

The Pleasure and Pain of Musical Accomplishment in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*

Introduction

This paper discusses domestic musical practices in Burney's final novel, *The Wanderer* (1814). Roughly divided into two, the first section of the paper maps-out Burney's presentation of the acquirement of musical skill in the context of competing narratives of patronage, individualism, and familial bonds. I argue that Burney exposes the inequalities that make patronage potentially exploitative, but also that she draws a veil over the pressures exerted on young women by patriarchal power dynamics. In doing so, Burney inadvertently suggests more than she perhaps intends, since the efforts she undertakes to erase male authority as a defining facet of musical accomplishment necessarily draws attention to its influence.

The second section of the paper discusses Burney's imagined reformation of domestic musical practices through the character of Juliet Granville. I contend that Burney argues for a more serious musical engagement than was fashionable in the period, and also that she seeks to cast musical performance as an expression of self, rather than as a showcase for technical proficiency. The text appears to misfire, however, when Burney goes one step further by attempting to articulate this expression of self in terms of the moral bonds of sentimentality. I argue that this move conflates human relationships with class interests, marking the point where the genuinely meaningful experience of music reaches its limit in transcending repressive societal structures.

Section 1: Miss Arbe and Maintaining an Accomplished Reputation

To examine the acquirement of musical accomplishment in *The Wanderer* I focus on the fashionable Miss Arbe. She is lady presented entirely negatively by Burney, characterised by

vanity and desire to maintain her accomplished reputation at all costs, regardless of who she exploits. Nevertheless, Miss Arbe's engagement with music does align in important ways with the practice of the activity as set-out in conduct-book rhetoric. The conduct-book view of music actually severely limits the pleasurable potential of music itself. Erasmus Darwin (1789, 125) sums up a conventional view of female accomplishments in *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools, Private Families, and Public Seminaries*. Accomplishments, including music, Darwin suggests:

Should be reciprocally applied to, either in the house or the open air, for the purpose of relieving of each other; and of producing by such means an uninterrupted cheerfulness of mind; which is the principal charm, that fits us for society, and the great source of earthly happiness.

Through music, drawing, and other standard accomplishments genteel women should be able to relieve boredom by alternating between different leisured pursuits, which in turn produces a cheerful mind. But this apparent source of pleasure remains tightly controlled, functioning primarily on the ideological plane, which Darwin alludes to when he argues that the cheerfulness thus engendered is most valuable because it fits young ladies for society. Accomplishment, in this guise, was more than anything a mark of class, the daughter or wife's conspicuous consumption of leisure activities signalling the social standing of the father or husband. And women who smiled and were cheerful in company made a better impression than those who were moody. The relaxing function of music in this context serves, primarily, to make the musician appealing in social interaction rather than for the pleasure of the player as such.

At the same time, the enjoyment that Darwin assigns to the practice of accomplishment is limited to the mere relieving of boredom, qualitatively distinct from the genuine joy which artistic engagement can bring, the point underscored by the emphasis on making use of multiple accomplishments that mutually relieve each other. Once the woman

has tired of one, she can pick-up another, constructing these activities as interchangeable past-times which are not so much valued for their unique and inherent capacity to bring personal fulfilment, but rather as merely useful practices which can mitigate the monotony of existence.

Conduct-book rhetoric, therefore, sees accomplishment less as a source of pleasure than as socially useful and as a relief from boredom. Miss Arbe implicitly subscribes to this view, as the narrator suggests:

Miss Arbe, who aspired at passing for an adept in every accomplishment, seized with great quickness whatever she began to learn; but her ambition was so universal, and her pursuits so numerous, that one of them marred another; and while every thing was grasped at, nothing was attained. Yet the general aim passed with herself for general success. (Burney 1988, 209)

Burney is critical of Miss Arbe's engagement with accomplishment, but her perspective should not be viewed as a standard Romantic-period trope, such as the common critique of women who pretend to faint in order to stimulate male chivalry, for example.

Accomplishments were never meant to be perfected, and, in order for them to mutually relieve each other, as Darwin suggests, a woman's time must be split between several of them, guaranteeing only average attainment except for the extremely talented. Moreover, Matthew Head points-out that musical compositions dedicated to women emphasised "naturalness ... instinct, the untutored, and the gently moving rather than the learned" (Head 1999, 208). Miss Arbe's "great quickness" in grasping new accomplishments, coupled with her unwillingness to continue her learning to gain complete proficiency, aligns perfectly with Head's formulation since it denotes natural and instinctive talent rather than serious practice. Miss Arbe's reasonable skill in multiple forms of female accomplishment, therefore, is entirely congruent with the dominant understanding of their cultural purposes.

