

‘Ovid was a mere fool to you’: Clothing and Nationality in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*

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Frances Burney’s last novel, *The Wanderer*, is also her most explicitly political work: set during the height of the French Revolution, the novel explores ideas about nationhood in a time of political crisis. Throughout the novel, characters muse about what it is to be ‘English’, but increasingly find they are unable to locate a distinctive and convincing answer. Instead, as the narrative progresses, Burney’s characters find that national identity can be as ephemeral and easily created, or discarded, as the clothes one wears. The controversial nature of Burney’s suggestion that there is no such thing as stable national identity should not be overlooked. Burney started writing *The Wanderer* in the revolutionary decade of the 1790s, and worked on it intermittently during her exile in France until its eventual publication in 1814.¹ This partly accounts for the novel’s unhappy reception history: this is a novel of the Revolution, and by 1814, these concerns were seen as rather outmoded. Further, as Linda Colley has usefully pointed out, during the Napoleonic Wars, the French ceased to be associated with the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity—the guiding principles of the Revolution—and had ‘reverted in the British imagination to what they had so often seemed in the past: spiritless victims of over-powerful government at home and ferocious exponents of military aggression abroad’.² In *The Wanderer*, Burney manages to both confirm and frustrate these reader expectations of France. Juliet’s husband is certainly as violent and cruel as the English might expect of a Jacobin. Indeed, the most horrifying element of Juliet’s story is not the fact that she witnesses an execution by guillotine, but the prospect of

¹ Kate Chisholm provides a valuable account of Burney’s passage back to England with the manuscript in 1812 and the subsequent publication of the novel in 1814. Kate Chisholm, *Fanny Burney: Her Life* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.218–39.

² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p.318.

her husband claiming his marital rights over her body. It is this threat that impels her trip to England and her desperate belief in the relative safety of the land of her birth. Juliet's inset narrative, detailing life in France during the Revolution, therefore, could be read as a conventional representation of the horror of the French Revolution during its most bloody period. However, Burney continually undermines popular perceptions of the French, and indeed, over the course of the novel, presents England in an increasingly unflattering light. Burney's exploration of nationality is inherently bound up in her exploration of the symbolic significance of clothing. National identity is consistently undermined in *The Wanderer* in this novel full of shape-shifting, where characters can assume and discard nationalities as easily and simply as they can get dressed or undressed.

Burney's novel resists perceptions of the French as 'spiritless' at home and 'ferocious' abroad, to borrow Colley's phrase. In fact, so disappointing was Burney's sympathetic depiction of the French in *The Wanderer* to many of her readers that the novel was sharply criticized for the sympathy with which Burney treats France, although that Burney was sympathetic to the French could hardly have been surprising given that Burney was married to a French man and had lived in France for a decade.³ The sharp critique of English society within the novel also accounts for some of the hostility with which the novel was treated upon its publication, given that this was a time when the discourse of nationalism, or patriotism, was reaching its nadir, as Linda Colley and Gerard Newman have shown.⁴ *The Wanderer* takes on a quasi-travel narrative form, which allows Burney to take Juliet on what amounts to a walking tour of England, from the seaside to the towns to the countryside. During her travels, Juliet meets a wide range of English society, from the upper classes at the beginning of the novel to the rural working peasants of the New Forest. While Juliet imagines that England will provide a relief for her from the violence of revolutionary Paris, she finds only danger in England. During her attempts to find refuge in the New Forest, for

³ As Margaret Doody speculates, 'Burney's public would have liked her novel better if she had spent all of it attacking the French and Napoleon.' Margaret Doody, 'Burney and politics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.109. Rose Marie Cutting also suggests that Burney's readers were hoping for a novel that 'unmask[ed] the sins of French society'. Rose Marie Cutting, 'A Wreath for Fanny Burney's Last Novel: *The Wanderer*'s Contribution to Women's Studies,' *Illinois Quarterly* 37 (1975): 47.

