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"A Creature for Whom Art Can Do Nothing": Femininity, Performance, and Gender Subversion in *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park*

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Dedication

For Richard Flynn, lover of words and music, gone too soon. "Nothing gold can stay."

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Introduction:

The "Natural" Woman and Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*

Elizabeth Inchbald's play *Lovers' Vows* (1798) opens with a scene depicting the fallen woman, Agatha, starving on the roadside after being evicted by her landlord. Agatha has fallen on hard times since her illegitimate son, Frederick, left to fight in the army. Fortunately, Frederick returns and is appalled at the state he finds his mother in – and he is equally appalled to learn that he is a natural born child whose father never acknowledged him, a fact which now means Frederick will be unable to return to serve in the army. Frederick is distraught at the revelation, but vows to prioritize saving his mother's life over seeking out a neglectful father. Ironically, as he sets out to beg money for Agatha's care, the first person he unwittingly encounters is his father, Baron Wildenhaim, recently returned from abroad. When the Baron offers only a paltry donation, Frederick attempts to rob him, getting arrested in the process. Frederick is subsequently imprisoned in his father's estate, neither having any knowledge of their true relationship.

Meanwhile, the Baron attempts to determine whether his daughter, Amelia, holds any affection for her suitor, the foppish Count Casssel. Unbeknownst to him, she instead cherishes a love for her tutor, the clergyman Anhalt. Amelia all but proposes to Anhalt, who believes himself unworthy of a baron's daughter. Their engagement is temporarily thwarted when Baron Wildenhaim returns and announces the imprisonment of Frederick, the "robber." Amelia and Anhalt both take an interest in the respectable looking prisoner and visit him in his cell. There, Anhalt reveals to Frederick that the name of his captor is Baron Wildenhaim, whom Frederick realizes is his father. He seeks out a private audience with the Baron to confront him.

In short order Amelia reveals her love for Anhalt to her father, and Frederick reveals his status as the Baron's son and Agatha's cast-down situation. When Frederick flees in distress after his admission, Baron Wildenhaim sends servants to fetch him and dispatches Anhalt to find Agatha. Anhalt brings Agatha back to the castle and counsels the Baron that the only way to amend his past mistakes is not only to make Frederick his heir, but to marry Agatha as he had once promised. The Baron initially resists the suggestion but is overcome by Anhalt's superior moral judgment, leading him to approve of Anhalt and Amelia's marriage. At the end of the play, the entire family – Baron Wildenhaim, Agatha, Frederick, and Amelia – are rightfully reunited at last.

In the course of the drama, the heroine, Amelia, asserts her unwavering veracity to her father when he questions her about whom she loves, saying, "you know you commanded me never to disguise or conceal the truth" (364). In her seeming artlessness, Amelia would prove to be a precursor to such later literary heroines as Glorvina from Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Fanny Price from Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). In fact, *Lovers' Vows* features prominently in *Mansfield Park* as the play that the Bertram children and their circle of friends attempt to stage. All three characters, Amelia, Glorvina, and Fanny, might be taken as models for French eighteenth-century thinker and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau's natural woman.

Rousseau perhaps best articulates his vision of the natural woman in his novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). Saint-Preux is tutor to the titular Julie and begins the novel by confessing his love for her in a letter thus: "It is that touching combination of a lively sensibility and an invariably sweet disposition… it is that justness of spirit and that exquisite taste which derive their excellence from the purity of your soul – these are… the charms… I adore." (26)

Saint-Preux conceives of Julie as his ideal woman, characterized by her emotional sensitivity and purity, which Judith H. McDowell suggests is a result of her connection to "nature." According to McDowell, Rousseau believed that most of humanity had been corrupted by civilization, with the exception of "a few, the 'sensitive souls,' in whom 'nature' still persists" (12). Julie, of course, is one of those sensitive souls; her virtue is unquestionable (even when she makes seemingly questionable choices) because "the voice of 'nature' is strong in her" (12). Susan Moller Okin further notes that Rousseau's natural woman is also "imbued with… shame and modesty" (402). Nature is therefore twinned with virtue and a more honest or pure manner of living, while society and all of its attendant cultural pursuits are twinned with vice, particularly that of artifice.

Rousseau's novel, as well as the ideas it expressed, quickly gained popularity in the United Kingdom. McDowell, citing the work of James H. Warner, reports that *La Nouvelle Héloïse* went through ten English editions between 1761 and 1800, concluding that the work had "an unusually large reading public in England" even at a time when literary works were frequently exchanged between the U.K. and continental Europe (2). Claire Grogan traces, via intertextual references, how Rousseau's ideas continued to resonate with British authors and readers thirty years after its original publication and translation into English. She remarks that *La Nouvelle Héloïse* appears "in at least fourteen British novels at the turn of the century" (463).[1] Moreover, McDowell explores how in fact *La Nouvelle Héloïse* was itself "indebted" to the English sentimental and moralistic novel, most notably Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (8). The British figure of the natural woman emerged out of this recursive interaction between English and continental European texts, and in fact has much in common with Rousseau's Julie.

[1] Another is Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*, which does not in fact appear on Grogan's list.

Inchbald's Amelia, as, we might say, *la nouvelle Julie*, is therefore able to "earnestly" attest to her father that "I never told an untruth in my life" (344). Yet curiously, in her preface to the play, Inchbald acknowledges that in adapting it to English from the original German of playwright August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe,* literally *The Child of Love* (1791), she had to make significant changes to Amelia's character modulating that earnestness. Inchbald admits:

> Almost all the dialogue of the character [Amelia] I have changed: the forward and unequivocal manner, in which she announces her affection to her lover, in the original, would have been revolting to an English audience… I have endeavoured to attach the attention and sympathy of the audience, by whimsical insinuations, rather than coarse abruptness: she is still the same woman… but with manners conforming to the English, rather than the German taste. (330)

It seems that conformity to the English ideal of the artless, natural woman ironically involves a certain amount of "insinuation." Inchbald contrasts insinuation with forwardness or abruptness; insinuation is an honesty softened by manner or dissimulation, a kind of less honest honesty. A few months after Inchbald's adaptation was published and while it was being staged, Stephen Porter published what he claimed was a translation of Kotzebue's *The Child of Love* that accessed its "literal meaning" (ii). He wrote disparagingly of Inchbald's translation, challenging his readers to "judge whether he [Kotzebue] is more beautiful in the garb I have decked him in, or the *disguise* in which he has been represented at Covent Garden Theatre" (ii, emphasis mine).

Porter's impassioned dismissal of Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* as mere disguise may be more apt than he realized, given the text's running theme of disguise or deception. Amelia, as discussed above, is represented as incapable of disguise, even when speaking to her father on a

subject as delicate as her love of her tutor, the clergyman Anhalt. Amelia's other suitor, Count Cassel, concedes that he has abandoned many of his former fianceés, perversely arguing that "for me to keep my word to a woman, would be deceit," or contrary to his nature (363). And finally, Baron Wildenhaim had some years earlier deceived Agatha with promises of marriage which he never fulfilled, leaving her to raise Frederick alone; Agatha then deceives Frederick about the truth of his birth until the first scene of the play.