Moreover, Miss Arbe's modest attainment in various leisure pursuits is actually more than sufficient for fulfilling the function of accomplishment as a signifier of familial wealth

and status. The polite society of Brighthelmstone sanctioned Miss Arbe's claims to attainment "by their applause; and spread their opinions" of her skill around, "till, hearing them reverberated, they believed them to be fame" (Burney 1988, 210). Without ever being tarnished with the stigma of professionalism, Miss Arbe succeeds in gaining an accomplished reputation, reflecting positively, of course, on her male relatives who society assumes have financed her training.

Miss Arbe's reputation as mistress of the arts is under threat, however, because she lacks funds. We are told that her "various accomplishments had already exhausted the scanty powers for extra expense of her father" (Burney 1988, 210). To resolve the dilemma, Miss Arbe "sought no acquaintance but amongst scholars of the most eminent professors", and by visiting her acquaintances during teaching sessions "she regularly managed...to attract the attention of the master to herself, for an explanation of the difficulties which distressed her in her private practice" (Burney 1988, 210). By way of payment, Miss Arbe offers her influence, as the narrator explains:

... if a benefit were in question, she had not an acquaintance upon whom she did not force tickets; if a composition were to be published, she claimed subscriptions for it from all her friends; if scholars were desired, not a parent had a child, not a guardian a ward, whom she did not endeavour to convince, that to place his charge under such or such a professor, was the only method to draw forth his talents. She scarcely entered a house in which she had not some little scheme to effect; and seldom left it with her purpose unfulfilled. (Burney 1988, 210)

Miss Arbe transforms the supposedly leisured role of patroness into one defined by the mutual exchange of services. She works, however, to sublimate the productive essence of her work into polite conversation. She charmed the artists "by personal civilities; she won them by attentions to their wives, sisters, or daughters [and] they dedicated to her their works" (Burney 1988, 210). Moreover, she labels her musical tuition sessions with Juliet (who is under her patronage) as "delightful little musical meetings" (Burney 1988, 256).

All Miss Arbe's musical activity creates the sense of an entirely self-serving character. However, when her actions are considered in relation to the gendered ideologies which structure the conduct-book rhetoric of musical accomplishment, a more sympathetic view of her becomes possible. In the text, Miss Arbe is happy to express her indignation against old maids who keep a close eye on money, but the social vulnerability of unmarried older women – and the behaviour it gives rise to – is perhaps closer to Mrs Arbe's situation and actions than she would like to admit. After all, Miss Arbe's musical exchanges are nothing if not financially prudent, designed as they are to squeeze as much value out of every transaction as possible. Moreover, Miss Arbe is well on her way, within the gender ideologies of the period, to becoming an "old maid" herself, and this, I will argue, makes possible an alternative reading of the text suggestive of the subjective damage engagement with music in its culturally official guise might produce.

Miss Arbe is unmarried at "one-and thirty" (Burney 1988, 201), and through this information the text tacitly acknowledges that if Miss Arbe wishes to remain a viable commodity on the marriage market she must emphasise her claims to feminine gentility, her accomplished reputation primary amongst her assets, since her youth is fading. Because Miss Arbe's father is poor, a socially advantageous marriage is the only realistic way Miss Arbe can maintain her social position, adding urgency to her need to marry well¹. However, to read Miss Arbe's actions purely in terms of her own desire to marry well is to deny the familial pressure the conventions of musical accomplishment have put on her. As Richard Leppert has

¹ Also, perhaps, even with the question of marriage left aside, an accomplished reputation might serve as compensation for disappearing beauty in a society which places heavy emphasis on the physical appearance of women. Giles Arbe, the text's mouthpiece for social justice, states of young, pretty ladies that "I always pity them, the moment I see them, those pretty creatures in their prime. I always think what they have got to go through. After seeing very body admire them, to see nobody look at them!" (Burney 2008, 261). Through Giles, the text acknowledges the difficulty of ageing for women in a society obsessed with women's youth and beauty. Indeed, the horribly ageist and misogynistic reviews of *The Wanderer* by Croker and Hazlitt validate, with pointed irony, Burney's stance, revealing as they do the vulnerability of the female author writing in old age. Please see John Wilson Croker. 1814. *Quarterly Review* 11, 123-130; and William Hazlitt. *Edinburgh Review* 24, 320-338.

argued, the musically accomplished daughter asserted the wealth of the father. Moreover, while it could be expensive, training a daughter to have a degree of musical skill was “routinely seen by parents as an asset to their daughters’ future matrimonial stock. It was an investment aimed at preserving family honor, for a father thus risked neither the social shame nor the economic burden of producing an old maid” (Leppert 1988, 29).