⁴ Colley, *Britons*, and Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).

example, she finds that the idealized image of the English countryside hides a landscape populated by petty criminals and people too busy trying to scratch out a living to appreciate the natural beauty which they live amongst. Both France and England are mired in suspicion, paranoia and violence. What Juliet discovers during her travels is that the English have no claim to moral superiority. In fact, most of the English people Juliet meets are avaricious, selfish and cruel. Juliet's French 'family', meanwhile, are the epitome of virtue and generosity. I am not suggesting here that Burney is arguing, in any kind of simplistic manner, that the French are 'better' or more virtuous than the English. Rather, *The Wanderer* calls into question the whole notion of national boundaries through its emphasis on the arbitrariness of notions of 'nationality'. The idea that either the English or the French can be assigned specific virtues or characteristics is destabilized throughout the novel, as other critics have noticed.⁵ One of the key ways that Burney problematizes the concept of national identity through *The Wanderer* is in her use of images of clothing, dressing, undressing and cosmetics, and how these images are linked to the creation of national (and class) identities. While there is general agreement in the critical literature that Burney collapses national distinctions throughout *The Wanderer*, this has hitherto not been associated specifically with the use made of clothing in the novel.⁶ By blurring the differences between France and England in the novel, Burney suggests that any idea of national difference is simply a cultural construction and, further, one that can be constructed through dress and cosmetics. While the English characters would like to claim superiority over the supposedly effeminate, frivolous French, entangled in a bloody

⁵ Leanne Maunu argues, for example, that 'Burney calls attention to the artificial and culturally constructed nature of nationalism...the randomness of one's birthplace and peer circle, Burney points out, influences our attachments and dislikes, which ultimately influence our understanding of other nations and people'. Leanne Maunu, *Women Writing the Nation: National Identity, Female Community, and the British-French Connection, 1770-1820* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), p.216.

⁶ Many critics have, however, foregrounded the importance of clothes in the novel. Kristina Straub, for example, argues that both *Camilla* and *The Wanderer* 'address the complex and contradictory position of the woman who seeks to control the way she is seen, the woman as manipulator of appearances, as the marker of her own identity—in short, of the woman as artist'. Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), p.190. More recently, Chloe Wigston Smith devotes a section of her study on the representation of work and clothes in eighteenth-century literature to *The Wanderer*. Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.145–79.

Revolution, the notion that they can actually differentiate themselves from the French is consistently undermined over the course of the narrative, to the point where even the most virulently Francophobic characters in the novel are forced to reassess their prejudices. Burney's representation of nationhood is radical, then, in its suggestion that national boundaries are performative, and therefore, largely arbitrary fictions.

That clothing has the ability to create or disguise national identity is repeatedly demonstrated in *The Wanderer*. Juliet appears in various guises throughout the novel, from impoverished black woman to fashionable French woman to English milkmaid. Of course, the first and easiest way to identify national identity is through clothing. When Juliet turns up at the boat that will take her from France to England she is dressed in rags and covered in black paint. The people she meets thus immediately identify her as an impoverished Creole woman. Later, when she is participating in the play staged by Elinor Jodderel, she dons the fashionable clothing of the upper classes, and her elegant bearing and the apparent ease with which she wears such outfits is read as revealing her true identity as an upper-class English woman. Juliet's ability to create (or discard) her national and class identity through clothing is constantly commented upon by a variety of characters, to the point where she is characterized as an Ovidian figure of trickery and metamorphosis. Juliet's ability to shapeshift through nationalities throws the idea of stable national identity into doubt. If Juliet can appear to be, and is treated as, a black woman, a French woman or an English woman, then how are we to tell what national identity is the 'true' one? Burney solves one problem for us—Juliet is not really black and therefore cannot sustain her disguise, which must inevitably wash off—but the uncertainty around whether she can be considered English or French lingers throughout the novel. At the end of the novel, for example, Juliet returns to France as soon as she is able to, and we are told that she would be quite happy to stay there indefinitely, if it weren't for her pregnancy and the need to present her child to her husband's English family. For all Juliet's apparent 'Englishness', then, she appears far more comfortable in France, surrounded by her adopted French family, than she ever appears to be in England. In this novel so acutely concerned with the making and wearing of clothes, then, the ability of clothing to allow the wearer to perform national identity is central to understanding the way Burney problematizes the idea of nationhood.

