring of natural trust. If there was no cultivation, there was no art; if there was no refinement, there were integrity and good will (Burney, Frances 1991:694).

Agnes's situation is quite different since she is a *femme couverte* and really has all her expenses paid throughout the novel. Nevertheless, material comfort does not guarantee happiness, so, when she lives with the Leroux, Agnes is deprived of liberty and considers her home a prison opposed to Meadwell, her birthplace:

The enjoyments derived from the loveliness of nature, from purity of air, from the freshness of early day, from the sight, sound, scent of ten thousand fragrant and reviving objects, not only far outweigh, in themselves, all the artificial advantages man can devise, but have the property of awakening a degree of attachment, which causes her loss to be deplored with nearly as much sorrow as the loss of a long-tried friend. Agnes did not reason upon the subject: but she felt –felt as a bird might have done freshly deprived of its liberty; and though she neither fluttered nor struggle to escape, she was just as miserable (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:16).

Loneliness is a constant in her life, and Agnes experiences it on different occasions. During her stay with the Leroux, Monrival adopts a maternal role by consoling Agnes and regretting that the girl has never felt affection since then (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:22). The discovery of Lucy's letter represents another painful moment for Agnes: "She stood alone in the world; she had neither friends, kindred, nor fortune; and she was removed from all possibility of throwing herself for protection upon the laws of her country (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:48). Agnes pursues community, and, what is more important, affection, which happens when she sings: "This was the first time she had ever enjoyed the gratification of giving pleasure to those she was inclined to love" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:68). The necessity to sincerely communicate with somebody precipitates her letters to Harry even at the cost of compromising her reputation (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:76). All attempts to achieve happiness

or some kind of affection are frustrated, for instance, when Agnes thinks that she has found a brother: “I am a new being; I seem to have gained importance in my own eyes; and at this moment, there is no one amongst the children of men whose fate I would exchange for my own,” (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:133) and she is upset once she has talked to William Danvers:

Once more she saw herself a lone being in creation; at eighteen years of age, with the probability of a long life before her, she was without kindred – without a home– without even a name she could legally appropriate –without other means of existence than such as depended upon the precarious favours of the public! It was a perspective that at once filled her with grief, terror, and self-compassion, and her tears long continued to flow with undiminished bitterness. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:178-9)

As we can see, feelings matter more than patrimony in Sarah Harriet Burney’s novel. Undoubtedly, the most difficult relationship is between Agnes and her father, a reminder of the one between Sarah and Frances with their father, Charles Burney. Agnes has been brought up by a foster family, the Blakes, and after some time with the Leroux, she must live with her father, who refers to Agnes as if she was a coveted property in one of the funniest scenes of the novel:

I fear ye not, ye idle praters [sic], though ye seem to touch the clue, which, if unwound, would lead to my destruction! It is but seeming. She who could alone, exclusive of my sister, have made any fatal revelations, is now no more; and Agnes [...] will not trust, be proof against two such powerful enticements, as wealth and flattery [...] She is mine, there can be no fear of her –she is irrevocably mine. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:59)

However, there is some evolution in his views, and Mr. Wharton grows desperate at the news of Agnes’s flight with the realisation that he has sentimentally lost her forever:

‘Oh had I but been blessed,’ he cried, ‘with such a daughter!’ No man is wholly evil, –and what was undepraved [sic] in the unhappy being now writhing Agnes the sense of his own misdeeds, derived some consolation from meditating upon the illusion made by Agnes to the vigilant with which she had been guarded from perversion in his family, and suffered to grow up as pure, as unambitious [sic], and as disinterested as when he first bore her from her obscure home. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:98)

The prospect of going to live with Mr. Wharton depresses Agnes, who somatizes the situation and falls ill (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:25). Despite the comfort she is offered and Mrs. Marchmont’s efforts to portrait Mr. Wharton as a kind man, Agnes rejects her father and associates him with the hand that grasped her when she was kidnapped. Her benefactors try to win her affection as bourgeois parents do, by purchasing a great quantity of objects. After reading

Mr. Wharton's letter, Agnes sees that he really loved her and she feels repentant in a delicately written paragraph which seems taken from Austen's novels:

The affection with which he spoke of her, bore all the appearance of sincerity, and for ever put an end to the most distant idea of foul dealing. When she was mentioned herself, it was done with so much temper, that considering the catastrophe she had brought upon him, his moderation and placability [sic] surprised and touched her. She *had* hated him, no doubt; but less at the moment when by her flight, she effected his ruin, than at most other periods of her life; the knowledge of what he would suffer, had then mollified her aversion, and it had been with true regret she came to the conclusion, that his prosperity and her sense of right could never be made compatible. (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:123)

Her anxiety to be reconciled with Mr. Wharton is compared with that of the Greek Antigone, "a personification of Pity, made more intense by filial love" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:198). To solve the situation, St. Hubert gives Mr. Wharton an annuity and he goes to America, where he marries a wealthy widow. *The Renunciation* lacks tear-jerking reconciliation scenes in the manner of *Evelina*, but the narrative contains a touching letter of Agnes's aunt resembling Lady Belmont's one in Burney's first work and worth reproducing:

Man without a heart! Oh, that I could but hope I had found at least the means to make thee feel! That I could but know thou wert [sic] mourning in bitterness and sorrow thy irrevocable loss! Yes –it *shall* be irrevocable, unless I should one day hear thou hast begun to show symptoms of surviving humanity and affection. Hard, hard of nature hast thou hitherto been! –without memory, without gratitude for past felicity –without concern for the living or reverence for the dead. Was it not monstrous to seclude from sight –to neglect –to treat as base-born intruder, the treasure Providence still entrusted to thy love? How did I find her situated in her father's splendid mansion? She was consigned to the worst room it contained; she was as meanly clad as she was lodged; she was committed to the sole care of a young and inexperienced country girl; and if ever she was remembered by her unnatural parent – if ever she beheld him, was it as it were by *stealth* – he was *ashamed* of his little Agnes! Wretch! Wretch! What are the pangs that can ever sufficiently expiate such a dereliction from all virtue –from all sense of justice – all remains of honour? Poor babe! She is here at least beloved; her, in obscurity and almost indigence, she is happier than in the chilling atmosphere of her father's dwelling. Yet –I sometimes tremble lest in seeking to punish *thee*, I should have brought down evil upon her innocent head! When I am gone, who is there to protect? (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:177)

What we find instead in *The Renunciation* is a more natural conciliatory scene, so father and daughter meet again and get on better since then. According to Bertha: "their looks denoted the most perfect harmony and kindness, with scarcely, even on his part, the least agitation" (Burney, Sarah Harriet 2008:223).

6. Conclusion

Both *The Wanderer* and *The Renunciation* meant the culmination of Frances's and Sarah Harriet's literary careers, both were written for money and both contain 'un-stories', that is, narratives about the heroine's alienation and social displacement. They centre on dysfunctional families, and there is a common concern for woman's difficulties and a yearning for independence confronting patriarchal society, two issues which were later tackled by other novelists, such as George Eliot or the Brontës. Thanks to the doubling technique, Frances and Sarah Harriet introduced in their works a variety of females who contrast or reproduce the heroine's conflicts. The Burney sisters gave prominence to the quest for public recognition and heroism of nineteenth-century middle-class women, as well as the break between feeling and reason. It is interesting that both published their first works (*Evelina* and *Clarentine*) anonymously, but their opinion on the novel as a narrative form was very different, so, in comparison with Frances, Sarah Harriet had a more diffident attitude as a woman writer. She portrayed affection with more detail than Frances did. Here she seems quite demanding in the sense that being rejected by the father automatically provokes frustration, and the protagonist needs to have her father's support. Sarah Harriet's ideas on female professionalism and multiculturalism in Europe were more optimistic and relatively less ambiguous than Frances's ones. Woman is never victimised in Sarah Harriet's narratives, where Agnes is able to earn her bread and keep away from raising suspicion. Unlike Frances, who resorted to satire to show the intolerance of the British towards other cultures, Sarah Harriet supported Englishness and her cosmopolitanism was not restricted to France. She also relied on female art and, as an alternative to the so-called masculine art, she privileged the artistic productions dealing with the domestic sphere. It is clear that, as twenty-first-century readers, we must be grateful to Frances and Sarah for their effort to be taken seriously. Undoubtedly, appreciating Sarah Harriet's *oeuvre* in itself enriches Burney Studies and gender studies and adds one name more to the list of best British women writers of the nineteenth century.

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