Seen as such, musical accomplishment becomes a heavy weight on Miss Arbe indeed. The cultural ideal that the conduct-book version of musical accomplishment at once advocates and conceals is that music for daughters was less for their own pleasure than it was to secure a financial return. Following this logic, it would be less that Miss Arbe has selfishly exhausted her poor father’s limited resources, as Burney would have it, and more that she has failed to provide a return on the investment which her father willingly put into her, in part for reasons of familial honour and wealth, rather than for his daughter’s sake *per se*². Viewed in this light, Miss Arbe’s drive towards maintaining her accomplished reputation takes on a rather desperate quality. It is a final bid not only to secure personal fulfilment in marriage or even because of a love of music itself, but also to satisfy felt filial obligations and avoid the shame attendant upon the failure to marry well.

At the same time, Miss Arbe’s ability to secure musical tuition rests on the general recognition of her as a young lady of fashion. Once she is considered as middle aged and/or a dependent she will likely find it increasingly difficult to make impromptu visits during music lessons. If she is no longer considered youthful, her apparent visits of leisure to young ladies taking music lessons will become suspect because of the obvious age difference between Miss Arbe and her supposed friends. If she is widely recognized as being dependent, then the self-interested nature of her leisure visits will become increasingly apparent. In either case,

² *The Wanderer* makes this dynamic explicit (although with a change in gender) when Mrs Maple, guardian of the young Selina, employs Juliet as a music teacher to Selina in order to make her more attractive to her fiancé, Ireton. Whether Selina actually wants to learn music or not is a question left more or less aside.

Miss Arbe's business venture cannot last long, and she must maximize her profits whilst she can if she is to avoid a life of dependency and increasing downward social mobility. Even the vanity which forms so central an aspect of Miss Arbe's character can be as easily interpreted as the result of self-conscious inadequacy due to (perceived) failures as a woman as it can by inherent narcissism (the overt position of the text). Furthermore, Burney casts the father's poor finances as the result of Miss Arbe's selfishness, but this financial vulnerability can also be seen as adding to the pressure on Miss Arbe: a failed investment is harder to stomach when one is poor.

Indeed, the relentlessness with which Burney erases patriarchal power dynamics in her representation of Miss Arbe suggests there is more to the matter than Burney would like to admit. Claudia Johnson (1995, 174) notes that, in *The Wanderer*, "in stark contrast to Burney's previous novels, the rule of fathers and their surrogates has retreated"; adding that Juliet's surrogate father "is indeed a sentimentalised figure of male power...but he is almost entirely offstage" (Johnson 1995, 174). In the case of Miss Arbe, her father is in fact entirely offstage, never once seen in mimetic representation. Moreover, he is never referred to in sentimental terms encoding a benevolent form of patriarchal power. In the reported text itself, Miss Arbe's father is only a poor, worn-out man, run ragged by his daughter's insatiable appetite for accomplishment. Through this, Burney is able to conceal the gender inequality which can be read as a determining factor in Miss Arbe's ruthless and unfeeling behaviour. Because Miss Arbe's father is never present, a veil is drawn over any disappointment he might feel because of his daughter's lack of success on the marriage market. Because his patriarchal power is not shown, the text conceals the function of accomplishment as an appendage to male authority. Finally, the absence of the sentimental father/daughter relationship casts Miss Arbe as devoid of filial feelings of love, and as such denies she feels

any obligation to her father, the cherry on the top of what is a thorough denial of male authority in structuring her relationship with music.

But Miss Arbe is not devoid of presented male relations; she has a cousin – very visible in the text – Mr Giles Arbe. Margaret Doody (1988, 346) points out that Giles Arbe “functions in the novel as the voice of social justice”. Giles’ sense of right is free from both gender and class scruples, in some ways purer than even the ethics of the near morally perfect Juliet, and more than once the heroine is forced to revise her judgments, informed by feminine delicacy, in light of Giles’ more socially transcendent sense of fair play. However, Giles is absent minded to the point of ludicrousness (or pity – perhaps he is a sufferer of dementia). He frequently forgets what he is doing, causing confusion, exasperation, and embarrassment wherever he goes. Moreover, Giles is completely lacking in anything resembling male power. As Doody points out, “Emotionally, he is permanent child” (Doody 1988, 346).