From Juliet's first, dramatic appearance in the novel, the people around her comment upon her ability to frustrate their expectations by eluding all of the definitions they seek to impose upon her, and thus they immediately

characterize her as a shape-shifter. Mrs Ireton's comment, 'Why that new skin must have cost you more than your new gown', said to Juliet when the black paint she has used to disguise her appearance in order to escape France has washed off, serves as a useful summation of the way unstable boundaries of nationality are tied up with either putting on, or taking off, clothing.⁷ If skin can be purchased, or simply put on as a dress can be, then nationality is simply another form of disguise or costume, able to be purchased and donned whenever it is convenient for the wearer. Mrs Ireton clearly finds such shape-shifting radically unsettling: 'You have been bruised and beaten; and dirty and clean; and ragged and whole; and wounded and healed; and a European and a Creole, in less than a week. I suppose, next, you will dwindle into a dwarf; and then, perhaps, find some surprising contrivance to shoot up into a giantess. There is nothing that can be too much to expect from so great an adept in metamorphoses' (46). While Mrs Ireton's 'ire' largely stems from her frustrated petty tyranny, this is a startlingly accurate prediction of precisely what Juliet will go on to do over the course of the novel. Juliet does, in fact, shape-shift numerous times, appearing at various times as white and black, English and French, rich and poor (although she does not manage to appear as either giantess or dwarf). Further, Juliet cycles through almost every occupation available to women in the late eighteenth century, from music teacher to milliner to shopkeeper and humble companion, showing a remarkable ability to adapt to ever changing circumstances. The uncertainty that the secondary characters feel about who Juliet actually 'is' is mirrored in the reader's uncertainty: for most of the novel, the reader has no idea what Juliet's real name is, or why she must conceal her identity so strictly. Elinor gives her the appellation 'Ellis' when Juliet can give her no other name, and so we are left to work out for ourselves how we read Juliet's class and national identity.

The idea that Juliet is a shape-shifter, able to appear to be anything that she wants to be, is returned to at the end of the novel. This time it is Riley who notes that 'you metamorphose yourself about so, one does not know which way to look for you. Ovid was a mere fool to you' (771). Like Mrs Ireton, Riley goes on to point out exactly how Juliet appears to be both 'European' and 'Creole', linking her ability to shape shift to her facility with costume and cosmetics: 'Look but what a beautiful head of hair she's displaying to us now! It becomes her mightily. But I won't swear that she does not change it, in a minute or two, for a skull-cap!' (771). Juliet's ability

⁷ Frances Burney, *The Wanderer*, edited by Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.45. All subsequent page references to this novel are taken from this edition.

to transform herself is achieved primarily through the clothes and accessories that she wears. She can cover up her natural beauty with a 'skull cap', or choose to appear as a young, beautiful woman and, crucially, she is believable in every guise she adopts. She has the ability to make people believe she is a black woman, a French woman or an English peasant, and all of these transformations are achieved through fashion. Juliet presents an intriguing puzzle to everyone she meets: she speaks perfect English with a French accent, yet is apparently black, and wears the costume of a poor black woman. Juliet's supposed racial identity at this early stage of the novel is entirely the product of what she is wearing and how she presents herself. She has used paint to appear black, and she is wearing clothes designed to conceal as much of her body and facial features as possible: 'the prominent borders of a French night-cap, which had almost concealed all her features, displayed a large black patch, that covered half her left cheek, and a broad black ribbon, which bound a bandage of cloth over the right side of her forehead' (20). The disguise is convincing: Riley suggests that she is from 'the settlements in the West Indies' or 'somewhere off the coast of Africa' (19). In other words, nobody doubts the authenticity of the costume that Juliet adopts, as indeed, nobody throughout the novel ever 'sees' through Juliet's various disguises. This ability to maintain a successful masquerade puts the lie to any claims that any one of Juliet's costumes is any more 'authentic' than another, as we will see.