And so Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* draws on Rousseau's figure of the natural woman but deliberately mitigates the wildness or spontaneity of her expression. In *Lovers' Vows*, then, the natural woman is not so much a true or originary state of femininity that a woman can inhabit but rather a role to be played. Yet the role still presents the fiction of truth to its audience. This theme of performing the part of the natural woman will later be picked up by Glorvina in *The Wild Irish Girl* and Fanny in *Mansfield Park.*

Defining Performance

The genre of *Lovers' Vows,* that of a drama, further complicates the theme of deception in the text. As a play, it is of course intended to be performed by actors. Performance has often been understood as a kind of deception or artifice, in which the performer takes on a character not *natural* to him- or herself. In England in the early 19th century, there was particular anxiety surrounding performances done by women deriving from the tension between those performances and women's apparent natural truthfulness.[2] Sometimes creative workarounds to

[2] Hannah More, for instance, wrote disparagingly in 1800 of "those *showy* acquirements," such as musical education, "which *decorate* the great" (77, emphasis mine). She feared that training in performance would make women showy, empty decorations. Nancy Armstrong argues that "for a woman to display herself in such a manner was the same as saying that she was supposed to be valued for her body and its adornments" (75). By participating

this conflict were employed. In the original production of Porter's translation of *Lovers' Vows*, for instance, Amelia and her lover Anhalt appear to have been played by a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. H. Johnston, thus reducing the distance between the female performer and the character she performed and making her performance more truthful (vii).

In modern performance studies, performance remains a contested term.[3] Erving Goffman, in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), defines performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (63). While Goffman emphasizes the effect of the performer on his or her audience, Erika Fischer-Lichte understands performance as fundamentally characterized by "the moment of encounter and interaction between actors and spectators," in which "each individual," both actor and spectator, "shares responsibility for the shape of the performance" (xiii; 22). Both Goffman and Fischer-Lichte's definitions of performance create space for a conception of performance beyond the performing arts, such as rituals, sports, religious ceremonies, which is important as my readings of my central texts will be equally informed by gender performativity, a form of cultural performance.

Marvin Carlson, too, in his essay "What Is Performance?" generates an inclusive definition of performance that encompasses both "the public display of technical skill" and "repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior" (71-72). Carlson suggests that an essential quality of performance is the performer's "consciousness" of the performative act as separate

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in performance activities that relied so much on the physical body, a female performer risked diminishing her value as an individual with depth and interiority.

[3] It is important to note that although I am here applying performance studies to the analysis of literary and dramatic texts, Fischer-Lichte sees this endeavor as beyond the purview of performance studies, which she argues should only examine performances themselves. However, in this thesis, I will be applying performance studies to the analysis of performances as they are represented in works of fiction.

from the self, deriving from an awareness of having an audience (72). In other words, for Carlson, there is no such thing as a performance in which the performer is unconscious or unaware of having an audience. Such an understanding of performance reveals why performance has at times been seen as deceptive, since performed behaviors are distinct from the so-called "real self." Goffman, however, declares that "the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (61). Goffman's definition potentially elides that double consciousness of "real" self and performed behavior that Carlson considers so indispensable.

Ultimately, each of these definitions hold value for this thesis, in which I will investigate the intersections between various types of female performance in the realms of music and theatre and the performative construction of female gender identity in the novels *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park*. It is therefore important to establish my definition of performance at the outset. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using the term "performance" to mean any behavior enacted by an individual or individuals in the physical presence of one or more spectators (to include the self), in which that behavior is shaped by the interaction between the two.[4]

Performance studies also offers an answer to why the producers of *Lovers' Vows* would have been more comfortable casting a married couple to portray the lovers Amelia and Anhalt onstage. Fischer-Lichte describes the "tension" that arises from "the actor's phenomenal body, their bodily being-in-the-world, and the use of that body as a sign to portray a character" (26). She identifies these two types of performing bodies as the phenomenal body and the semiotic body. During a performance, the phenomenal and semiotic bodies are always co-present in the

[4] This definition perhaps raises the question whether everything is performance. The answer unfortunately lies outside the scope of this thesis, as it is currently being debated in the field of performance studies itself. For more on the varying critical responses to this question, see "Epilogue: Not everything is theatre" in *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies.*

minds of both the performer and the audience to varying degrees. In more explicit, theatrical forms of performance, the tension between these two forms of bodily presence is more apparent, because the actor's semiotic body is announced as separate from her phenomenal one, for instance in the cast list. Within this binary, the phenomenal body of the actor appears to the audience to be the more "natural" of the two, while the semiotic body appears constructed or constituted by the performed acts.

Hence, casting a married couple as a pair of lovers can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the actors' phenomenal and semiotic bodies. This casting decision potentially reveals a wider cultural investment in the notion of a natural, phenomenal female body behind the performing, semiotic female body. As I will demonstrate, *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park* likewise present a gap between a woman's phenomenal body and semiotic body during performance. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, the narrator, Horatio, obsesses over the reactions of his love Glorvina's phenomenal body, such as sighs, tears, and glances. His doing so is an attempt to repress the knowledge that Glorvina is a performer who also inhabits a performing, semiotic body. In *Mansfield Park*, protagonist Fanny Price insists on her own status as anti-performer. She believes there to be no gap between her phenomenal and semiotic bodies and is consequently puzzled when those around her seem to misread her. In both texts, the privileging of phenomenality over semioticity allows them to presume the existence of a "natural" woman, like Amelia.

Performing Femininity in *Lovers' Vows*

The example of Amelia, like that of Julie, reveals that an insistence on honesty and naiveté forms a key part of female gender performance in late 18th- and early 19th-century Britain. In *Lovers' Vows*, one of the major ways in which Amelia's honesty is assessed by observers is through recourse to her physical body. Her father, Baron Wildenhaim, understands her physical body as a kind of litmus test of her affections, or lack thereof, toward potential suitors such as Count Cassel. In Porter's translation of the text, Amelia's father (rendered as a Colonel) remarks to Amelia of the Count, "But you don't blush when I name him" (29). The stage directions indicate that Amelia replies "No" only after "feeling her cheeks" to confirm her father's observation (Inchbald's version removes the stage direction) (29). The binary of phenomenal vs. semiotic bodies is thus present not just during the staging of a play, but also during mundane performances of gender. This moment clearly underscores how both Amelia and her father position the female body as a phenomenal one which has the potential to confirm or refute the semiotic one. If Amelia had been performing by trying, for example, to hide her affection for Count Cassel, her phenomenal body would present a "tell" such as a blush that would reveal the fiction or falsity of the performance.