It is surely no accident that Burney chooses to bind her simple representative of pure social justice to the unfeeling Mrs Arbe through familial blood. Miss Arbe frequently exploits Giles, using him to make excuses for her and further her own interest. Because of Giles’ extreme vulnerability, the relationship between Miss Arbe and Giles is reminiscent of that between a cruel mistress and her dog. By taking advantage of the morally pure and entirely innocent Giles, Miss Arbe comes across as the very worst of people, working to negate the more sympathetic reading I am advancing here. Far older, richer, and male, we would ordinarily expect Giles to exercise power over his female relation, especially in the absence of the real father. By reversing the power dynamic, therefore, Burney portrays Miss Arbe as beyond the influence of the father in particular and of patriarchy in general. In doing so, the text forecloses the possibility that the gendered structure of musical accomplishment itself could be to blame for Miss Arbe’s relentless pursuit of musical resources. Within the logic of

the text, male authority cannot be the cause of Miss Arbe's failures, precisely because she is impervious to male control.

The only father we are shown in detail in relation to female musical accomplishment is the unrefined but benevolent Mr Tedman. Mr Tedman has a daughter who has been educated at a boarding school. Throughout, Burney portrays the daughter as a ridiculous example of vulgar middle-class ambition to rise above one's station; she is a girl embarrassed by her commonly-educated father, and who only ever does what "she thinks will be agreeable to the quality" (Burney 1988, 238). As such, she desires to be musically accomplished in order to assert her claims to a genteel status, and Mr Tedman employs Juliet to tutor her.

While Burney seems to be critiquing the practice of sending low-born girls to genteel schools in a general sense, in the specific example of Mr Tedman and his daughter she certainly emphasises the character failings of the daughter rather than the judgment of the father in sending her to boarding school in the first place. As she does with Miss Arbe and her father, Burney here lays most of the blame in female hands. Mr Tedman is always presented in a positive light (he is a frequent rescuer of Juliet from male libertinism and social embarrassment), while the daughter is presented as ungrateful and selfish at all times. This mimetically narrated father of a daughter desiring musical tuition invites the reader to view Miss Arbe's father along similar lines, albeit with acknowledged class differences. The long-suffering, textually present Mr Tedman sign-posts the apparently equally long-suffering, textually absent father of Miss Arbe, thus enforcing the sense of Miss Arbe's failures as a daughter.

Once the insistence with which Burney erases any sense of the patriarchal structures that inform musical practice in the period is acknowledged, the power of these very structures becomes apparent. Haunting the text like a dark secret, the narrative devices Burney uses to

deny the patriarchal logic of accomplishment signals the cultural force of this logic. For if paternal authority was not the defining force in musical accomplishment that Leppert assigns it, then surely it would not be necessary to so strenuously avoid representing it? At the same time, however, the overt presentation of Miss Arbe as beyond the authority of the father, as taking charge of her own engagement with music, alerts us to the fact that female music practices cannot be entirely reduced to patriarchal containment. Burney's presentation of Miss Arbe might be entirely critical of her, but it also emphasises her musical autonomy. I do not believe that one reading here is more correct than the other. Rather, they mediate each other and mutually shed-light on music practices in the period, the ambiguity of the text signalling the gender dynamics which control women while acknowledging that lived existence is never entirely contained by homogenous ideological discourse.

Earlier, I made the point that the conduct-book view of music reduces artistic joy to the mere relief of boredom, but for Miss Arbe even this latter function is more or less foreclosed. When Miss Arbe exploits Juliet by demanding free music lessons, the former can hardly be said to find the experience relaxing. For example, she arrives at Juliet's residence proclaiming "I have not above three minutes to stay, so do let us try that sweet adagio. I want vastly to conquer the horrid long bars of that eternal cadenza" (Burney 1988, 256). Typical of Miss Arbe, who we told has always her watch "in her hand, when her harp was not" (Burney 1988, 266), she keeps one eye on the clock and crams in as much musical practice as she can.

The result of this, as I have alluded to, is an experience of musical accomplishment not as relaxation, but as a demanding and tiring enterprise. Miss Arbe wants "vastly to *conquer the horrid* long bars of that eternal cadenza" (Burney 1988, 256, my italics), denoting music as work rather than leisure, as something not pleasurable in itself but merely as a set of objectives which must be achieved in the most efficient manner possible.

Drawing on the work of both Roland Barthes and Terry Eagleton, Head (1999, 222) argues that there is pleasure in identifying oneself with cultural expectations, and that “this enjoyment is not escape from ideological pressures but is in fact constituted by them.” Miss Arbe’s relentless desire to self-identify as an accomplished lady of leisure operates, I think, according to this logic. Because, however, Miss Arbe is forced to work strategically with financial, time, and cultural constraints looming large, she transgresses the cultural coding of musical accomplishment according to the conduct-books. For her, the attempt to conform to ideology results not in pleasure, but in alienation from the conservative ideals of femininity, gentility, and domesticity which she ostensibly subscribes to.

