

Frances Burney's *A Busy Day; or, an Arrival from India* (1800-1802) and the Family Business

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Frances Burney (1752-1840) became one of the most famous eighteenth-century English novelists after the publication of her first work *Evelina* (1778), which was followed by other successful novels that made her a household name in Britain. Though Burney was always very attracted by the stage and there is a close relationship between her narrative and dramatic production, her comedies and tragedies have been considerably less explored and celebrated by eighteenth-century scholars and feminism. This article examines Burney's comedy *A Busy Day; or, an Arrival from India* (1800-1802), which was never performed on stage during her lifetime and was one of the author's last compositions paving the way for her harsh social criticism in *The Wanderer* (1814). Like all of Burney's works, *A Busy Day* contains a good deal of satire and a provoking view of the domestic ideology, colonialism and the economic interests of the family at the turn of the nineteenth century. Burney introduces an insightful analysis of vulgarity and prejudice against the middle class. By drawing on the work of several Burney scholars, gender and theatre studies, I show how gender and colonialism are interrelated in *A Busy Day*, which showcases an evolution from Burney's first heroine in *Evelina* to a more mature woman that would continue up to *The Wanderer* and it turns out to be Burney's fiercest dramatic criticism against bias based on class, race and sex.

Keywords: Frances Burney; eighteenth-century; theatre studies; gender studies; English literature.

1. Introduction

Most studies about Frances Burney (1752-1840) focus on her role as the founder of the domestic novel written by women. Despite the already existing long tradition of women novelists before her, Burney stood out for her awareness of being a female novelist and her use of the genre to denounce the position of women in eighteenth-century society, as the prefaces to both *Evelina* and *The Wanderer* show. In fact, Burney created a literary tradition that would be followed by Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen or Elizabeth Inchbald, among others, and she was admired by twentieth-century feminist scholars.

If we had to choose among Burney's main topics, legitimization and the family, good and bad manners and woman's place in society would definitely be on the list. Scholars have traced Burney's evolution through the years and it is assumed that *Evelina* (1778) was a fresh start opposing the moralism in *The Wanderer* (1814). Similarly, it is possible to more originally associate Burney's comedies with her novels, which is one of the main goals of this article: to revisit *A Busy Day* as a play about speculation and gender and to analyze Eliza as a disenchanted heroine coming from India that reencounters her family but without experiencing any *Bildung*, just facing disappointment and embarrassment.

Scholarship has already highlighted some ways that *A Busy Day* satirizes class relations and gender norms. After Tara Goshal Wallace's edition, a doctoral dissertation by Barbara Darby was read and a volume offering close readings of each of Burney's plays followed. Darby examines them alongside writings by other late eighteenth-century female dramatists and employs performance and feminist theory. This is the most comprehensive study on Burney's play's so far, though mention should be made to Francesca Saggini's book (2012) on the mediation of theatrical elements in Burney's fiction that emphasize the performative element, a growing subfield in Burney studies. Specific studies on *A Busy Day* are few and they focus either on classism or racism. Gillian Skinner states that Burney's plays investigate the social and behavioural aspects of inheritance. Both the protagonist and her father feel socially uncomfortable since aping gentility is very difficult and neither the upper nor the middle classes are favourably portrayed (2010, 241-2). In 2005 Alexander Pitofsky pinpointed that Burney's satire on the racial politics of her time has not received the recognition it deserves. According to this scholar, *A Busy Day* Burney mixes conventional novel of manners with a sustained satirical attack on racism and contains familiar attitudes of both the British working classes and the wealthy at that time, taking prejudice to an extreme: if in *Evelina* Macartney was rejected for being a Scot, now Mungo is invisible in *A Busy Day* for the very fact of being black. For Noel Chevalier, *A Busy Day* is a literary response to India: Burney builds a fanciful British India embedded with the values endorsed by

Warren Hastings to underpin a satire on British society itself. Thus, London is characterized by disorder and savagery while Burney's India exists as a unrealized ideal which "offered the much maligned nabob the opportunity to be redeemed from the stereotype of the ruthless, greedy, parasitical merchant —not exactly foreign, but never quite English" (Chevalier 1999, 35).