Fischer-Lichte argues, "The acting theories of the eighteenth century attempted to eradicate the possible dangers stemming from the tension between the phenomenal body of the actor and the actor's portrayal of a role. They privileged the semiotic portrayal of a role over the phenomenal body by emphasizing the dominance of the literary text over the art of acting" (26). But *Lovers' Vows* demonstrates that this may not universally be the case, at least when it comes to female performers. According to *Lovers' Vows*, a woman's phenomenal body may be at times more natural or real than the semiotic body, but it may also escape her control by revealing truths she would rather conceal via the performing, semiotic body. We might say that in some ways the

female phenomenal body is privileged over the semiotic one as it constitutes a barometer of semioticity (although on the other hand, the phenomenal body appears more natural by virtue of the contrast with the semiotic one). This theory of using the responses of the female phenomenal body to test for the presence of a performing, semiotic body will return powerfully in Horatio's observation of Glorvina in *The Wild Irish Girl.*

But significantly, it is the Colonel who first suggests using Amelia's body as a gauge of her true emotional or mental state; Amelia merely follows suit. Besides inquiring about whether she blushes to think of the Count, Baron Wildenhaim further investigates other possible physical symptoms of love in Amelia, like "restless" sleep or dreams of the Count (343). Yet later in the play, Amelia is seemingly baffled by her as-yet unconfessed feelings for Anhalt, wondering privately "Why do I cry? – Am I not well?" (350). Amelia apparently *does* experience physical symptoms of love in her phenomenal body toward Anhalt but does not understand them as such. For her, the uncontrollable reactions of her phenomenal body engender confusion, not insight. Thus, a woman may not experience her phenomenal body as more true than the semiotic body that she presents to the world. This complicated phenomenon could be read as affirming Butler's theory of gender performativity, which I will argue collapses the distinction between the phenomenal and semiotic bodies. Or contrarily, it could be read as *Lovers' Vows* upholding that distinction and implying that Amelia is too naïve to understand it.

In spite of his insistence that Amelia always be truthful, the Baron clearly remains suspicious that she is concealing something. In actuality, she never does, openly confessing to her father that while she has not dreamt of Count Cassel, she *has* dreamt of Anhalt, whose departure in the dream elicited from her yet another physical symptom of love: tears. There are thus two potential flaws in the Baron's reliance on a separation of female phenomenal and

semiotic bodies. First, as discussed above, the Baron harbors lingering concerns that Amelia may wield her semiotic body in a way that masks what's occurring in her phenomenal body. He worries that interrogating her phenomenal body may not offer him, as an observer, foolproof access to the truth.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, this method of detection depends upon the audience observing the phenomenal body at precisely the correct moment with precisely the correct criteria in mind. Baron Wildenhaim, in his quest to determine Amelia's feelings toward Count Cassel, utterly ignores what amounts to, in his own estimation, her confession of love for Anhalt. Although *Lovers' Vows* seems to endorse the belief that the phenomenal body provides real clues about a woman's interior life, it simultaneously suggests that these clues are subject to interpretation by observers in ways that may be more or less correct. Baron Wildenhaim misinterprets Amelia's dreams for Anhalt because he did not anticipate her having feelings for Anhalt. Sir Thomas Bertram will commit the same error in assessing the emotional states of many of the young women of Mansfield Park, but especially his daughter Maria, whose inappropriate affection for Henry Crawford is not discovered by him until it is too late.

The fact that Amelia's phenomenal body displays ambiguous signs that always require an observer's interpretation makes a strong case for reading *Lovers' Vows* through a lens of performativity, in which the phenomenal body forms part of the performance in the same way as the semiotic body. Just as Fischer-Lichte suggests that any performance "is ultimately created by everyone present and escapes the control of any one individual," the phenomenal body of the female performer ultimately escapes control of both the performer herself, in that her physical responses are involuntary, and her audience, in that the meaning of the phenomenal body is subject to potentially inaccurate interpretation (20).

The Contributions of Performativity

The field of performativity dismantles the notion of separation between the self and the performance, and the phenomenal and the semiotic bodies. Judith Butler's work on gender performativity has served to combat the notion of a natural, phenomenal body behind the performed, semiotic one. In her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler articulates her theory of gender performativity, in which "gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity… an incessant and repeated action" (152). For Butler, gender is an effect that appears seamless but is actually created through discrete acts repeated and naturalized over time. In her earlier work, she specifies that these acts primarily take the form of the "stylization of the body," such as clothing or gesture ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 187). For Butler, gender is not an expression of any natural interiority, but is rather constituted through a series of culturally conditioned acts.

Performativity is a theoretical framework that has at times informed readings of *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park*, but it is rarely explicit in those readings.[5] For instance, in his analysis of *Mansfield Park*, Joseph Litvak describes the pervasive theatricality that characterizes the world of the novel, hinting at performativity without ever referring to it as such. I will argue that in these novels, theatrical and musical performances are often deployed in the service of constructing particular kinds of performative female gender identity; therefore, performativity is an essential lens through which to read them. The most important contribution of performativity

[5] One notable exception is Penny Gay who, in her book *Jane Austen and the Theatre,* early on mentions Butler's work on performativity (23).

to this thesis will be its potential to demonstrate the figure of the natural woman as not natural at all, but rather an identity effect constituted through performed acts.

Taking gender as performative suggests that any distinction between a performer's phenomenal and semiotic bodies is constructed, relying on a natural body that is supposedly different from the one that is performed. But like gender, the body itself is not "passive" or "prior to discourse" (*Gender Trouble* 176). Rather, it is inscribed and constituted through culture. Thus, in Butler's formulation of performativity, the distinction between the phenomenal and the semiotic bodies upheld by performance studies ultimately collapses because the phenomenal body is itself constituted and understood through the performance; there is no "purely" phenomenal body that exists outside of performance and apart from the semiotic body that it presents. The phenomenal body is revealed to be always already a performing, semiotic body.

In spite of the tension between performance studies and performativity studies on the question of performers' phenomenal and semiotic bodies, it will nonetheless be useful to bring both of them to bear on my core texts. At times it will be beneficial to examine Glorvina or Fanny using the terms from performance studies of phenomenality and semioticity. At others it will be more interesting to reflect on how performativity renders that binary null. I consider this as an animating tension of my argument rather than one that requires resolution. It will, however, occasionally call for a kind of double vision, or toggling back and forth between the two lenses, particularly during my discussion of *Mansfield Park.*

Mostly, performance studies and performativity studies together can advance my reading of these novels in congruent, complementary ways. For example, although Butler conflates the phenomenal and semiotic bodies, she admits that often, "The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity

and naturalness" ("Performative Acts" 190). The habituality of gender performances contributes to a widespread understanding of gender as not-performance. Fischer-Lichte tends to agree; she notes that performances, which occur in time and are necessarily transient, may be more likely to have a "lasting effect" on the spectator after multiple performances (166). In the case of performativity, however, the "lasting effect" engendered in both the spectator and the performer is most often a belief that the performance of gender in fact accords with a reality of gender.

In contrast with Carlson's definition of performance, which always requires a consciousness of itself as separate from the performer's self, Butler's performativity needs no such double consciousness and instead is more likely to be *un*conscious. In this regard, Butler has more in common with Goffman, who proposes that the performer may be "sincere" in her belief in her own performance (59). Sincere performances of gender will be particularly important to my reading of *Mansfield Park*, as Fanny Price performs the role of the natural woman so sincerely that even she herself believes it.