Section 2: Juliet and the Reformation of Musical Accomplishment

One key reason why Burney chooses to present Miss Arbe so critically, I think, is because her musical engagement devalues the experience. Gillen D’Arcy Wood (2010, 55) points out that “there is no culture of listening” in either Burney’s novels or in society at this period more generally. Nobody is actually really listening to Miss Arbe when she plays. If they did, they would recognise her mediocrity. But because Miss Arbe acts and looks as polite society believes a highly accomplished lady should, society at large is willing to recognise her as a woman of high accomplishment. In this section of the paper, I examine how Burney imagines reforming this lackadaisical attitude towards music through the character of Juliet.

When presenting Juliet, Burney frequently works the story to displace the generalised class signifiers of music, forcing a more meaningful engagement with the actual musical performance. For example, when the family Juliet initially seeks refuge with return to their house, they are surprised to hear someone playing the harp, when no one other than servants were believed to be at home. In fact, Juliet is in residence, but she has been so ignored by the

other inhabitants that the returning characters have forgotten about her. This is how the characters react to the sounds of the harp:

“’Tis my harp!” cried Selina, “I am sure of that!”
“Your harp?” said Mrs Maple; “who can be playing it?”
“Hist! dear ladies,” said Harleigh; “’tis some exquisite performer.”
(Burney 1988, 64)

Since the listening characters are initially at a loss as to who could be playing the harp, they find them themselves listening with attention and judging the performance free from social bias, as the narrator continues:

A new movement was now begun; it was slow and pathetic, and played with so much taste and expression, though mixed with bursts of rapid execution, that the whole auditory was equally charmed and surprised; and every one, Mrs Maple herself not excepted, with uplifted finger seemed to beseech attention from the rest. (Burney 1988, 64)

Since knowledge of the performer is denied, none of the listening characters are afforded the luxury of evaluating the level of accomplishment according to general class signifiers. Instead, they focus on the only signifier available to them: the actual performance of the piece itself. The result is that the music is critically evaluated and, in consequence of which, is able to bring pleasure to the listeners. Even Mrs Maple, a character symptomatically presented as lacking in refinement, is charmed.

There is also a broader societal point here, one I do not fully develop in this paper, but which is nevertheless worth making briefly. By acting as far as possible as an accomplished lady should, Miss Arbe not only artificially raises the perception of her musical ability, she also renders polite society vulnerable to her manipulative strategies. Because it is assumed that Miss Arbe is mistress of the arts, she is able to take control of the means of producing musical accomplishment under the guise of disinterested patronage. Thus, Miss Arbe is able to exploit Juliet and other musical workers, as well as determine which musicians are in favour and which are not. But the value of any particular musician is not so much related to

their musical ability, or even, more conservatively, to their suitability for inclusion within polite society, but rather in terms of their usefulness to Miss Arbe. By forcing attention onto the actual performance of music rather than its general class signifiers, Juliet's music, the text implies, not only reforms practises of accomplishment but also wider society insofar as it demands a critical judgment which would become conscious of Miss Arbe's mediocrity. Through this, Miss Arbe's reputation as mistress of the arts would be diminished, and with it her exploitative hold over the musical culture, since her recommendations would carry far less weight.

Another aspect of Burney's sought reformation of accomplishment is a push for a far more serious engagement with music than is characteristic of Miss Arbe or detailed in conduct-books. We are told that Juliet's performances have "grace and meaning...played with a taste and an expression, that the first masters would most have admired, because best understood" (Burney 1988, 289-290). By hypothetically subjecting Juliet's skill to the judgment of the "first masters," Burney implicitly argues for both a level of attainment and level of critical judgment comparable to that of professional musicians. Furthermore, the first masters, we are told, would have appreciated Juliet's music primarily for its "meaning," "taste" and "expression." These terms do not so much emphasise technical skill as they do feeling in performance. In fact, persistently throughout the text, Burney underscores expression as the most significant aspect of musical excellence.

To develop this point, a brief examination of the text's presentation of amateur dramatics is helpful. Juliet excels in her role of Lady Townly in *The Provok'd Husband*, and the audience eagerly debate whether Juliet's "excellence were the result of practice and instruction, or a sudden emanation of genius" (Burney 1988, 85). The text emphasises the latter, since the pinnacle of Juliet's performance "was a certain air of inquietude, which was discernible through the utmost gaiety of her exertions" (Burney 1988, 85), and this

melancholy has its roots, the text tells us, in Juliet's "own disturbance" (Burney 1988, 85).

For Claudia Johnson, moments like this undercut the text's progressive social project.