My purpose is to take Pitofsky's and Chevalier's work as a point of departure and deal with the intersection of gender relations and colonialism in *A Busy Day*, bearing in mind that the theatre gave the novelist much more freedom than the blank page, as female playwrights knew. Following Noemi Tadmor, I focus on the private realm of the family, where Eliza is simultaneously seen as a member by birth but an alien by her education and a space that turns out to be a mixture of affectation and bad manners, and the public or social space, where Eliza becomes an exotic economic pawn in the hands of men:

[i]n family and kinship relationships, interest and emotions were often closely bound, and in many cases the nearer the relationship, the greater was its instrumentality. As parents and children, husbands and wives, sibling groups and other kin pulled forces together, their interests and emotions were often closely intermixed (Tadmor 2010, 26)

The confrontation between the urban middle classes and the old elite's right to rule is familiar in Burney's novels. By focusing on Burney's portrayal of gender relations, Barbara Zonitch (1997) defines new forms of familiar violence: legal changes strengthening the position of younger sons as well as daughters within the primogeniture system; economic changes such as the emulative consumerism and the credit system; and the new middle-class emphasis on affective individualism and the empowerment of women as guardians of morality and social harmony in the domestic sphere. I approach *A Busy Day* as a satire of such a system: the author portrays a money-obsessed society in which women are placed at the same level as ridiculed patriarchy. *A Busy Day* is a definitely a play about vulgarity and hypocrisy, but I add identity and speculation to show that in this piece neither class, race nor sex prove to be the best way to judge people.

2. *A Busy Day* and the eighteenth-century stage

Eighteenth-century British drama comprised a variety of forms. Together with the acclaimed sentimental comedy, there were adaptations of Shakespeare, pantomimes and tragedies. Joanna Baillie (*Arnold* 1790) or Inchbald (*Every One has His Fault* 1793) were some acclaimed female playwrights; and there

had been remarkable authors before, like Susana Centlivre (*A Bold Stroke For a Wife* 1718), Eliza Haywood (*Frederick* 1729), or Frances Sheridan (*The Discovery* 1763). While the stage was particularly appealing, this space was also easily associated with prostitution due to the actresses' exposition to the male gaze. As for female authors, the close proximity to theatre managers, actors and the fact of writing for the public detached them from serious writers. Burney loved drama, but she was cautioned by her father, Dr. Charles Burney, and Samuel Crisp not to become a playwright (Fernández 2020; Burney 2017, 69-70). In her lifetime she composed up to eight dramatic pieces, including comedies (*The Witlings* 1779, *The Woman Hater* 1802, *Love and Fashion* 1798 and *A Busy Day*) and tragedies (*Edwy and Elgiva* 1788-9, *Hubert de Vere*, *The Siege of Pevensey* and *Elberta* 1790-3). Critics, like Tracy Daugherty, even argue that Burney's narrative technique with frozen frames or the reaction of many characters in catalogue scenes resembles the theatre and many situations and characters in her novels migrated to her comedies as Burney initially planned them for the stage.

Burney's *oeuvre* was diverse and complex. After her best-selling *Evelina*, she wrote three novels (*Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress* [1782], *Camilla or a Picture of Youth* [1786] and *The Wanderer or Female Difficulties*) and the pamphlet *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* [1793]), defending the French clergy who ran away from revolutionary France. *A Busy Day* is special for two reasons: Burney had triumphed as a writer for the third time with *Camilla*, which allowed the family to buy *Camilla Cottage*, and she had already recovered from the dark period that she spent at Court as Queen Charlotte's Keeper of Robes. It seems that she started composing the piece at the end of the century, when she faced the heavy blow of her sister Susanna Elizabeth Burney's death. *A Busy Day* was also Frances's last piece; she had carefully planned the cast so the play was to be staged at Covent Garden and included William Thomas Lewis, Joseph Shepherd Munden and Mary Anne Davenport among the actors (Sabor 1995, 290). Unfortunately, Burney had to leave for France in April 1802 to join her husband General D'Arblay in Paris, where she would spend ten years. It was not until the 20th century that *A Busy Day* came to life by the Show of Strength Company at the Hen and Chicken Theatre, Bedminster, England, for four weeks from 29 September to 23 October 1993 (Sabor 1994, 153). According to critics, it is a brilliant play that most approaches Jane Austen for its attack against bad manners. Interestingly, and in comparison with Burney's novels, *A Busy Day* has not attracted much critical attention. Quite the contrary, it has just been examined with the rest of Burney's dramas in articles and monographs. After Tara Ghoshal Wallace's 1984 edition, it was rediscovered by Peter Sabor in 1995 and recently translated into Spanish and Galician together with *The Witlings* (Sanz 2019; Míguez 2020; Tomé 2018; Burney 2022; Fernández 2023).