Appropriately, given her own propensity for masquerade, it is Elinor who unknowingly anticipates the fact that Juliet's racial identity is a disguise when she mockingly suggests adopting the same strategy of transformation in order to attract Harleight's knight-errantry: 'for I won't lose a moment in becoming black, patched and pennyless!' (28). Indeed, a few days after her arrival, Juliet's disguise washes away: 'a manifest alteration in the complexion of her attendant, which, from a regular and equally dark hue, appeared, on the second morning, to be smeared and streaked; and, on the third, to be of a dusky white' (42-3). Soon, Juliet is revealed to be of 'a skin changed from a tint nearly black, to the brightest, whitest, and most dazzling fairness' (43). Juliet's transformation from black to dazzling white can be read on one level as a moment of revelation: far from the West Indian or African woman she is assumed to be, she is a European and her white skin is 'real'. However, Mrs Ireton points out that the revelation of Juliet's whiteness hardly solves the mystery of her national identity, saying:

'O! what, you have some other metamorphosis to prepare, perhaps? Those bandages and patches are to be converted into

something else? And pray, if it will not be too great a liberty to enquire, what are they to exhibit? The order of Maria Theresa? Or of the Empress of all the Russias? If I did not fear being impertinent, I should be tempted to ask how many coats of white and red you were obliged to lay on, before you could cover all that black.' (44)

The image of Juliet painting red and white paint over her black skin suggests that Juliet's ability to become a different nationality through the use of cosmetics throws the idea of being able to identify somebody's 'authentic' national identity into considerable doubt. Which layer of skin is the true layer and which is the layer of paint? Of course, we know that Juliet is 'really' white, but if her black skin was so convincing that she fooled everybody on the boat into thinking that she was black, then Mrs Ireton's question becomes rather more revealing. Juliet could be white pretending to be black, or she could be black pretending to be white. If skin colour can be painted on or washed off, then how are we to determine racial boundaries? Indeed, Juliet's ability to frustrate expectations becomes something of a parlour trick for Elinor, as she tries to coerce Juliet to adopting different disguises to 'phiz' Aunt Maple (53). Of course, this is largely a false, and quite problematic, equivalence here: Juliet can simply wash off her black skin, and therefore, escape the kind of racial discrimination that a real Creole woman would face in eighteenth-century British society. The parallel between skin colour and cosmetics is, at best, an uneasy one. Nonetheless, Burney does suggest that race and nationality are simply things that can be either assumed or discarded, just as clothes can either disguise or reveal, so, at least in the narrative world of *The Wanderer*, black paint can conceivably be used as a marker of the instability of racial boundaries.

Given the novel's emphasis on the difficulties inherent in using dress as a means of identifying racial and/or class boundaries, it is difficult to assign authenticity to any of the roles Juliet takes up over the course of the novel, even when they are read by other characters as revelatory. When Juliet takes up the role of Lady Townly in Elinor's production of *The Provoked Husband*, the fashionable outfit that she dons causes the company to perceive her in an entirely new light:

it was from the ease with which she wore her ornaments, the grace with which she set them off, the elegance of her deportment, and an air of dignified modesty, that spoke her not only accustomed to such attire, but also to the good breeding and

refined manners, which announce the habits of life to have been formed in the superior classes of society. (92)

Juliet is 'really' the upper-class woman that she appears to be in these clothes, so on one level this outfit does reveal something about Juliet's true identity. However, while Juliet's performance of an upper-class woman in Lady Townly is read as an authentic portrayal, this is, in fact, literally a costume. Juliet's 'identity' is again read through her clothing, but while this costume is read by those around Juliet as revealing something of her 'true' self, it should not be overlooked that she is playing a part in a play at the time, and thus again self-consciously assuming a role. The idea that one particular costume is more authentic than another is a problematic contention in this novel of metamorphosis and shape-shifting. Helen Thompson has described this moment in the text as 'Burney's paradoxical, apparently incoherent attempt to figure the wanderer's whiteness as both self-evident (asserted by her blushes) and spectacularly revelatory (blindingly revealed by the opened shutters)'.⁸ This is an important point, because it seems here that Burney does not quite grasp how problematic it is to embed in her narrative the assumption clothing can reveal 'true' self, when this is firstly, literally a costume and, secondly, when the rest of the novel repeatedly demonstrates how fashion and performance can construct (or disguise) identity. Juliet's performance of white, English upper-class woman is persuasive, but then, so was her performance of lower-class blackness. How, then, can you decide which national identity is the correct one? How can clothes reveal the truth about one's identity if they can also conceal, shape or distort the truth? In attempting to 'reveal' Juliet's class status through her clothes, Burney is attempting to utilize what she has already established to be an unstable determinate of identity.