Johnson comments that Juliet:

...falters during her first scene, and her representation of Lady Townly is captivating only because of her 'own disturbance', not because she possess any real, hardened talent for acting...Arguing on the one hand that Juliet is marvelously talented and on the other that she is not acting, Burney takes with one hand what she gives with the other. Rather than stretching our notions of what a woman can do without sacrifice to propriety, she tightens the stranglehold of propriety itself. (Johnson 1995, 169)

I think, however, that Burney's position is more nuanced than this allows. In the first place, Burney does not create as polarised an opposition between natural talent and feminine sensibility as Johnson suggests. Before the personal anxiety which adds depth to Juliet's performance is described to the reader, the text emphasises the technical proficiency of her performance:

... it seemed the essence of gay intelligence, of well bred animation, and of lively variety. The grace of her motions made not only every step but every turn of her head remarkable. Her voice modulated into all the changes that vivacity, carelessness, pride, pleasure, indifference, or alarm demanded. Every feature of her face spoke her discrimination of every word; while the spirit which gave a charm to the whole, was chastened by a taste the most correct; and while though modest she was never awkward; though frightened, never ungraceful. (Burney 1988, 84)

The emphasis here is not, primarily, on the feminine sensibility which underwrites aspects of Juliet's performance, but rather on the more mechanical aspects of drama: voice, gesture, and the like. Moreover, Juliet is said to excel in representing "vivacity" and "pleasure", attitudes very far removed from the melancholy which Johnson argues is the only determining factor in Juliet's success. Even so, Juliet's proficiency in the technical form of drama is significantly augmented by her status as a lady. Her "good-breeding," "grace" and "taste the most correct" appear to refine her performance and guard against her appearing unladylike even as she performs emotions and behaviours which might not ordinarily find their way into genteel

drawing rooms or parlours. Thus, Juliet's excellence comes from a carefully worked balance of feminine sensibility, technical skill, and good breeding.

In fact, the nature of Juliet's attainment in acting mirrors that of her music perfectly. The emphasis on innate feminine sensibility notwithstanding, at no point does the text attempt to entirely align Juliet's accomplishment with the unlearned and natural identified by Head and which actually most strongly corresponds to Miss Arbe and, also, Miss Sycamore (one of Juliet's students), who I will briefly discuss now as a way of elaborating the point. Juliet finds Miss Sycamore "so far superiour, in musical capacity, to every other pupil that had fallen to her charge, that she conceived a strong desire to make her the fine player that her talents fitted her for becoming" (Burney 1988, 221):

Her utmost exertions, however, and warmest wishes, were insufficient for this purpose. The genius with which Miss Sycamore was endowed for music, was unallied to any soft harmonies of temper, or of character: she was presumptuous, conceited, and gaily unfeeling...She had a haughty indifference about learning; but it was not from an indifference to excel; 'twas from a firm self-opinion, that she excelled already. If she could not deny, that Ellis [Juliet] executed whole pieces, in as masterly a manner as she could herself play only select passages, she deemed that a mere mechanical part of the art, which, as a professor, Ellis [Juliet] had been forced to study; and which she herself, therefore, rather held cheap than respected. (Burney 1988, 221)

Miss Sycamore is incorrect in her assumption that Juliet has learnt music for professional purposes. The narrator makes explicit that all Juliet knows about music "had been acquired as a *dilettante*, not studied as an artist; and though she was an elegant and truly superiour performer, she was nearly as deficient in the theoretical, as she was skilful in the practical" (Burney 1988, 268). Seen thus, Juliet's "mechanical" mastery does not represent the taint of professionalism, it simply represents a higher degree of amateur accomplishment. The fact that Miss Sycamore can mistake leisured accomplishment for professional training, however, denotes that Burney does not emphasise feeling in performance to the point that technical

proficiency disappears as a method of discrimination. Far from it, Burney pushes for a far more practiced form of accomplishment that was fashionable in the period.

At the same time, Miss Sycamore fails to realise the potential of her talents partly because they are “unallied to any soft harmonies of temper” (Burney 1988, 221). The musical metaphor for a lack of sensibility indicates that Burney views the absence of feeling in a person as foreclosing the possibility for achieving excellence in music itself. Similarly, Miss Sycamore is characterised throughout the text by her haughtiness and assertiveness, aligning her more closely with fashionable behaviors of self-display than the modest propriety of Juliet, and this also seems implicated in Miss Sycamore’s relative musical inadequacies.

It is quite clear from both the dramatic and musical examples given here that Burney’s ideal conception of domestic musical practices, while it does indeed emphasize feeling above technical proficiency, nevertheless strives for far greater mastery of the technical than is valorised in conduct-books, or realised in characters like Miss Arbe or Miss Sycamore. It is a subtle point because throughout *The Wanderer* Burney does in fact insist that women’s musical engagement should remain leisured, but this valorisation of a fairly conservative attitudes does not undercut Burney’s basic push for more serious musical participation. It is a question of degree – Burney might concede that women should learn for pleasure rather than professional purposes, but that does not mean they should not take their learning seriously.