Amelia, also, is a sincere performer. Like Fanny, she truly believes she is supremely artless and truthful, as she asserts to her father. And like Fanny, Amelia's sincerity in the role of the natural woman is what allows her to engage in gender subversion, according to the definition of subversion put forward by Butler. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that gender norms may be subverted precisely because of the fact that they are performative, repeatedly established through a series of acts. That recurrence enables the possibility of what Butler calls a "subversive repetition" (44). A subversive repetition might rearrange the existing elements of gender in unanticipated ways – for instance, according to Butler, as in drag. Amelia commits a subversive repetition of femininity in the scene that Inchbald attempted to make more palatable to an English audience, where she openly confesses her love to Anhalt. In doing so, Amelia carries her

inability to lie to an extreme, a performance of femininity that unexpectedly allows her to articulate her desire. In this light, her statement to her father – "you know you commanded me never to disguise or conceal the truth" – appears at least deeply ironic, if not deliberately disingenuous (344).

In performing, often sincerely, the role of the aperformative, natural woman, through explicit forms of performance like music and theatre and through gender performance, the women of these texts achieve the subversion of otherwise strictly mandated gender roles. The same might even be said of Rousseau's Julie. In performing the part of the natural woman, Julie justifies a sexual relationship with Saint-Preux without being married to him; Amelia directly courts and practically proposes to the man she loves; Glorvina validates her right to participate in the formation of a new Irish national identity; and Fanny defies the authority of her male guardian who commands her to marry a man she does not love. In each case, the performing woman redirects the fundamental qualities of the character she plays – truthfulness, purity, naturalness – in a way that allows her to gain the agency to make personal and political choices that would otherwise be disallowed. These examples show what happens when a female performer carries her sanctioned role to a hyperbolic extreme. Thus it becomes possible to see that even the kind of "good acting" which appears at first glance benign or even conservative always already contains the potential for gender subversion.

Chapter 1:

Natural and National?: Repressing Performance in Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*

Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's epistolary novel *The Wild Irish Girl; a National Tale* (1806) chronicles the journey of a young Englishman, known as Horatio M—, to Ireland. Horatio understands the trip as a kind of "banishment," as he is sent to his family's Irish estate, acquired through the Cromwellian Wars, by his father as a consequence of his dissipated behavior (102). While in Ireland, Horatio encounters the O'Melvilles, a father and daughter who prefer to be known by their ancestral titles of the Prince of Inismore and the Princess Glorvina. Horatio is instantly enchanted by the beautiful Glorvina (the titular wild Irish girl), but when he inadvertently finds himself admitted to their ruined castle home, he must disguise himself as the itinerant artist Henry Mortimer, knowing that the Prince would never allow entrance to a member of the M—family, who confiscated the O'Melville family lands several generations earlier. In this disguise, Horatio simultaneously falls in love with Glorvina and with Ireland. He tutors the Princess in art, and she in turn gives him lessons in Irish language and culture.

Although their affections for each other steadily grow, Horatio becomes suspicious of Glorvina when he observes her secret correspondence with a mysterious gentleman. Disgusted with her seeming betrayal, Horatio returns to his family's estate where he learns that his father has arranged for him to marry an English woman. He does not protest, but unable to resist the lure of Inismore, he is drawn back to the castle, which he finds deserted. The infirm Prince, he discovers, has been jailed for his many debts, and Glorvina has refused to leave his side. Horatio attempts to liberate the O'Melvilles only to learn that the mysterious gentleman with whom Glorvina has been corresponding has already done so. Horatio returns to Inismore just in time to

witness Glorvina at the altar with this gentleman as her expiring father looks on. Horatio hastens to interrupt the ceremony, at which point he realizes that Glorvina's fiancé is none other than his own father, the Earl of M—.

Upon this discovery, Lord M— discloses how he entered the O'Melvilles' lives through deception, much like his son after him. The Prince, too shocked at the dual revelation to continue living, dies at the altar, leaving a distraught Glorvina keening for him. The novel concludes with a final letter from Lord M— to both Horatio and Glorvina in which he relinquishes his engagement to his son, exhorting the couple to be happy and to establish a new kind of relations between the English and the Irish.

The Wild Irish Girl is often seen by today's critics as a baffling, messy mix of genres and registers, including the (self-proclaimed) national tale, the Romantic novel, the Gothic novel, the epistolary novel, travel writing, and historical fiction, among others.[6] But when it was published, *The Wild Irish Girl*, Owenson's second novel, was wildly popular in London literary circles and won her instant fame. Drawing on the training of her father, an Irish actor, Owenson capitalized on the novel's popularity by performing as Glorvina at literary gatherings, often playing her harp and engaging her auditors in conversation about Irish culture. Frances R. Botkin remarks on the success of Owenson's performances as the "alluring figure of the Irish princess," demonstrated by the resulting "taste for Irishness and for what was called 'the Wild Irish look' in London and Dublin" (44). Owenson's public assumption of the character of Glorvina is oddly apt, given the text's preoccupation with performance – both literal, musical performance and gender or national performance.

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[6] For more on *The Wild Irish Girl* as a blend of different kinds of discourse, see Joep Leerssen's "How *The Wild Irish Girl* Made Ireland Romantic." Heather Braun also explores the political reasons behind this "hybrid form" in "The Seductive Masquerade of *The Wild Irish Girl:* Disguising Political Fear in Sydney Owenson's National Tale" (33).

Critics have had a fraught relationship with Owenson's history of performance as Glorvina, and by extension, the presence of performance in the novel. Thomas Tracy acknowledges the sometimes negative impact of Owenson's adoption of the Irish princess character on modern readings of the novel, saying, "Perhaps because Owenson's heroines have long been recognized as thinly veiled embodiments of herself, they have sometimes been dismissed as arguing not for the empowerment of women, but for the aggrandizement of Sydney Owenson" (91). But he proposes reading the text as an optimistic allegory, calling for improved, more equal relations between England and Ireland as a result of the Act of Union, passed just six years before the publication of *The Wild Irish Girl*. Natasha Tessone likewise establishes the "metonymic chain Owenson/Glorvina/Ireland," which Vivien Jones further expands as "woman/estate/nature/nation" (172; 121).[7] For Tessone, Owenson's habits of public self-fashioning as the Irish princess importantly inform her reading of *The Wild Irish Girl* as caught in a double-bind between agency and appropriation. Botkin understands the novel and Owenson's performances as equally intended to create a positive, if essentializing, image of the Irish in the minds of the English public.