The instability of clothing as a marker of class status is further underlined by the many instances in the novel when Juliet is 'read' as a lower-class woman due to the clothes that she wears. When Miss Arbe convinces Juliet to take part in a concert during the period of time when Juliet is attempting to use her musical abilities to support herself, she buys Juliet a gown designed to mark out her difference from the other young ladies taking part. The colour Miss Arbe suggests is bright pink, a colour that is both sexually suggestive, and designed to draw attention to Juliet and mark her out as different: 'as our uniform is fixed to be white, with violet-ornaments,

⁸ Helen Thompson, 'How the Wanderer Works: Reading Burney and Bourdieu,' *ELH* 68.4 (2001), 971

it was my thought to beg Miss Arbe would order something of this shewy sort for Miss Ellis; to distinguish us *Dilettanti* from the artists' (314). Juliet, with her acute sense of the political significance of clothing, is well aware what the pink dress signifies, and responds with revulsion, refusing to wear the gown and instead appearing at the concert in 'plain white satin, with ornaments of which the simplicity shewed as much taste as modesty' (358). Juliet will not be part of an attempt to use her clothing to signify her difference, so instead she uses her clothing as a kind of mute protest. White registers both her purity and her reluctance to perform in public. Clothes are the way that she can frame herself as the reluctant performer: a genteel woman hesitant to be seen as sexually available. As Juliet cycles through professions, she finds herself adopting the clothes of women ever further down the social ladder. During her journey through the New Forest, Juliet adopts the costume of a country maiden: 'she changed over night, her bonnet, which was of white chip, for one the most coarse and ordinary of straw, with her young hostess; of whom, also, she bought a blue striped apron' (665). Once again, Juliet finds that the clothes make the woman, as her adoption of Debby Dyson's bonnet leads to unwanted sexual advances. Juliet is treated like a working class, promiscuous woman, because that is the persona her costume evokes. Such is the power of her bonnet that it attracts sexual invitations no matter who is the wearer. When Juliet swaps the offending bonnet with the daughter of a farmer she stays with, the sexual connotations of the bonnet travel with it again: 'she had caused Bet to be taken for that bold hussy, by the higler' (702). So powerful are clothes that they literally take their symbolic significance with them, erasing or disguising the woman who wears them. Juliet's very ability to successfully pose as a working-class woman through her clothing recalls anxieties around Marie Antoinette's adoption of plain white muslin gowns and straw hats as her preferred costume at Le Petit Trianon, as if an upper-class woman can be taken for a working class peasant, then surely the opposite can be true. As Caroline Weber points out in her excellent study of the symbolic significance of Marie Antoinette's clothes, there was much anxiety about the way the pastoral style cultivated by the Queen 'obfuscated long-standing sartorially coded differences in class'.⁹ How could the French distinguish their Queen from a peasant, if they were both wearing the same kind of dress? Juliet is an aristocratic woman by birth, yet is read as a working-class, sexually available woman due to the clothes that she wears. The ability of a working-class woman to appropriate the fashions of the upper-class was a key site of

⁹ Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), p. 159.

anxiety during the eighteenth century, so Burney is here exploring popular anxieties about the politics of fashion in ways that would be very recognizable to her contemporary readers.¹⁰

As I gestured towards earlier, the problem of identifying Juliet's racial identity is hardly solved when we discover that Juliet's black skin washes away. There is considerable confusion over whether to identify Juliet as an English woman or as a French woman, and she is read variously as both over the course of the novel. While some of the more virulent Francophobic characters throughout the novel respond negatively to Juliet's French accent, when Juliet takes up employment in a milliner's, she finds that her Frenchness is as much an asset in this environment as it is a liability in others. She functions as a draw card for customers due to France's association with high fashion. When Miss Matson spreads the word that she has employed a French woman, the news is 'soon spread through the neighbourhood; with the addition that the same person had brought over specimens of all the French *costume*' (429, emphasis is Burney's). Juliet's Frenchness, or ability to assume the identity of a French woman, is the most effective means to advertise the wares of the store, and she becomes a local draw card for women hoping to take her advice on how to emulate the latest Parisian fashions. Juliet's ability to advise customers how to arrange their gowns and accessories, is presumed to be a natural consequence of her Frenchness, or at least her long residence in France. That Juliet does, in fact, have this facility with dress and cosmetics has been stressed repeatedly through the novel, so here Juliet's identification as a fashionable French woman seems quite apt. Once again, then, Juliet can appear to be of a different nationality by way of her clothing and what that clothing signifies. The way Juliet dresses herself (and others) creates her as a French woman just as other people read her skill in arranging her outfits as a sign of, variously, her innocence and her gentility. Despite the ease with which Juliet can arrange her clothing in order to create or disguise her identity, which is linked to her fashionable Frenchness, Burney goes to some length to demonstrate that Juliet is a master of disguise because she simply must be. This is not a matter of choice or play: in order to keep her identity firmly concealed, she must