Nevertheless, the tension that Johnson identifies does seem to be implicated in certain logical and ideological difficulties in *The Wanderer* that are perhaps ultimately irrecoverable. In the final section of this paper I will focus on what is to my mind the text’s most serious aesthetic issue. Namely, the use of music accomplishment as a function of platonic love.

In *The Wanderer*, accomplishment, when free from the taint of class prejudice, becomes entwined with sentimental discourse. This is apparent both in Harleigh’s romantic love for Juliet as well in the platonic love between Juliet and her sister and brother, Aurora

and Melbury, respectively. I focus here primarily on the latter, since it is through the relationship between Juliet and Aurora/Melbury that my point is most clearly made. When the three characters first meet, Aurora and Melbury are ignorant of the fact that they have a familial link to Juliet. Indeed, they are ignorant of everything about her, knowing her only as a young lady of fashion recently come over from France. The initial meeting occurs during Juliet's performance of *Lady Townly* and, enchanted by Juliet's powers of acting, the two young nobles invite Juliet to stay with them and their guardian Mrs Howel, and friendship blooms according to the revelation of Juliet's numerous accomplishments. Upon first hearing Juliet play the piano, Lord Melbury "was enraptured" (Burney 1988, 104) and Aurora "almost dissolved with tender pleasure" (Burney 1988, 104). Immediately after, they learn the harp to be her principal instrument and she again plays for the company, is "prevailed upon to sing" (Burney 1988, 104), and the performance has such an effect "that Mrs Howel could scarcely find phrases for the compliments which she thought merited" (Burney 1988, 104-105), "Melbury burst into the most rapturous applause", and "Aurora was enchanted, fascinated" (Burney 1988, 105). In the very next moment, Juliet reads aloud, "And here again her powers gave the utmost pleasure" (Burney 1988, 105). Finally, "Brilliant...as were her talents, all the success which they obtained was short of that produced by her manners and conversation" (Burney 1988, 105). Friendship develops here according only to the display of Juliet's accomplishment.

The sentimental narrative symptomatic of the long eighteenth-century novel is characterised by powerful feelings of sympathy for a virtuous person suffering extreme distress. Burney establishes this as a basis of Aurora's feelings for Juliet very early in the novel, and maintains it through the rest of the story. However, these powerful sentimental feelings are inseparable from the level of Juliet's accomplishment (especially in music). For example, the narrator explains that the "perfect good will of Lady Aurora would have been

won, by the mere surmise that [Juliet] was not happy” (Burney 1988, 106). However, when the “the rare accomplishments of [Juliet]” (Burney 1988, 106) were considered in addition to her unhappiness, giving comfort to Juliet becomes, the narrator tells us, “indispensable” for Aurora’s “own peace” (Burney 1988, 106).

The relentless revelation of Juliet’s accomplishments creates, therefore, sentimentalized feelings which are decisive in forging her relationships with Aurora and Melbury. From this point on, both Aurora and Melbury become fascinated with Juliet, and this initial time spent with her is enough to convince them of her value, and they industriously exerts herself to aid Juliet in whatever means they are able, despite being forbidden to do so, and despite not even being able to see Juliet again until towards the close of the novel.

This emphasis on accomplishment as the cornerstone of friendship continues throughout the text. Towards the end of the story, for example, Juliet is facing the imminent possibility of exile to France and forced bondage to a cruel husband, and an emotional Aurora exclaims that “Your talents, your acquirements, your manners, won, instantly, all our admiration; enchanted, bewitched us” (Burney 1988, 785). And again, a few pages later, Aurora laments that Juliet’s father had not lived to see the ““proud day of receiving his long lost, and so *accomplished* daughter”” (Burney 1988, 793, my italics). Janet Todd argues that the “aching raptures” of Juliet and Aurora are, within the ideology of the text, “justified, for Aurora is discovered to be the younger half-sister of Juliet” (Todd 1980, 318). Yet these sentimentalized feelings are also inseparable from accomplishment, since Aurora insists on the primacy of accomplishment in creating her feelings for Juliet until the very end of the novel. Through this, Burney suggests that domestic music practices themselves are capable of generating the “aching raptures” which structures the relationship between Juliet and Aurora.

The text's position, therefore, might be stated as follows. The authentic appreciation of accomplishments, with music figuring pre-eminently, represents a powerful force in forging inter-personal relationships based on respect, trust, and affection. In wider societal terms, the implication is that these relationships can displace inter-personal experiences based purely on superficial appearance. Furthermore, since these authentic relationships are made possible by listening with critical attention, they are indicative of a perspective on the world more alert to the manipulation of convention for self-interested purposes, thus destabilizing the influence of the likes of Miss Arbe.