3. The private realms in *A Busy Day*.

Briefly summarized, the plot of *A Busy Day* hinges on Eliza Watts, a London-born girl who comes back home after being raised in India by a guardian, Mr. Alderson. In the capital she reencounters her family, the Watts, who are City merchants despised by the West End aristocrats, and her fiancé, Cleveland, to whom she is engaged since they left India. The couple has to struggle until Sir Marmaduke Tylney and his wife Lady Wilhelmina accept Eliza in the family and there are some comic misunderstandings revolving on Eliza's fortune and her family's manners.

Composed of five acts and with considerably fewer characters if we compare it with other plays by Burney, *A Busy Day* is inspired by William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Like most comedies of its time, it does not respect the dramatic principles of the unity of action, unity of place, and unity of time dating back from Aristotle. In fact, act one starts in an apartment in a hotel, then we move on to a drawing room at the Tylneys' and act three is in Kensington Gardens. In act four scenes take place again at the Tylneys' and finally act five is set at Miss Percival's.

A Busy Day exemplifies what the English family was like at the end of the eighteenth century, as described by classic historians, like Lawrence Stone (1977) or Rundolph Trumbach (1978), among others: the nuclear family stretched; men married more than once; women had a subservient role; and the number of children from different unions increased. According to Lisa O'Connell in the second half of the eighteenth century marriage moved to the centre of the English novel which reflected familial contentions, alliances and tensions in the context of the landed estate and the parish (2019, 4). For this scholar, Burney had the merit to bring the urban lower-middle classes into focus in her novels and she also invented a number of damaged, unjustly treated people (2019, 210). The intricacies of the extended family in *A Busy Day* are comparatively less complicated than *Evelina*, where Sir John Belmont had another illegitimate child (Macartney) after Evelina was born and the girl was changed at birth with Miss Polly Green, a usurper with a forged identity who has passed for Sir John's heiress all the time. On the contrary, *A Busy Day* is structured on the contrast between the highborn Tylneys and the recently enriched Watts: Cleveland, Frank and Jemina (also called Miss Cleveland) are Sir Marmaduke Tylney and Lady Wilhelmina Tylney's nephews while the Watts have two daughters, Miss Watts and Eliza, and are unexpectedly visited by Joel Tibbs, Mr. Watt's nephew. This situation is a good source of laughs since Eliza thinks Jemina is Cleveland's lover and Cleveland is curious about the mysterious Cit that Frank has to get married to. Therefore, instead of an aristocrat by birth, like *Evelina*, Burney shifts to an urban middle-class heroine.

A Busy Day represents the subversion of Burney's heroines in more aspects. To start with, Eliza is not a delegitimized orphan but doubly fathered by Mr. Alderson—who is dead—and Mr. Watts, and she has not been brought up in secluded Berry Hill. In both works, the beloved venerable figures are not parents, but kind and venerable Reverend Villars and Mr. Alderson. Eliza remembers the latter and is respectful to her biological family, but she does not overact before her parents. Instead, she would rather seek their sanction and respect: "A Father, — A Mother — my dear Cleveland! what sacred ties! Even though any memory scarcely retains their figures, my heart acknowledges their rights, and palpitates with impatience to shew its instinctive duty" (Burney 1995, 297-8). Any Burney reader knows that parents are of major significance in *Evelina*, even though they are absent or inactive most of the time. In *Evelina*, two scenes mark the protagonist's fate: the appearance of Mrs. Belmont's poignant letter—which is later reproduced in the novel—and Sir John Belmont's meeting his daughter in a highly dramatic scene:

"Oh, dear resemblance of thy murdered mother! — Oh, all that remains of the most injured of women! behold thy father at thy feet! — bending thus lowly to implore you would not hate him. — Oh, then, thou representative of my departed wife, speak to me in her name, and say that the remorse which tears my soul tortures me not in vain!" (Burney 1994, 428).

The latter is parodically transformed in *A Busy Day*, so the Watts remain unaltered and Eliza makes little impact in the family. No one expects a tear-jerking scene in a hotel that is actually a gambling house, a space where people risks money, and the reaction of the Watts is totally different and diverse. Eliza is kindly welcome only when introduced to her father:

ELIZA (*rushing out*). O where? where? My Father! my dear Father!
She runs to MR. WATTS, takes his hand,
and drops upon one knee to him.

