

2017 McGill-ASECS Fellowship Report: Dan Waterfield

I visited the Burney Centre in August to September 2017 in order to better understand Frances Burney's religious thought. I hoped that a survey of her family's letters and diaries would go some way to reconstruct – and perhaps explain – the vicious editing she undertook late in her life – both on her own, and her father's, correspondence. My visit was more than fruitful. I found an evidence trail of sustained familial awareness of the Burney Family's Catholic heritage, whether in Susan and Charles' awkward cries of no popery to safeguard themselves during the Gordon riots, their concurrent sympathy towards his Catholic tenants and students, or what I suspect were Frances' early fears come to life in her friends' wary treatment after her marriage to General d'Arblay. This not only complicates and contextualising existing critical treatments of the Burney family, but paves the way for a wealth of new work.

Since Joyce Hemlow's foundational biography and editions of Burney's diaries from the 1950s, the importance of the biographical quality of Burney's political thought has been well established. From the 1980s onward a wave of feminist criticism, sparked by Margaret Anne Doody's desire to rescue Burney from languishing as a footnote to Jane Austen, highlighted Burney's articulation of the intrinsic violence of womanhood.¹ Julia Epstein encapsulates this when she argues that Burney's novels prove 'surface propriety was purchased at the price of internal rage,' and that Burney 'wrote in order to permit herself to live.'² Barbara Zonitch echoed this in a historically-grounded survey that suggests 'Burney's preoccupation with

¹ Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: the life in the works*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 2.

² Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the politics of women's writing* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 5, 9 – 10.

violence originates in the fear that the death of the aristocratic social denomination subjects women to the escalating violence of the modern world.³ The question of religion, however, has remained sidelined. This is particularly curious when we note the prominence given to her Roman Catholic grandmother Frances Sleepe in these accounts of Frances' ideological formation. Margaret Anne Doody, Claire Harman, and Kate Chisholm inter alia all pinpoint in this affection – in Doody's words - 'her first unconscious lesson against bigotry, intolerance, and snobbishness.'⁴ It is difficult to believe that hearing tales of catholic persecution could lead to a strong sense of social equality for all, except Catholics. Indeed, her father Charles Burney's fear that his daughter might convert – and his subsequent unwillingness to send her to France, has become a popular anecdote for Burney's biographers, one often contrasted with her later marriage to the French Roman Catholic General d'Arblay in the Sardinian Embassy's Catholic chapel.

How, then, are we to approach this apparent silence in what Burney has left us? Indeed, it is a silence at all? Religion, after all, has been discussed in the context of Burney's novels, if only obliquely. Joyce Hemlow was – predictably – the first to note that Burney's diaries and letters are filled with references to conduct books, those popular texts that 'instructed or initiated new-comers [and] the rising middle classes at their entrance to the drawing rooms.'⁵ Villars letters, as Hemlow goes on to suggest, 'constitute a courtesy book' that was 'astonishingly complete.'⁶ Yet the religious content of these books cannot be overlooked. Reverend Villars is, after all, an Anglican clergyman. 'Evelina's experience' of following her guardian's advice, Emma Major notes suggests that 'piety was an awkward partner for a

³ Barbara Zonitch, *Familiar Violence: Gender and Social upheaval in the novels of Frances Burney*, (London: University of Delaware Press, 1997),

⁴ Doody,

⁵ Joyce Hemlow, 'Fanny Burney and the courtesy books,' *PMLA*, Vol 65, No. 5 (Sep., 1950), pp. 732 – 761, p. 732

⁶ Hemlow, 755-6.