The same ambivalence that surrounded, and continues to surround, Owenson's enactments of Glorvina, also surrounds Glorvina's performances in the literary text. Throughout much of the novel, Horatio understands Glorvina as the consummate natural woman, much like Amelia in Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*. Glorvina's extraordinary intelligence and education, as well as musical skill, are not considered antithetical to this conception of her, but are instead all

[7] There is a longstanding literary tradition of representing Ireland as a woman, such as Hibernia. Another well-known example is W.B. Yeats' and Lady Gregory's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), in which a personified female Ireland first appears as an old woman who lures young men like a siren to fight for her, then as "a young girl" with "the walk of a queen" (11). For more on the trope of Ireland as a woman, see Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "The Stage Englishman of the Irish Drama: Boucicault and the Politics of Empathy" in *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (2001).

subsumed under the label of "natural" gifts. However, Horatio's perception of Glorvina as artless breaks down in a spectacular way by the novel's end, and suddenly he is suspicious that she may be the ultimate performer. *The Wild Irish Girl* finally refuses to resolve the question of the extent of Glorvina's performance, leaving open the possibility that she, and by extension Ireland, may be capable of a deceptive performance for an audience of colonial masters. This lingering ambiguity encapsulates a moment of tectonic change in the British cultural understanding of performing women and their role in the political sphere.

Glorvina as the "Natural Woman"

Horatio is primed to view Glorvina as the Rousseauian natural, pure woman, like Julie, even before he meets her. While first exploring the landscape of Connaught, Horatio encounters an elderly local man, who furnishes him with some information about the O'Melville family at Inismore. After this meeting, he imagines Glorvina as a "*red headed*... romp," full of "unpolished ignorance... simple and unvitiated!" (137, original emphasis). Moreover, he is "glad" to do so, preferring her thus, suggesting that if she were also "amiable and intelligent," he might, contrary to his wishes, have to regard her as cultured or civilized (137). Later, he attempts to dismiss his budding fascination with Glorvina, wondering: "What had I to expect from the unpolished manners, the confined ideas of this Wild Irish Girl? Deprived of all those touching allurements which society only gives; reared in wilds and solitudes... endowed indeed by nature with some personal gifts..." (153). Yet he remains drawn to the Princess, whom he envisions as a "timid" "mountain violet" (154).

There are several reasons why Horatio attempts to frame Glorvina as uncultured. To him, Glorvina is the exotic, desirable Other, set in distinct opposition to the English women with whom Horatio is so disenchanted upon his arrival in Ireland. Culture is a quality most associated with English women, about whom Horatio feels a dizzying ambivalence. He reflects how he "had fled in disgust even from those [English women] to whose natural attraction the bewitching blandishments of education, the brilliant polish of fashion, and the dazzling splendor of *real* rank, contributed their potent spells" (153-154, original emphasis). The "education," "polish," and "rank" of his female English acquaintances are simultaneously repellant, causing him to flee "in disgust," and preternaturally attractive, as emphasized by his choice of supernatural words like "bewitching" and "spells." Moreover, here he recasts his journey to Ireland from banishment to flight, attempting to reclaim agency by positioning himself as an escapee from the monstrosity or sorcery of English women. This excerpt reveals how Horatio conceives of "natural attraction" as a kind of originary, Eve-like state, in which he supposes Glorvina to exist and from which women fall as they gain civilized accomplishments. In contrast with Glorvina, whom he believes retains the pure form of Nature, English women are mere "servile copies, sketched by the finger of art" (159).

Through his prolonged stay at Inismore, Horatio becomes better acquainted with Glorvina. He continues to report on "the purely national, natural character of an Irishwoman; in fine, I long to behold any woman in such lights and shades of mind, temper, and disposition, as Nature has originally formed her in" (159). Even as he learns of her intelligence and grace, qualities earlier negatively associated with Englishwomen, he maintains his original conception of her as unvitiated. In fact, her seeming naturalness is directly correlated with her Irishness, as is suggested by Horatio's blurring of the "national" with the "natural."

This generalization of Irish femininity as natural becomes clearer in Volume III when Horatio visits the O'D___ family. After spending an evening in the company of the three O'D___ daughters, he ventures that "It is certain, that the frank and open ingenuousness of an Irishwoman's manners forms a strong contrast to that placid but distant reserve which characterizes the address of my own charming countrywomen" (288). Frankness and ingenuousness are here used synonymously with naturalness. He arrives at this conclusion even though the O'D___ girls pursue such cultured activities as playing the piano and reading in his presence. Horatio maintains the Irish/natural metonymy regardless of Glorvina's, as well as the O'D____ sisters', demonstrable possession of both education and social niceties, qualities that earlier allowed Horatio to class English women as distinctly *un*natural or supernatural. Owenson, then, suggests that the "wild" Irish girl is a preconceived notion that the young Englishman brings with him to Ireland, one that he stubbornly and hypocritically clings to in spite of contradictory evidence.

The linkage of natural with *Irish* in particular is significant because Irish naturalness functions to assuage English guilt over historical injustices. Upon arrival in Ireland, Horatio experiences a newly-awakened sense of guilt about the violence by which his family acquired their Irish estate. His very first fantasy of Glorvina as the redheaded romp occurs immediately after he is struck by the realization that he is "the descendant of a murderer!" (137). He continues, "I wished *my* family had never possessed an acre of ground in this country, or possessed it on other terms. I always knew the estate fell into our family in the civil wars of Cromwell… but I seemed to hear it now for the first time" (137, original emphasis). The stress on "*my*" in the above excerpt emphasizes Horatio's new sense of ownership of his ancestor's actions in confiscating the O'Melvilles' family land. Horatio therefore attempts to imaginatively

project onto Glorvina "unpolished ignorance," which reveals her "real inferiority" to him as an Englishman (137). Believing her to be wild, unpolished, and inferior better allows him to justify his legal dominion over her land.

The theme of colonization as necessary and justified would be most famously articulated by Rudyard Kipling in his poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899) almost a full century later. In it, Kipling characterizes the British colonial project as a form of service to colonized peoples, who require such intervention by virtue of being "Half devil and half child" (267). Initially, Horatio is conscious that this fantasy is an attempt to assuage his guilt over colonial wrongdoing, explicitly writing to his friend, "All this soothes my conscientious throes of feeling and compassion" (137). However, that awareness seems to desert him as the novel progresses and he incorporates all future revelations about Glorvina into this first sketch of her.

Kipling's "half child" is an apt description of how many of the novel's characters read Glorvina. Although Glorvina is nineteen, and therefore certainly of marrying age, she is consistently spoken of as a girl rather than a woman, even in the novel's title. The old man who first tells Horatio of Glorvina calls her a "jewel of a child," and only after Horatio exclaims at the youth that this appellation connotes does he acknowledge "she is no child either" (136). Father John, Glorvina's lifelong tutor, likewise continues to view her as childlike. When Horatio refers to Glorvina as Hebe, the Greek goddess of youth, Father John fondly agrees, saying, "she is a mere child" (175). In a certain way, Glorvina's naturalness has the function of infantilizing her, since both states are characterized by innocence and purity.