MR. WATTS. How do do, my dear? you're welcome home again. Well! I should never have known you! But what have I been a'ter? I hope the waiter ha'n't been saucy? (Burney 1995, 307)

Because it is the father who legitimizes the daughter and has a closer relationship with her, the maternal side is not so pivotal in Burney. Instead of a motherless girl vindicated by Caroline Belmont—or a totally absent mother, like Juliet's—, what we

find is a heroine who has been brought up without a mother figure and reencounters an uneducated clothes-obsessed London mother too similar to vulgar Mme. Duval who is “at once uneducated and unprincipled; ungentle in temper, and unamiable [sic] in her manners” (Burney 1994, 13) according to Reverend Villars in *Evelina*. If Mme. Duval was a tavern girl, the other was a wash-woman, as Tibbs light-heartedly reminds to her husband: “has she forgot already how time was she used to scrub the floor upon her knees, before you married her?” (Burney 1995, 340).

Identity is slippery, as it usually happens in Burney's works, and names are very problematic. All the roles Eliza performs are summarized by Barbara Darby: “a Watts by birth, an heiress by adoption, and a fully refined lady because of her upbringing” (1997, 139). Instead of *Evelina* —who is initially called Anville (since Reverend Villars does not know how to call her)—, we face Eliza bearing a City name and marginalized for that reason because no Watts is accepted among the high classes. With the exception of Camilla, all the heroines have to regain or keep the family name and then their husbands' name in order to marry. In Eliza's case, first names are adapted to fashion and revised again and again within the family circle. Therefore, Mrs. Watts calls her sister “Elizeana”, the Watts use “Elizinenny” and the rest of characters “Betsey”. Outside the family, the protagonist is more formally called “Elizabeth” and the Watts keep correcting the patriarch. The same applies to Mrs. Watts (“Aylce”) and Miss Watts (“Peggy”, “Peggerelly”, “Margerella”, “Margarely”):

MISS WATTS (*whispering*). La, Ma', what do you call her Betsey for? You're as bad as Pa' ! You know I told you she's to be called Eliziana now.

MRS. WATTS. Yes, Elizinneny I mean. I'm sure my dear. I'm very glad to see you again. You've been a long ways. (*kisses her*) Why you're grown quite a woman, my dear! (Burney 1995, 307-8)

In *A Busy Day* Eliza is not welcomed by her family; they are quite detached from her and, worse than that, from each other. The affective family described by sentimental literature does not exist and Eliza Watts experiences solitude. Only her servant Deborah and Jemina are kind to her in London and in both cases there are no blood ties between them. For Darby, both *A Busy Day* and *The Woman Hater* deal with the family seen as

[...] a 'natural' and biologically based entity ... invested with emotional power and a sense of necessity and desirability. However, families are shown to be simultaneously, and with quiet effectiveness, the source of numerous social rules and evaluative standards that are especially forceful and negative for wives and daughters (1997, 131).

Gender—and all the cultural assumptions that are inherent to it, such as softness, passivity and beauty— does not only determine family role, but also how one is perceived by female relatives who feel free to manipulate the rest of the family. Instead of a source of happiness, in *A Busy Day* the family is mainly business and a speculative agent. Eliza is seen in economic terms, as a commodity, like Mungo, rather than a woman. Mrs. Watts, for instance, is not very affectionate to Eliza:

ELIZA. Is that my Mother? — my dear Mother! —

Runs to MRS. WATTS with open arms.

MRS. WATTS. Take care, my dear, take a little care, or you'll squeeze my poor new Handkerchief till it won't be fit to be seen. And it cost me sich a sight of money — (Burney 1995, 307)

Regarding sisterhood, in *Evelina* there is one special sibling, Miss Belmont, who does not confront Evelina and is happily set aside in the novel, while Lord Orville's hysterical sister, Lady Louisa Larpent, looks down on the heroine, just as in *A Busy Day* Eliza faces the despise of her own sister Betsey. The latter is unable to realize that had Eliza been brought up in London and had she not come back from India as a prosperous heiress, both would be in exactly the same position:

ELIZA (*running to embrace MISS WATTS*). My Sister!

MISS WATTS. O dear, is is you, Sister Elizana? how you're grown! How do do, Sister? What a pretty Hat you've got on! I'll have just the fellow to it. Pray who are those two smart beaus you've got with you? (Burney 1995, 307).