fashionable life.’⁷ But as *Evelina* is itself an epistolary Bildungsroman formed in part on the young heroine’s attempts to write a response to her guardian’s letters, and against her biological father’s destruction of the literary trail which would prove her legitimacy Emma Major’s wider point that identifies womanhood as a personification of church and nation should take priority. Contextualising existing criticism with the work of religious and cultural historians, however, suggests fertile new critical pathways. This becomes even more apt when we consider her problematic grandmother, whose legitimate claims to authority haunt both *Evelina* and Reverend Villars. The brutish Captain Mirvan’s repeated ‘japes’ fail to silence a woman who, proclaiming her ‘foi in ‘dieu’ stubbornly asserts her right to take her granddaughter back to Paris to finish off her education. Yet as some critics have pointed out, this woman is neither straightforwardly French nor English, nor is she wholly proletarian or aristocratic. Her faith is therefore particularly dangerous. Colin Haydon’s work suggests that the mere figure of a soldier attacking a non-English woman would have glossed the woman as Catholic.⁸ If this were not enough, his later work points out that a Catholic education on the continent could lead to a difficulty with the English language.⁹ Captain Mirvan’s violence, then, surely carries with it a distinct anti-Jacobite tinge. Indeed, thanks to the work of, inter alia, Carine Martin and Jennifer Novotny, we can see that his brutal assault of Duval, which leaves her in a ditch, clothes shredded, should be read both as a punishment of her gendered transgressions and a search for material evidence of Jacobite treason¹⁰. They are,

⁷ Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, church, and nation, 1712 – 1812*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), P. 193

⁸ Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, C 1714-80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.53-54.

⁹ Colin Haydon ‘I love my king and my country, but a roman Catholic I hate: anti-Catholicism, xenophobia and national identity in eighteenth-century England.’ in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Eds.) *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c1650 – 1850*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp 33 – 52, P. 36.

¹⁰ Jennifer Novotny, ‘Polite War: material culture of the jacobite era; 1688 – 1790.’ In Alan McInnes, Kieran German, and Lesley Graham (eds.) *Living with jacobitism, 1690 – 1788* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), pp. 153 – 172, p. 158. ;

indeed, inextricable. This historical context, then, suggests that just as Evelina has the prospect of a glorious Anglican womanhood ahead of her, Reverend Villars is eternally terrified of an alternate maternal, Catholic inheritance for his young charge. That Evelina's account of her grandmother's sufferings is fundamentally sympathetic is telling in its enticing parallels with Burney's own life. Indeed, once we begin to notice the parallels, it is not just Evelina that contains such tacit commentary on the questions of religious and national identity. Just as *Cecilia's* Delvile Family hints at its Catholic identity and past Stuart allegiances in the wake of Burney's experiences of The Gordon Riots, *The Wanderer* ended with an explicit defence of the Christianity of a Catholic Bishop.

I therefore approached the Burney Centre's collections with four broad aims. I wanted to complete a comprehensive survey of the Burney family's correspondents, both in order to grasp possible influences and to plot these against whose correspondence she destroyed later in life. Secondly, to use the comprehensive collection of correspondence between Frances and Charles to reach a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between her father's understanding of continental culture and that expressed in her own work. Harman, inter alia, notes the closeness of the composition between *Cecilia* and Charles' history.¹¹ Lonsdale prefigures this, arguing that although Frances 'later gave the impression that there was a considerable interval between the publication' of the second volume of the *History* and *Cecilia*, Charles 'was greatly attracted by the prospect of the simultaneous appearance of the two works.'¹² The extent to which the Catholic culture in which Frances was inculcated by her father's research and friendships influenced her post-Evelina novels has been under-

Carine Martin 'Female rebels: The female figure in anti-jacobite propaganda' in Alan McInnes, Kieran German, and Lesley Graham (eds.) *Living with jacobitism, 1690 – 1788* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), pp. 85 – 98. (p.88)

¹¹ Claire Harman, p. 162-163.

¹² Roger Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 262.

explored. Thirdly, I wanted to look at the early life of their son, Alexander. Born in England and raised in France, I hoped to find track potential similarities between Charles Burney's concerns for Frances' formative love of her Catholic grandmother, and any potential anxieties concerning the Franco-British d'Arblay's identity. Lastly, I wanted to reconsider Frances Burney d'Arblay's memoir of her father and final editing of her correspondence as an act of self-fashioning. Lonsdale considers her memoir of her father as a final novel and, in this sense, can be considered as an integral part of the wider thought expressed in her novels.