¹⁰ John Styles' discussion of the significance of white stockings is interesting here. White stockings had been associated with the upper class, but from 1750 onwards, the possession of white stockings by the working class had become a 'common subject of plebeian aspiration'. Again we see here the idea that clothes give the wearer the ability to transcend social and cultural boundaries. See John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p.195.

adopt a variety of disguises. It is clear that this sits uneasily with Juliet, as Burney tells us that 'shocking to all her feelings was this attempt at disguise, so imitative of guilt, so full of semblance to conscious imposture' (174). Chloe Wigston Smith has read Juliet's shame at having to adopt such disguises as revealing Juliet's 'essential Britishness—conceptualized in the novel as moral purity', so that we 'see through the literal and figurative darkness of her disguise'.¹¹ I would argue that, in fact, there is no such thing as 'essential Britishness' in this novel. In this novel so concerned with the concept of disguise and metamorphosis, even Juliet's Britishness is simply another outfit that can be put on or removed depending on her needs, just as she can capitalize on her links with fashionable France when it is convenient. Even though Juliet is personally uncomfortable with imposture, this does not necessarily negate the effect of Burney's portrayal of nationality as costume. At the end of the novel, Juliet dons clothes appropriate to the station that she has been born into, when Sir Jaspar, in the full knowledge of who she really is, presents her with a 'complete small assortment of the finest linen' and a 'white chip bonnet of the most beautiful texture' (769). These are clothes befitting the status of the Honourable Miss Granville, and form part of her conscious attempt to 'prove' her authentic identity as an upper-class woman now that it is expedient for her to do so. However, after reading some 768 pages of text about the ability of clothes to *create* identity, it is hard to accept that this particular outfit is somehow more authentic than any of the costumes donned by Juliet prior to this point, just as her Lady Townly costume is problematic as a stable marker of identity. The fact that these clothes also form part of Juliet's self-conscious strategy to convince people that she is, indeed, Juliet Granville, lends further weight to the suggestion that clothes can be used to create social identity. Clothes signify the creation (or destruction) of class and national status throughout *The Wanderer*, so the high status accorded to Juliet when wearing fine linens and handsome bonnets is radically destabilized.

Juliet is hardly the only character, meanwhile, with an acute understanding of how clothing can be used to construct identity. Elinor Joddrel dons a variety of highly theatrical outfits and poses throughout the novel in order to construct herself as a radical Wollstonecraftian figure, from her adoption of 'foreign' male drag to floating around graveyards dressed in a white shroud. Indeed, Julia Epstein has perceptively called both Juliet and Elinor 'self-activating chameleon[s]'.¹² However, while Juliet is hesitant

¹¹ Wigston Smith, 175.

¹² Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p.187.

about the morality of disguise, Elinor revels in it, seeing herself as a profoundly disruptive figure: 'I regard and treat the whole of my race as the mere dramatis personæ of a farce; of which I am myself, when performing with such fellow-actors, as principal buffoon' (153). Elinor creates herself through highly staged pieces of theatre and elaborate costumes, seeing life as a farce with herself at the center. In Elinor's 'farces', we see the essential theatricality of the Revolution. The Revolution is created through pieces of theatre, whether these pieces of theatre are public executions, such as the one Juliet is forced to witness in order to scare her into marrying the French commissary, or Elinor's staging of herself as a heroine of romance through her numerous suicide attempts (which are used to further tie her to Wollstonecraft, whose suicide attempts became notorious after they were revealed in Godwin's posthumous memoir of the author). Elinor defines France as the location of true, radical enlightenment: 'I feel as if I had never awaked into life, till I had opened my eyes on that side of the channel' (18). She thus attempts to align herself to France by the way she dresses, but instead of creating herself as a fashionable French lady, she instead attempts to position herself as a French man. When Elinor attempts to commit suicide at Juliet's concert, she dresses in drag, in a costume designed to disguise herself both as a man, and as a foreigner:

He was wrapt in a large scarlet coat, which hung loosely over his shoulders, and was open at the breast, to display a brilliant waistcoat of coloured and spangled embroidery. He had a small, but slouched hat, which he had refused to take off, that covered his forehead and eye-brows, and shaded his eyes: and a cravat of enormous bulk encircled his chin, and enveloped not alone his ears, but his mouth. Nothing was visible but his nose, which was singularly long and pointed. The whole of his habiliment seemed of foreign manufacture (357).

Elinor, the self-professed revolutionary, essentially dresses up as a French man in order to stage her public suicide attempt, so this is essentially a double performance. While her clothes are not necessarily immediately perceived as specifically 'French', their very strangeness marks them out as 'foreign' in style, as everybody immediately recognizes. Elinor has created herself as a foreign man, just as Juliet has created herself as a black woman, but these identities are costume: attempts to create an alternative self through clothing.

Clearly, the intersection of national identity and clothing is one of *The Wanderer's* central preoccupations. However, one of Burney's most

interesting comments on the link between clothing and national identity is easily overlooked. The comic character Gooch comments that he would like to know if the French have 'millions and millions of red-coats there, all made into generals, in the twinkling, as one may say, of an eye?' (79). While the English soldiers wear red-coats, the French army did not.¹³ While it certainly plausible to suggest that Gooch has simply presumed that French soldiers wear red uniforms because that is the colour of English uniforms, I would suggest that this comment is far more significant, and tied to Burney's exploration of the performative nature of national identity. The French and the English are once again confused, and again, the source of that confusion is the clothes that they wear. The French soldiers become English red coats, and vice versa. If the way to identify which soldier is which is through the uniforms that they wear, what happens if they swap uniforms? Or wear the same colours? If the English cannot even tell French soldiers from English soldiers, how can you tell what nation an individual properly belongs to? This comment takes on increased significance, too, when read against the importance placed on military uniforms by the English at the time. As Linda Colley writes, British military costumes of the period were immensely lurid: richly ornamented, very brightly coloured, and quite impractical, an impulse she attributes to 'underlining their wearers' patriotic function'.¹⁴ British military costumes were supposed to signify something intrinsic about their wearers, but Gooch's inability to differentiate the British army from the French suggests that, while the British army might hope to use clothing to create a sense of national identity, this is actually impossible to achieve. Clothing is an unstable determinate of identity, and so British attempts to fashion an identity through their military costumes can only ever be delusive. This easily overlooked error from the comically ignorant Gooch, then, is a neat, comic summation of the interplay between clothing and constructions of national identity in the novel. The patriotic function of the red coat is undermined by Gooch's inability to see the costume as specifically signifying Englishness.

As Juliet travels through England, adopting the clothing of various nationalities and classes as she goes, she finds herself adopting what feels like an almost endless sequence of identities. At no point is the authenticity of her costumes questioned, and in fact, her disguises are so successful that she is able to literally walk past Harleigh at one point without being

¹³ See Terry Crowley's *French Revolutionary Infantry 1789-1902* for more information about the uniforms of French soldiers during the period. Terry Crowley, *French Revolutionary Infantry 1789-1902* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2004).

¹⁴ Colley, 190.