The obvious outcome of childishness on the part of the colonized is the intercession of the colonizer in the guise of a parental figure. Importantly, for Kipling, in order to take up the burden of Empire, the white man must "Have done with childish days;" the work of Empire is

both characterized and authorized by a kind of cultural adulthood or maturity and therefore authority (268). Yet Kipling nonetheless terms such work a "burden." In contrast, Horatio recounts how his father, Lord M—, accepts colonial authority with pleasure:

> "How delightful," he exclaimed, "to form this young and ductile mind, to mould it to your desires, to breathe inspiration into this lovely image of primeval innocence, to give soul to beauty, and intelligence to simplicity, to watch the ripening progress of your grateful efforts, and finally clasp to your heart that perfection you have yourself created." And this was spoken with an energy, an enthusiasm… (318)

This effusion is directed at Horatio; Lord M— assures him he will find happiness in molding his future wife, as, we may assume, Lord M— has already done with Glorvina. Carrying out the training and education of the "naturally childlike" colonial subject is therefore a major motivation for infantilizing her in the first place.[8]

In contrast with his father, who represents an earlier generation of English colonizers, Horatio replaces the impulse to educate (and therefore improve) the colonial subject with an impulse to essentialize her instead. Admittedly, Horatio takes on the authoritative role of Glorvina's drawing tutor, an event which initially engenders in him feelings of "triumph" because it allows him to maintain residence with Glorvina at Inismore longer (171). However, Horatio soon admits that these lessons bring him less pleasure than anticipated because drawing is an art that is fundamentally opposed to Glorvina's sensibility.[9] This is a complicated gesture because on the one hand Horatio resists shaping Glorvina against her inclination; but on the other

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[8] The recurrence of the male-tutor-turned-lover trope in non-colonial English literature, such as Anhalt with Amelia in *Lover's Vows* and Edmund with Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, suggests that English women, like their colonial counterparts, were similarly naturalized and infantilized.

[9] For more on Horatio's association with the visual arts and the "imperial gaze," and Glorvina's association with the verbal arts and bardic culture, see Katja Jylkka, "Ut Pictura Poesis?: Art and the Irish Nation in *The Wild Irish Girl*" (84).

hand, he nonetheless privileges her natural or innate talents even above her own choice to participate in the drawing lessons. Moreover, in a reversal of roles, Glorvina, in conjunction with Father John and the Prince, later serves as Horatio's tutor in the Irish language. Nonetheless, in spite of the softening of Horatio's position on colonial tutelage, the Earl of M— receives the last word; he continues to justify his "parental affection" toward Glorvina and exhorts Horatio to continue to offer "the nutritive beam of encouragement" to those under his care (335; 339). Owenson ambivalently explores both colonial *modi operandi*, the educational and the essentializing, but the return to Lord M—'s perspective at the novel's end suggests that Horatio's method of governance will prove unsustainable.

The major way by which Horatio sustains his conception of Glorvina's naturalness for so long is by observing the reactions of her phenomenal body, just as Baron Wildenhaim does with Amelia in *Lovers' Vows*. Horatio's minute observations of Glorvina's physical body pervade the novel from the first moment he sees her, when his "ardent gaze was still riveted on a face alternately suffused with the electric flashes of red and white" (155). Tessone notes that "Horatio's interpretations of Glorvina are, more often than not, based on an enigmatic sigh, or glance, or movement;" she convincingly argues that his resorting to such physical cues are a result of Glorvina denying him "full access into her character" (184).

Indeed, Horatio frequently turns to interpreting Glorvina's phenomenal body at moments when she cannot, or will not, speak, as in this excerpt, after he recites to her some lines of French poetry:

> "Oh!" said she, with an arch smile, "I perceive you too will expect a tributary flower for these charming lines; and the summer's first rose—" she paused abruptly; but her eloquent eye continued, "should be thine…" I thought too – but it might only be the

> fancy of my wishes, that a sigh floated on the lip, when recollection checked the effusion of the heart. (174)

As Glorvina falls silent, Horatio imaginatively interjects, ascribing in fact an entire monologue to her "eloquent" eye. He also speaks of "read[ing]" her body like a text (175). He half-heartedly concedes that such reading may be inflected by his desire for her body to produce certain signs. But much like his awareness of his complicity in historical wrongs toward the Irish, his awareness of his possibly willful readings of Glorvina's phenomenal body dissipates as the novel progresses through Volume II and he becomes increasingly confident in his observations.

Like Baron Wildenhaim in *Lovers' Vows,* Horatio seems inclined to only notice those aspects of Glorvina's phenomenal body that accord with his preconceived understanding of her as the Wild Irish Girl; any physical gestures that defy that understanding will either go unnoticed or will be semi-willfully misread. Nowhere is this more apparent than when Horatio witnesses Glorvina emotionally reading a letter from a man he does not yet realize is his father. Horatio exclaims, "When was the letter of a friend thus answered with tears, with smiles, with blushes and with sighs? This, this, is love's own language" (303). Horatio's definitive but incorrect interpretation of the scene – that the letter is from Glorvina's secret lover – obscures or forecloses other interpretive possibilities for the reader. His superficial reading of Glorvina successfully identifies her tears as the "natural" expression of some strong emotion, but he misinterprets that emotion as love, when in fact it is more likely gratitude that the Earl of M— has offered to pay the Prince's debts. The fact that Horatio is incorrect in his reading of Glorvina in this scene – she is not harboring any romantic love for his father – crucially reveals that he is a bad or inept reader of Glorvina and the physical signs she produces, and reveals the extent to which *his* bad reading interferes with the reader's ability to accurately gauge Glorvina.

As he likewise does with the reactions of her phenomenal body, Horatio frames Glorvina's education, potentially aberrant due to her masculine areas of study, as a natural expression of the character of the Wild Irish Girl, in this case through the Romantic notion of divinely-given "genius." At first, Horatio expresses concern that Glorvina's studies will have "spoiled" her:

> I fear, however, that this girl is already spoiled by the species of education she has received. The priest has more than once spoke of her erudition! *Erudition!* the pedantry of a school-boy of the third class, I suppose. How much must a woman lose, and how little can she gain, by that commutation which gives her our acquirements for her own graces! For my part, you know I have always kept clear of the *bas-bleus*; and would prefer one playful charm of a *Ninon*, to all the classic lore of a *Dacier*. (159, original emphasis)

Horatio was not the only one concerned with the question of female education at the time. In his belief that education was a distinctly masculine undertaking ("our acquirements"), he echoed the thoughts of Rousseau, whose novel *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* is explicitly referenced in *The Wild Irish Girl* as among the books that Horatio recommends to Glorvina. Another popular contemporary thinker, Dr. John Gregory, very seriously advised his young daughters, "If you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men" (63-64). He represents female education as happenstance which, if accidentally acquired, should be kept as a shameful secret. Jane Austen lambasted this anemic approach to women's education, for instance by making the Reverend James Fordyce's heavy-handed *Sermons to Young Women* Mr. Collins' reading material of choice in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Glorvina's pedantry therefore flies in the face of contemporaneous recommendations about the kinds and depth of learning to which women should be exposed. Tracy describes how many of her areas of mastery were at the time considered "masculine studies: the natural sciences (including botany… and the practice of medicine), history, philosophy, and classical languages" (97). Horatio is also perplexed by her "elegance of manner," or command of social niceties, which in his previous experience have always been the result of societal training (163). He concludes that since Glorvina has been "reared amidst rocks, and woods, and mountains! deprived of all those graceful advantages which society confers," her elegance of manner "must be the pure result of elegance of soul" (163). Horatio does not find Glorvina's education and manner problematic because he views them not as artfulness or artifice, but rather as natural or inborn to her.