The logic of the text is thus both clear and consistent in this regard. The issue, however, is that, as readers, we cannot buy into the relationship between Juliet, Aurora, and Melbury. The descriptions of Juliet's playing, acting and manners never denote anything more than a highly accomplished lady, and yet we are asked to believe that they are perhaps the most powerful spring of platonic love in the text. Juliet's friendship with Gabriella carries far more weight at the human level because the reader intuitively grasps that the two ladies' shared upbringing, their solidarity in grief, and their joint endeavours to secure the means of subsistence, are representative of the human experiences through which friendship is cemented. Set against this inherently meaningful friendship, the relationship between Juliet and her siblings appears profoundly superficial, based as it is on little more than the leisured performance of accomplishment.

The text's inability to suspend the reader's disbelief marks, I think, the limits of female musical accomplishment in the period. Burney's advocates that accomplishment should be informed primarily by sensibility but augmented with significant technical training, that it deserves to be respected and listened to more than it usually is, and that this will bring greater meaning to women's lives as well as pleasure to the drawing rooms of Romantic-period England. In this, the reader has no issue in relating to the text on both a logical and

emotional level. But when Burney asks us to consider the leisured accomplishments of upper class ladies as capable of forming bonds of solidarity that exceed almost anything else presented in the text, reader engagement fails.

In some ways, however, Burney's theory of music does have an internal logical consistency insofar as the emphasis on sensibility and expression in musical performance suggests that Juliet communicates something of her essence, of 'who' she is, when she plays. As Wood has shown, the wider musical culture in the period emphasised virtuosity; that is, performances that dazzled through their technical mastery rather than created sympathy through feeling in performance. Seen from this perspective, Burney emphasises the expressive music of Juliet as a function of meaningful human relationships as the antidote to meaningless virtuosity. As such, Burney's thinking perhaps begins to appear less erroneous, but I don't think this completely resolves this issue because the display of Juliet's ability remains caught-up with patriarchal class values, and in this way tends to cast music not in terms of expressing the self, but in terms of expressing the social standing of the player, ultimately coming close to the critiqued version of musical accomplishment embodied in Miss Arbe.

For example, *The Wanderer* conflates the sentimental responses of Aurora and Melbury to Juliet's performances with those of Mrs Howel (who is filled with "wonder" when Juliet plays). Mrs Howel never develops an intimate relationship with Juliet (indeed, she become one of her most serious enemies), but she is concerned to gauge Juliet's value because she is "anxious ... from the responsibility" (Burney 1988, 103) of having Aurora and Melbury in her charge, and congratulates herself "in so seasonable an acquisition of so accomplished a visitor" (Burney 1988, 104). Thus, Mrs Howel responds to Juliet's performance in terms of its class significations, which trace the apparently disinterested feelings of human intimacy experienced by Aurora and Melbury. Similarly, on the one hand,

Juliet's musical performances inspire Harleigh's infatuation because they are presented as revealing her humanity. But, on the other hand, they also convince Harleigh, much to his satisfaction, that Juliet is a woman of good breeding who has had a very fine – and very expensive – education.

It is through platonic and romantic love that Johnson's criticism of *The Wanderer* is, in my view, most astute. Burney seems to want to have it both ways. On the one hand, she tries to cast domestic musical performance as a vital source of sibling affection and romantic passion. This is a stretch in itself: we have seen how the relationship between Juliet and Aurora/Melbury is far less believable in human terms than the relationship between Juliet and Gabriella. On the other hand, however, Burney continues to insist on the primacy of Juliet's accomplishment in delineating class and status, and these socio-cultural mechanisms are, at best, only tangentially related to the human intimacy which Burney argues arises from the expression of self in performance. Interpersonal relationships developed through Juliet's music in *The Wanderer* cannot quite shake the feeling they are relationships based primarily on shared class interests, rather than on any sense of individual self.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Burney's final novel is an extremely nuanced elaboration of Romantic-period domestic musical practices. Burney's position features both reformist and reactionary traits, creating an original perspective that breaks ranks with culturally dominant views. It is perhaps Burney's very awareness of the complexities of the issues at play that finally leads *The Wanderer* to its impasses. In the end, Burney's attempts to reconcile the different functions of patronage, capitalist enterprise, personal enjoyment, and friendship formation in domestic music result in a fracturing of the aesthetic and ideological coherence of the text. For the critic, however, these very discrepancies constitute some of the most revealing

insights into musical accomplishment in a text that is perhaps the most sustained novelistic account of the activity we have available.

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