Of course, archival work never runs as planned. But what I did find thankfully supported my fill-in-the-gaps work heretofore done during my MA and first years of my PhD with something more concrete, both from a wider survey of the collected archival material and easy access to the edited journals and letters.

Perhaps most importantly, manuscript versions of Susan Burney's account of The Gordon Riots demonstrate the family's sympathy for the Catholic faith. Frances Burney and Hester Thrale's experiences in Bath during the anti-Catholic riots of June 1780 are well attested. The Egerton MS of Susan Burney's letters to Frances however, go beyond their published detail. Warning Frances 'how How frightened & how miserable would you have been had you known what has been passing in St Martin's Street, & indeed in almost every street in London since my last paquet,' Susan summons the strength and 'courage to take up a pen.' Her account of the mobs' encroachment into their neighbourhood is disturbing. The '30 foot guards with an ensign at their head' who march forward to subdue the rioters not only leave the mob well alone, but 'one of these even joined in the huzza.' Moreover, in a passage that is worth quoting in full, Susan recounts how:

My sister & I stood at the window, the crowd being then greatly diminished, as Nos. had flown to attack other places – I saw about 10 men & women in a group looking up at our Windows – “No popery,” cried they & repeated this 2 or 3 times – but as Men, Women, & children had been crying No Popery a thousand times during the evening, & indeed all the day long, we had no idea that we were ourselves addressed at this time, till one the men said to the rest pointing us out, “they are all three papists.” – “for god sake, cried poor Etty, Mr Burney call out No popery or anything” – Mr B – accordingly got his hat & Huzza’d from the window – It went against me to hear him, tho it seemed no joke in the present situation of things to be mark’d out by such wretches, as Papists – “God bless your honour” they then cried, & went away very well satisfied. ¹³

Susan articulates a familial tension between the necessity of outward Anglicanism and an enduring sympathy towards the victims. Despite the lack of sources which I suspect results from Frances’ late editing of the family papers, a more complicated picture of religious family identity emerges.

Moreover, as Susan’s journals and letters demonstrate the extent to which Charles and his family were integrated into the economy and society of Catholic London. Susan explains that

‘soon after my sister left us, Mrs Reynolds called, & told us Mr Drummond, whose daughter is one of my father’s scholars, was expected to be attacked that night –

¹³ 8-12 June 1780 SB to FB BM Barrett Egerton MS 3691 f. 132 - 142

because his wife & family are Catholics – did you ever hear of such persecution? –
His house is just opposite to Sir Joshua Reynolds.’¹⁴

Susan thereby locates the family within a wider web of Catholic patronage. Yet this is not an isolated incident. She writes that a ‘Mr Porter [...] whose wife keeps a china shop in one of the houses belonging to my father, just at the back of ours’ was shown in to the parlour. He explains that his ‘house was to be attacked that night [...] because ma’am, they say we are papists.’ Susan blurts out a request to know whether it’s true, and when the man awkwardly replies in the affirmative she tellingly reassures him ‘do not apologise for them to *us* – we are the last people who would wish you to be persecuted.’¹⁵ Susan’s letters exhibit both an awareness of their own heritage and the political necessity of Anglicanism at the same time that their own familial space is shown to be confessionally contested. In other words, they struggle with sympathy for Catholics rooted in their own heritage and their daily interactions, both via Charles’ own property holdings, research into the history of music, and his own enduring friendships with visiting Italian musicians. Indeed, in the same week that Charles is forced to yell ‘no popery’ and his daughter reassures his tenant that they are not anti-Catholic, he writes to his friend and collaborator Thomas Twining of ‘the mad bull john’ terrorizing his Catholic friend Paccierotti’s performance at the London opera.¹⁶ These journals and letters however, not only develop the extent of Charles’ economic holdings but demonstrate the inextricability of the Burney family from their Catholic neighbours. It is, therefore, implausible to claim that Charles’ fear of his daughter’s conversion and later

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Charles Burney to Thomas Twining 11 June 1780 in Charles Burney *The Letters of Charles Burney, vol 1, 1551 – 1784* ed. by Alvaro Ribeiro, SJ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp 301 – 312, p.302, 306.

marriage was derived from sectarianism. Rather, Charles would have been well aware of the social penalties under which Catholics suffered.