This view of Glorvina as naturally, not artificially, endowed with intelligence is crucially supported by Father John, her lifelong tutor. He remarks, "the *genius* of Glorvina has ever appeared to me as a beam from heaven, an emanation of divine intelligence" (172, emphasis mine). In his study of the history of genius, Darrin M. McMahon relates how, during the Romantic period, genius was conceived of as a "gift" that "could be "'awakened' and 'tested'" but never "'learned' or 'taught'" (121). He further describes the Shelleyan ideal of the poet-genius as "like a musical instrument, an Aeolian lyre, on which a divine melody is harmonized and played" (128). This is indeed an apt simile for the genius of Glorvina, whose name, Owenson tells us, literally translates from the Irish as "sweet voice" (169). Like Romantic genius, Glorvina's genius is also represented as a gift, in this case from God, which she has displayed to her tutor since childhood. Because she specifically possesses genius rather than

cleverness or astuteness, she evades the problematic association with intentional learning, which in women is perceived as artificial.

However, one explanation that Horatio never considers might be that Glorvina has indeed undergone extensive education that Horatio might deem "unnatural," which is simply invisible to Horatio as a recent arrival to Ireland. In "Narrating Cultural Encounter: Lady Morgan and the Irish National Tale," Ina Ferris stresses Horatio's status as cultural outsider in the novel, displaced from his English origins both physically and mentally. As the cultural outsider, he has not been privy to observing Glorvina's education firsthand, and therefore the intentional nature of her intellectual acquisitions are obfuscated. As discussed earlier, Horatio frequently compares Glorvina favorably with other English women of his acquaintance, referring to them as mere "servile copies, sketched by the finger of art, and finished off by the polished touch of fashion" (159).[10] Through the comparison, it becomes clear that Glorvina, simply by virtue of inhabiting an unseen corner of Ireland, has achieved what English women achieve through visible (to Horatio) training. In this reading, the fact that Horatio glosses over Glorvina's intellectual acquisitions implies his continuing status as cultural outsider and underscores the limitations of his vision as narrator.

Throughout the early sections of the novel, Horatio, relying on his authoritative view, casts Glorvina as the wild or natural Irish girl. He arrives in Ireland prepared to read her as such because for him she exists as the exotic Other to the Englishwomen of his acquaintance, and he

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[10] This masculine disgust for obvious female alteration, this time over the question of being "out" in society, resurges in Austen's *Mansfield Park,* with Tom Bertram recounting the story of a Miss Anderson: "When Anderson first introduced me to his family, about two years ago, his sister was not *out*, and I could not get her to speak to me… I did not see her again for a twelvemonth. She was then *out*. I met her at Mrs. Holford's, and did not recollect her. She came up to me, claimed me as an acquaintance, stared me out of countenance, and talked and laughed till I did not know which way to look" (33, original emphasis). All citations taken from the Dover Thrift Edition (2001) of the text.

persists in this reading because it allows him to justify his family's legal dominion over her ancestral home at Inismore. Any of Glorvina's qualities that might subvert Horatio's understanding of her as the natural woman are refashioned to conform to that understanding. He presents her intellect, for example, not as an intentional achievement borne out of individual effort but rather as an expression of her innate genius. He moreover privileges the reactions of her phenomenal body as a means of bolstering her seeming naturalness, even though he proves himself an incompetent reader of those reactions. However, Horatio's reframing of Glorvina as purely natural strikes the reader as suspect, thanks to such qualities as her impressive range and depth of knowledge, and perhaps even more significantly, her music-making.

Glorvina the Performer

Glorvina's favored pastime is music, both singing and playing the harp. These musical activities signal her as a performer, an identity category that is generally aligned with artfulness. Musical performance constitutes one form of intentional, conscious engagement with an audience and always occurs under an audience's gaze. This deliberate encounter between the musician and her audience represents one way in which musical performance can be understood as artful. Additionally, musicianship is a craft that is acquired through instruction, making it an artful pursuit in terms of the skill required to master it. Glorvina's status as a passionate and talented musician therefore situates her firmly as a performer, in spite of Horatio's attempt to frame her as the natural, or artless and nonperforming, woman.

Even more than her education, Glorvina's musical performances, because of their explicit relation to artfulness, threaten to expose Horatio's image of her as the Wild Irish Girl as absurd.

In an attempt to maintain that image, Horatio relegates music to the natural through its connection to "real" or "true" Irishness. In some ways Owenson upholds the association between music and "the genuine Irish character," as demonstrated by Glorvina's characterization of her own art (290). Yet for Glorvina, music is also a conscious expression of a particular kind of Irish political identity, an aspect of her performances that Horatio utterly ignores or dismisses.

One of the scenes from the novel that has garnered the most critical attention depicts the moment when Horatio first hears Glorvina singing and playing. Earlier in the day, he had observed the O'Melville family attend a Catholic Mass. Then, just as he contemplates departing, he hears Glorvina's voice on the wind and is enchanted by it:

> At that moment a strain of music stole by me, as if the breeze of midnight stillness had expired in a manner on the Eolian lyre: Emotion, undefinable emotion, thrilled on every nerve. I listened. I trembled. A breathless silence gave me every note… the voice it symphonized; the low wild tremulous voice, which sweetly sighed its soul of melody, o'er the harp's responsive chords, was the voice of *a woman!* (146, original emphasis)

In this first moment of encounter, Horatio explicitly conceives of Glorvina's music as produced by the quintessentially Romantic Aeolian lyre. Critics have engaged with this scene in various ways: Heather Braun understands Glorvina as monstrous here, luring Horatio to a subsequent dangerous fall like a "syren"; Ferris reads it as a form of "ravishment" of the displaced traveler, or a "moment of excess in cultural encounter," in which the distance between the traveler and the native is "reduc[ed]" (38; 415).

Expanding upon Ferris' reading of this scene, I suggest that it stands as an example of what has been called in performance studies a liminal moment. Fischer-Lichte explains liminality as what an audience experiences during, and perhaps after, a performance. In the

transcendence of the liminal moment, the boundaries between the performer and the audience are blurred, and the audience may be temporarily transformed. She remarks, "The experience of a liminal situation destabilizes one's sense of self and other, and of the world at large… A person experiences liminality first and foremost as a bodily transformation" (43). Fischer-Lichte's liminality is remarkably similar to Ferris' ravishment: both temporarily destabilize the observing subject in a fundamental way, beginning with his or her body.

Horatio certainly demonstrates this destabilizing effect as a result of Glorvina's performance in the passage above, breathlessly reporting on the physical symptoms it engenders in him, such as trembling and thrilled nerves. His entrance into a liminal state emphasizes that what he has just experienced during his first meeting with Glorvina was indeed a performance, even if he is reluctant to acknowledge it as such; the liminal state acts as a barometer that indicates whether a performance has occurred.