The translation from a novel to the stage implies multiple transformations with it. The most obvious one is the disappearance of letter writers (*Evelina* is an epistolary novel), which is substituted by a dramatic polyphony representing different ideologies: liberal, conservative, young, old, urban or rural. For better or worse, Reverend Villars, Lady Howard and Mrs. Welwyn advise and supervise Evelina's movements, not to mention Cecilia's host of male mentors. However, in *A Busy Day* Eliza has to defend herself just as Juliet's thoughts will be expressed in direct or free indirect speech in *The Wanderer*. Unfortunately, there are not many monologues revealing Eliza's feelings. She puts herself in Cleveland's shoes and feels for his surprise in an intercourse so new to him: "all your shame, your confusion, your Blushes — tingling upon my own cheeks!" (Burney 1995, 341).

Furthermore, Eliza is aware of the prejudices against the Cits and feels ashamed of her family. Cleveland's reaction is difficult to predict and Eliza knows that she risks losing his heart:

ELIZA. [...] O Cleveland! with elegance like yours, founded on birth, education and intellectual endowments, can I wonder if your mind should involuntarily recoil from an alliance, in which shame must continually struggle against kindness, and Pride against Happiness? (Burney 1995, 350)

Shame and rejection is not only experienced by Eliza. The conservative ideology is represented by the aristocratic Tylneys, but also by the parodied patriarch. Like an eighteenth-century King Lear, Mr. Watts feels a defeated and frustrated *pater familias* instead of a self-made man cherished by his children:

MR. WATTS. Ah, Joel, as long as business did but go on, all them things was a joy to me! For then I was somebody! And my wife and darter did not dare give themselves such airs. I used to speak as sharp as they. Here's a nice dinner, says I; but who kivered the table? And what smart new Gowns you've got on, says I; but who paid for 'em? And now let's all go, and take a ride in our own coach, says I; but which of us earned it? And when first I got on in the world, I used to give 'em a crown at a time; and then, at last 'twas a Guinea; and then, lauk! there was such kissing and joy! and there's a good Tommy! says one; and Thankee, dear Pa! says t'other: but now that once they've fooled me into giving 'em their pin money, as they call it, they take it without never a word, as if it was their own gaining! (Burney 1995, 340)

The father and daughter bond in the eighteenth century is summarized by Ruth Perry paraphrasing Lynda Boose: "As a member of a patrilinear family or tribe, her [the daughter's] power derives from her father's backing. In other words, a daughter's connection to her father enhances her power insofar as she is his representative or the representative of his family" (2004, 89). As Tadmor explains, family ties were often marked by negative tension and disappointment: obligation was expected yet inadequately fulfilled (2010, 27). *A Busy Day* showcases the consequences of capitalism on human relationships and ostracized patriarchy: being a male does not mean to be respected in one's own family since people are valuable for what they represent, for the money they have or could bring, not for their personal worth and this connects the private sphere of gender with colonialism. A total lack of authority on Mr. Watts' part and a lack of authentic communication with his family lie behind familiar disaffection. Perhaps a biographical element can be traced here. Charles Burney

struggled painfully to make a name for himself among London's polite circles. A music teacher of humble middle-class background, he used to feel haunted by a feeling of insufficiency. In *A Busy Day* Frances might then be reflecting her father's anxiety to rise in the social ladder and relating it to the dawn of old family structures.

4. The polite world and cultural shock in *A Busy Day*

If closely examined, most of Burney's heroines find themselves in a new environment: Evelina enters high society in London and Eliza goes down into London vulgar society. The difference is that Eliza has not been raised in England, but in India, and the play is not an entrance into the world, but an arrival from the colonies, which makes Eliza have a very different view point, not naïve, but hybrid or colonial, bringing the Hindu culture to the metropolis.

Another element adds up to her female condition. Eliza is not only a token of exchange for men, but she is also a nabob, a derogatory term suggesting excessive wealth and influence in eighteenth-century England. Since the first trading settlements were created in India by a company called the East India Company, India was an influential part of the British Empire and some British made their fortune there since trade and political power required several thousand British men to live in India for extended periods. Most young men who gained nominations in Company India were middle- or upper-class —the sons of military officers, clergymen, merchants and the like. As Margaret Finn argues,

[t]he political and commercial operations of the East India Company were notoriously corrupt, and hundreds of EIC employees accumulated vast fortunes in India, money that allowed them to purchase large landed estates, stand successfully for Parliament and gain lucrative positions in government at home.