Indeed, Charles seems to have been proved correct. Joyce Hemlow's fourth volume of the edited journals letters demonstrates the little-remarked effects Burney's marriage to d'Arblay had on her circle of friends. Burney writes in her 26 Feb to 10 March 1798 journal of her enduring friendship with Mrs Chapone. This contrasts with her treatment by Mrs Ord, whom she suspects both of being duped by an unnamed other and 'weakening friendships.'¹⁷ The Barrett manuscripts demonstrates the enduring quality and depth of this friendship, which lasted almost up until Chapone's death and which, indeed, extended to Burney's wider family.¹⁸ This is particularly interesting considering the clear critical influence (remarked above) of Hester Chapone's conduct literature on *Evelina*. Moreover, as Hemlow's edition remarked, Chapone 'spoke warmly of Camilla – especially of Sir Hugh, but told me she had detected me in some Gallicisms and pointed some out.'¹⁹ Chapone's friendship brought with it a clear critical influence. But her remark on Burney's gallicisms echoes too the uneasy influence her husband's faith and nationality had on her writing, and prefigures the tidal wave of disapprobation she received for *The Wanderer*. Burney's marriage, then, influenced her peers' views of her loyalty and writing from its very beginning. This only validates both her and her father's earlier anxieties, and the problematic nature of Catholicism in polite society.

General d'Arblay's correspondence as he attempts to negotiate his pension under the rise of Napoleon, meanwhile, underscores the family's transnational fame. In brief, d'Arblay

¹⁷ Chelsea and west humble journal, 26Feb – 10 March 1798, Joyce Hemlow, ed. *The journals and letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)*, Vol. 4, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973)

¹⁸ Hester Chapone to Frances Burney d'Arblay,

¹⁹ Chelsea and west humble journal.

discovered that he technically only served in the army for 24 years, and that he is not therefore eligible for his pension. Lafayette states that others in the same situation, however, had been granted their pension at Napoleon's discretion. In this particular instance, d'Arblay eventually accepts an offer of military service if that means putting down the rebellion in St Domingue, but twice fatally states that he cannot bear arms against England. There is an apparent deadlock. However, a note (Berg 1/202) following d'Arblay's letter to Lafayette narrates Lafayette's interview with the first consul. Napoleon seems to accept d'Arblay's plea on the basis that his wife is the celebrated author of *Cecilia*. Soon afterwards, his pension is awarded. This is critical, and only underscores both the presence of Napoleon in the couples' trans-national lives, but also the spectre of St Domingue and its associated threats of race, revolution, and disease. For our purposes, however, it also underscores the trans-national reputation of Frances Burney herself – a reputation that while it reached as far as Napoleon and helped secure favour for her husband, also came back to problematize her own relationship with Englishness in her final novel.

Though there is no smoking gun, there is nevertheless more than enough manuscript evidence in the Burney Centre collection to demonstrate a life-long anxiety regarding the limits of their Anglican identity, Catholic heritage, and its relation to their place in society. Catholicism continued to exert a full influence on Frances and her family, and while there is of course no evidence she ever thought of conversion beyond childhood, it nevertheless remained an ineluctable part of her identity. None of this of course would have been possible without the warm welcome from everyone at the Burney Centre. Many thanks in particular for all the travel help during an 'interesting' flight over, culinary recommendations, and sympathy in my long-running struggle with the microfilm machine!