recognized: 'Harleigh, to whom her dress, as he had not caught a view of her face, proved a complete disguise of her person, concluded her to be some light nymph of the inn' (726). That Harleigh immediately reads Juliet as a 'light nymph', with all its sexual connotations, reveals that he cannot, in fact, immediately recognize her true gentility, despite his claims to the contrary. As Smith astutely writes, 'the more time Juliet spends in England, the more she is subjected to sartorial stereotyping by acquaintances and strangers'.¹⁵ Moreover, the further into the heart of England Juliet travels, the more she finds that her previous ideas about what defines Englishness do not withstand any kind of scrutiny. Juliet imagines that the New Forest will provide her with refuge from the harsh judgments of the world: 'to lodge with a rustic family of this simple description, in so retired and remote a spot, promising all the security and privacy that she required' (659). However, it is during this sojourn in the New Forest that Juliet discovers that English national identity is built on as unstable a foundation as her own masquerade as a black woman, finding that the beauty of the landscape hides a network of criminals, cruel patriarchs, and shallow, frivolous women. Just as Juliet's black skin washes away, so too do her fantasies about the English countryside, musing that popular perceptions about the pastoral idyll would be destroyed were the upper and middle class English people 'to toil with them [the peasants of the forest] but one week!' (697). The English may comfort themselves with myths about the graceful and beautiful countryside, but these myths hide a much darker reality of poverty and economic disadvantage.

Ultimately, despite the happy ending to the novel, in which Juliet's true identity is asserted and her marriage to Harleigh made possible through the conveniently timed execution of her husband, Juliet never really seems to align herself with England wholeheartedly. It should be noted that one of Juliet's first actions upon her marriage is not to set up a home for herself in England, but to retrace her journey across the Channel and return to France. Both locales, in fact, become 'safe' at precisely the same time, again underlining their familiarity. The denouement of the novel sees France become safe due to the demise of Robespierre (and Juliet's husband) and, at precisely the same moment, England is rendered safe (at least, for Juliet) as her identity is affirmed through Admiral Powel's codicil. Once again, Burney emphasizes the similarities, rather than the differences, between the two locales: just as they were once both hostile environments to Juliet, they are now both perfectly safe and welcoming. Moreover, upon Juliet's return

¹⁵ Wigston Smith, 176.

to France, she receives the warm homecoming that she did not receive upon her homecoming to England:

There she was embraced and blessed by her honoured benefactress...there, and not vainly, she strove to console her beloved Gabriella; and there, in the elegant society to which she had owed all her early enjoyments, she prevailed upon Harleigh to remain. (871)

Juliet is evidently in no rush to return to England. In fact, the only reason that Juliet does return to England at all is her pregnancy, and the need to present her child to both Harleigh's English family, who remain invisible in the novel, and Admiral Powel. The implication here is that Juliet would be quite satisfied to remain in France indefinitely, except for the fact that a 'rising family, then, put an end to foreign excursions' (871). While Juliet has, at last, been given the English name she has sought throughout the novel, it seems that she is more interested in reuniting with her adoptive family in France than settling into an English upper-class lifestyle. Again, the suggestion that Burney is privileging France over England is far too simplistic a reading of what is a complex and thoughtful exploration of both nations. Rather, her refusal to bow to national stereotypes of both the English and the French reveals that, to Burney, national identity is a meaningless construction. The English are not uniformly virtuous (indeed, far from it), and so too are the French not uniformly dissipated and sensual, despite popular prejudices. In Burney's fictional universe, virtue is the only true indicator of worth, and these virtues bear no relationship whatsoever to the arbitrary fictions that are national boundaries.

In Burney's fictional rendering of both England and France, then, the only difference that she can identify between the two nations is geographical distance: there are no qualities or characteristics that can be defined as 'French' or 'English'. While France is in the midst of political upheaval, England is hardly the safe haven that the English present it to be, and even the pastoral idyll evoked by the New Forest ultimately fails as a coherent marker of national identity. Conversely, the French are hardly the lascivious corrupted spendthrifts that the English imagine them to be, but, in fact, provide far more useful and loyal assistance to the beleaguered heroine than the English. Burney's long, digressive novel works through models of both English and French national identity, only to finally decide that these models are meaningless fictions with no relevance to life as it is actually lived. Virtue does not belong exclusively to either the English or the French, and

neither England nor France is privileged: a remarkable position, given that Burney was representing France at the height of Revolution. Rather, private morality and personal worth are the only means by which to accurately judge another person. The ability to either create or disguise national and/or racial identities suggests that such identities are simply a matter of performance: that they can be put on or put off with one's clothing. In emphasizing the performative nature of national identity throughout *The Wanderer*, Burney undermines the very nature of nationhood itself. In a world where national identity can be performed through one's clothing, neither England nor France can lay claim to any sort of stable national identity. Published at a time when patriotism was at its zenith, Burney's portrait of nationhood was radical indeed.

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