Still, nabobs were British and when they returned home they were considered in terms of the material luxury they carried with them. Playwrights like Inchbald (*Mogul Tale; or, The Descent of the Balloon* 1784) or Mariana Starke (*The Sword of Peace* 1788 and *The Widow of Malabar* 1791) had already populated their works with nabobs, who were satirized by Samuel Foote in a homonymous comedy in 1722 and they brought “imported items that served as imperial souvenirs, private markers of time spent in India that could be saved and intermingled with British artifacts to narrate an Anglo-Indian life” (Nechtman 2010, 71). However, nabobs were seen as outsiders, a threat to the establishment. Because they were both envied and seen as dangerous or suspicious when they returned to Great

Britain, they revealed the tensions and contradictions inherent in British national identity as it happens in Burney's plays. Burney herself had witnessed the trial against one of the English governors in India, Warren Hastings (1732-1818). She wrote about it in her journals and supported Hastings against Burke (Clark; Bolton). It is not a coincidence that Eliza bears the same name as Hastings' daughter, Eliza de Feuillide (1761-1813), Jane Austen's sister-in-law and the inspiration for *Lady Susan* (written 1794).

One of the strengths of *A Busy Day* is the depiction of social reality and injustice overseas and in Britain and this topic will be further explored in *The Wanderer*. In Burney's first novel, the author reveals her humanitarianism by portraying the abuse of old women in a race and animals disguised as people. In these instances, Evelina is just a passive spectator; she never intervenes and just makes a comment to Villars with the exception of the moment when she grabs the gun from Macartney's hands to prevent his suicide:

“Awaken you,” I cried, with a courage I now wonder at, “to worthier thoughts, and rescue you from perdition.”

I then seized the pistols; he said not a word, — he made no effort to stop me; —I glided quick by him, and tottered down stairs ere he had recovered from the extremest [sic] amazement. (Burney 1994, 204)

As Burney grew older, she focuses on a heroine who is more independent and experienced in the prejudices of the world. The first instance of Eliza's assertiveness can be seen when she defends her never-seen-on-stage black servant Mungo just at the beginning of the play. The scene means an acceptance of the blacks and a frontal attack against the indifference of the English from an Englishwoman by birth:

ELIZA. Yes; be so good as to see if he wants any help.

1ST WAITER. What, the Black?

ELIZA. Yes. He is the best creature living. I shall be extremely concerned if he should meet with any accident. (Burney 1995, 295-6)

Only Jemina and Eliza support those in need, like Mungo, arising as many reactions as Juliet at the beginning of *The Wanderer* (Doody 1988, 299). For Betsy Bolton, “Burney here directs her spectators' attention to the margins of England's imperial drama—and draws attention to the absences enabling her own sentimental resolution of social disparity” (2005, 897). It seems that Burney got well informed about India through her family and acquaintance (Wallace 1984, 1-2). Critics, like Edwards Said, have noticed an anti-colonialist reading in Jane

Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815). Here Burney is anticipating Austen and similarly addressing the insensibility of the gentry in terms of race. Also, it is Eliza who stands up for herself and explains to the Watts that Cleveland and Mr. Alderson became good friends in India and she suggests Mr. Watts having an interview with Cleveland who will "candidly acquaint you with the state of his affairs. He entertains the most reasonable expectations of inheritance from Sir Marmaduke." (Burney 1995, 338). If closely analyzed, Eliza has three opponents in *A Busy Day*: her parents' impolite manners, the Tylneys' partiality for rank and birth and Cleveland's irresolution. Wallace accurately points out that in *A Busy Day* the comic scenes of confrontation with the family expose vulgarity and gives us laughter at the expense of the hero and the heroine (1984, 7). All through the play there is some unbalance between Eliza's assertiveness and Cleveland's lack of resolution. The hero unconsciously becomes Eliza's enemy by putting off an interview with Mr. Watts.

The prejudice against India is deeply rooted in the ignorant Watts sisters and race and gender meet here. *A Busy Day* is about economy, but also about physical appearance. Clothes, wigs and all those elements that build the social persona matter. They transform the individual in the social milieu by giving them a new value. Eliza is always seen as a wealthy girl coming from India that one can take advantage from, so the Watts ladies scrutinize and ask her about her muslin, a metaphor of herself: Eliza is a beautiful object for show, not a woman with a mind of her own and able to fight for a place in society. Though the Watts have not been to India and have never met people from this country, they do not stop hazarding a guess and voicing their prejudices: "La! can they make things there? I thought they'd been all savages" (Burney 1995, 309). They think people are wild and frightening there: "La, nasty black things! I can't abide the Indins. I'm sure I should do nothing but squeal if I was among 'em" (Burney 1995, 309). Behind her comedy, Burney hints that neither money nor class make people respectful to and respected by others. The piece portrays a group of characters who feel empowered for the very fact of being wealthy.

Eliza is othered in *A Busy Day* and the play is built on the parallelisms between social alienation and embarrassment at different levels. "Disgrace" is one of the most repeated words in the play and it is the patriarch Mr. Watts who voices discomfort, like Eliza when she mentions Mungo. Curiously, the Watts are also despised by aristocracy as "the vulgarest tribe" (Burney 1995, 319). Deborah exposes the background of the story regarding the Watts' origin: "He was nothing, but an errand boy, or such like, at this beginning. And as to she he married, she was no more than his master's house maid: a poor mean thing" (Burney 1995, 305). In *Evelina* this bias against the Branghtons is not as prominent as in Burney's comedy where Mr. Watts is not blind to their daughters'

pretensions: "It's a very troublesome thing the having darters" (Burney 1995, 350) and feels alienated while Joel Tibbs tries to console him:

MR. WATTS. Ah, Joel, That's the very thing! I can't divert myself no way! Ever since I left off business, I've never known what to do. They've made me give up all my old acquaintance, because of their being so mean; as and to our new ones, it's as plain as ever you see they only despise me: for they never take off their hats if I meet them in the street; and they never get up off their chairs, if I ask them how they do in their own houses; and they never give me a word of answer I can make you, if I put a question to them (Burney 1995, 341)

As explained above, the patriarch is not respected by his own family and Miss Watts even feels ashamed of his father, as she describes to Eliza:

MISS WATTS. [...] you can't think how I'm ashamed of him. Do you know I was one day walking in the Park, with some young ladies I'd just made acquaintance with, quite the pelite sort, when all of a sudden I felt somebody twitch me by the elbow: so I scratched, and called out La, how impertinent! and when I turned round, saying Do pray, sir, be less free of your hands, who should I see but Pa! (Burney 1995, 342).

Neither young men nor aristocrats care about women's name or virtue, as long as they are worthy in the family. Affective ties matter very little when it comes to take material advantage of women. In Burney's works, the aristocracy assumes not only having the right to abuse of others, but they also keep assuming the right to speculate with women's property, even in the high classes, as it happens in colonial politics. Therefore, Eliza will be as chased for her money as Miss Percival, the other rich heiress, as Sir Marmaduke explains to Cleveland ("you were hardly sailed, when her rich brother, Lord Percival, departed, and left her all he had at his own disposal" (Burney 1995, 322)). The young lady does not conform to Cleveland's ideal ("she is vain and fantastic, and has won from me neither the esteem nor the confidence I wish to repose in my wife" (Burney 1995, 325)), as he remarks to Jemina. Believing herself to be a manipulator, Miss Percival is manipulated by others and ends up married to Frank while she was to marry Cleveland as Sir Marmaduke explains: "I demanded ready money, in return, to buy off my mortgage. To this she consented; and therefore you have only now to take her fair hand" (Burney 1995, 322)). Unable to accept Cleveland's rejection, bitchy Miss Percival orchestrates an encounter between the Watts, Lady Wilhelmina and Sir Marmaduke to lower Eliza's family down because she feels jealous:

MISS PERCIVAL. What unspeakable pleasure it would give me to see that wretch torn by wild beast! And yet, were it not for the disgrace, the horrible disgrace, I should rejoice to have got rid of him, for he is grown so insipid, he made my head ache by his stupidity. But then — not to wait to be rejected! — A male creature, — destined for nothing but to die at one's feet. — (Burney 1995, 372)

Sexual harassment features in both works and appearances are very deceiving. In her novels Burney always includes a list of womanizers, who do not hesitate to use brutality if necessary. The repertoire includes Sir Clement Willoughby in *Evelina*, Sir Robert Floyer in *Cecilia*, Sir Lyell Sycamore and the abusive French Commissioner in *The Wanderer*. Frank Cleveland cannot meet Eliza in a better place, a hotel which is significantly a gambling house, and he sets his mind on her eighty thousand pounds, not on herself:

LORD JOHN. O take her, then, take her! 'Tis better than the King's bench.
FRANK. And she is really young and pretty. — 'Twould but a charity. I must positively think of it. A little rhodomontade is all she can require. Come, my Lord John, you can help me. You shall go and tell Sir Marmaduke and my Aunt Wilhemina that 'tis my fixt resolve to take this measure; and then, either they will draw their purse strings and pay my debts, or I'll fairly put the eighty thousand pounds into my pocket. (Burney 1995, 313)

Frank's attitude is the same as the Tylneys, but a distinction should be made. Lady Wilhelmina approaches Eliza Mrs. Delville-like and proves to be wrong about the girl's connections: "There is a certain air of reserve, a certain modesty of respect, in young people who are born and bred to know what is due to certain distinctions in life, that immediately point them out to those who are conversant in discriminating the various classes of Society" (Burney 1995, 355). However, for Sir Marmaduke, class is irrelevant as long as the family can take advantage of individuals: "Well, what's that to us? Who cares about the genealogy of a younger Brother's wife? If it were my Nephew Cleveland, indeed, who may become the head of his house" (Burney 1995, 323), an opinion he reinforces later about Cleveland's marriage:

SIR MARMADUKE. If she pays his debts, what's where she's born to us?
JEMINA (*aside*). Unfortunate subject.
LADY WILHELMINA. How any young person of that class can even think of coming among Us, often amazes me. What is it possible persons of that description, when once their fortunes are paid down, can expect from Us?

ELIZA. Miss Cleveland — suffer me, I beg, to retire.

JEMINA. No, no! (*holding her.*)

SIR MARMADUKE. I don't mean to praise the wisdom of such Girls, Lady Wil., for I think them to the full as silly as you can do: but if they take our younger branches off our hands, and provide for our spendthrifts, what signifies their folly to us? (Burney 1995, 357)

One of the worst portraits in *A Busy Day* is the insensibility of the rich towards those around. Lady Wilhelmina Tylney and Lord Marmaduke are unaffected as people lose their homes and natural disasters impact the economy. They just think of themselves while Jemina is worried about Mrs. Summers's economy and Tomson's death. Lady Wilhelmina's justification for her selfishness is sheer hypocrisy: "a man of rank is peculiarly susceptible of evil, because not brought up to vulgar vicissitudes; but a low person has so little leisure to reflect of refine, that a few disagreeable [*sic*] accidents can make but little impression on him" (Burney 1995, 317). Similarly, Sir Marmaduke complains about Lord Garman losing his hair and the loss of his own hay-rick and is also more concerned about his social persona rather than people:

SIR MARMADUKE. Disturb me? Why look at my great Coat! See how the Cape's sprinkled with rain! I dare say you may count nine or ten large drops upon it. And yet that booby, John Midge, stood in the Hall, staring me full in the face as I got off my horse, and rubbing his hands with joy, because, forsooth, he says this cursed Shower will bring up peas and beans for his young family (Burney 1995, 357)

For Wallace, *A Busy Day* insists on Burney's moral positions: "class boundaries are not what separate the well-bred from the vulgar, and that essential delicacy springs from minds and hearts rather than from pedigrees" (1984, 24). The play insists that the rich are neither aware of the social role of each member of society nor of their own role since there is neither a sense of community nor any interest in building society together.

5. Conclusion

All Burney's comedies deal with controversial issues and uncomfortable truths. In *A Busy Day* introducing love as a liberating force and Cleveland and Eliza standing apart from selfishness does not suffice for the happy ending: the comedy shows England's darker face, so it is difficult to accept this play as light

comedy. *A Busy Day* was a kind of rehearsal or draft of *The Wanderer* and both works obsessively revolve on money, gender and race.

The private sphere and the wider social sphere go hand in hand in *A Busy Day*, just as gender and class differences are cleverly dissected by Burney, who deals with the cult of individualism and crises of the patriarchal family as Eliza is always seen in terms of the economic benefit she brings from abroad and her marginalization as a woman parallels the lack of respect for the patriarch, who is as mocked and frustrated as a woman. Gender matters in that no gentleman coming from India would have to endure so many embarrassing situations. Besides, there is no female community, but a good deal of disrespect towards women who are economic pawns, like men, in a more open and critical way than in Burney's novels. Eliza represents a fantasy because she is only valued for what she is/could be worth and her identity is unstable for being both a woman and a foreigner. This is definitely not the play to be expected from a pen like Burney's at that time, but Burney's criticism of gender connections and colonialism is precisely what makes *A Busy Day* so memorable for eighteenth-century studies and worth restoring within Burney's dramatic production.

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