Throughout the rest of the novel, Glorvina continues to be referenced as a skilled musical performer. Music has long been associated with Ireland in the cultural imagination; the harp particularly has been acknowledged as a national symbol (and now appears as the country's coat of arms).[11] Owenson acknowledges the harp's special relationship with Ireland in several ways. First, it is the chosen instrument of her heroine Glorvina, who is a symbol of Ireland. Second, it constitutes the subject of Horatio and Glorvina's first conversation, in which Horatio inquires, "And is this, Madam… the original ancient Irish harp?" (164). Within that conversation, Owenson's paratext overwhelms the actual narrative, as she devotes almost a full two pages of notes to the harp and its origins, underscoring it as important information for her readers.

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[11] For more on the history of the harp in Ireland, see *Ireland's Harp: The Shaping of Irish Identity C. 1770-1880* (2015) by Mary Louise O'Donnell and *The Story of the Irish Harp: Its History and Influence* (2003) by Nora Joan Clark.

Glorvina's choice of the harp as her primary instrument is vital to a reading that accounts for her political agency. In her study of the Irish harp from 1770-1880, O'Donnell traces the shifts in cultural coding of the harp. Earlier in Irish history, she suggests, the "harp and lyre were initially encoded as media for the transmission of the word of God" (9). This earlier view of the harp maps well over the Romantic notion of genius, in which the artist is a vehicle for an innate, divinely-endowed gift. So in reading Glorvina's music-making as a production of genius, Horatio is tapping into a much earlier, perhaps outdated understanding of the harp.

As Ireland approached the 1798 Rebellion, the harp came to be seen as a propagandistic symbol for Irish autonomy from England, prominently deployed by revolutionary groups like the United Irishmen. O'Donnell records:

> The instrument was a potent medium for the articulation of political and social grievances throughout the eighteenth century and it retained this potency in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The harp metaphor and icon were bequeathed to generations of nationalists in the nineteenth century who employed them to critique contemporary society and effect religious and political emancipation. (23)

Owenson's novel was published in 1806, just a few years after the 1798 Rebellion and the subsequent passage of the Act of Union in 1800. The image of Glorvina's harp would therefore certainly have retained, as O'Donnell notes, revolutionary resonances for both English and Irish readers. The importance ascribed to Glorvina's harp by the text works to undercut Glorvina's more moderately expressed opinions about Union. Indeed, the harp's weighty symbolic presence, along with the notable absence of English-Irish nuptials in the Conclusion, suggests Owenson's skepticism about the success of Union and Glorvina's subtle association with the movement for Irish independence.

But Glorvina's nationalism is present in her music even aside from her choice of instrument. In addition to being a talented harpist, Glorvina is also a gifted singer, a practice associated with the Irish bardic tradition. Katja Jylkka also points out the significance of Glorvina's choice of songs: "The lyrics of the ancient bards often carried political significance and Glorvina, who considers herself the bards' replacement, sings 'Erin Go Bragh,' or 'Ireland Forever' among her many other performances" (84). Owenson further emphasizes the importance of the music-Ireland connection by embedding several Irish songs, such as "Cathlein Nolan" and "Gracy Nugent" directly in the text as part of Horatio's, and by extension the reader's, Irish education (182-184).

Yet there is an important gap between how Horatio and Glorvina perceive Glorvina's music making. Jylkka hints at it when she summarizes the work of Leith Davis: "Davis argues that for the Irish people, music is politically charged yet inextricably personal, at once an intrinsic part of their ethnic character and a *conscious assertion of national identity*" (84, emphasis mine). Glorvina frequently endorses this both/and view of her own musical performances. In her first conversation with Horatio, she states, "in all which concerns my national music, I speak with national enthusiasm," and later speaks of the correlation between "Our national music" and "our national character" (165; 167). The first equation, national music/national enthusiasm, supports the view of music as performance, while the second, national music/national character, simultaneously supports the view of music as expression of a natural interiority. Davis explains this simultaneity as a function of gender dynamics, arguing that "Music, as presented in *The Wild Irish* Girl, is a form of patriotic sentiment that unites the 'politics' of the male sphere with the 'sentiment' of the female sphere" (135). Owenson, through Glorvina, affirms the naturalness of music to the Irish, particularly Irish women, as a means to an

end: to provide Irish women with a justified and justifiable avenue into participation in national identity politics. Women's engagement in performance is, by extension, revealed as engagement in politics.

In contrast, Horatio takes a more limited view of Glorvina's musical performances. In an early letter, he writes: "She was created for a musician – there she is borne away by the magic of the art in which she excels, and the *natural enthusiasm* of her impassioned character; she can sigh, she can weep, she can smile, over her harp. The sensibility of her soul trembles in her song, and the expression of her rapt countenance harmonizes with her voice" (179, emphasis mine). In this passage, Horatio transforms what Glorvina has earlier referred to as "national enthusiasm" for her music into "natural enthusiasm." The subtle alteration in phrasing is indeed significant as it indicates Horatio's denial of Glorvina's intentional participation in national identity politics through musical performance. Again here, he focuses on her phenomenal body (sighing, weeping, smiling) as demonstrative of her guilelessness while ignoring the explicitly political agency that might animate it.

So Horatio only understands Glorvina's musical performances as an expression of her innate Irish character, not, in Jylkka's words, "a conscious assertion of national identity." The latter would certainly constitute a threat to the image of Glorvina as the Wild Irish Girl that he has been cultivating; therefore, as with her potentially problematic education, he appropriates it wholesale into "the natural." He privately derides Glorvina's investment in her national musical tradition, writing, "Not for the world would I have annihilated the triumph which this fancied superiority seemed to give this patriotic little being, by telling her, that we thought as little of the music of her country, as of every thing else that related to it" (166). Regardless, Glorvina's

defense of her nationalistic performances cannot be so easily dismissed by the reader, resulting in a new understanding of the importance of the performing woman to the emerging Irish nation.

From Wild Irish Girl to Stage Irishwoman

Owenson allows Horatio, as the narrator, to maintain his fantasy of the natural Wild Irish Girl throughout much of the novel, but by the third and final volume, it finally starts to break down. Glorvina's perceived artlessness is abruptly demolished for Horatio when he glimpses her privately poring over a letter from an unknown gentleman, who later turns out to be his father. He assumes that the letter is from a "former, happier lover," and the thought sends him into a frenzy (308). He relates:

> Yet to be thus deceived by a recluse, a child, a novice: – *I* who, turning revoltingly from the hackneyed artifices of female depravity in that world where art for ever reigns, sought in the tenderness of secluded innocence and intelligent simplicity that heaven my soul had so long, so vainly panted to enjoy! Yet, even there – No! I cannot believe it! She! Glorvina, false, deceptive! Oh! were the immaculate spirit of *Truth* embodied in a human form, it could not wear upon its radiant brow a brighter, stronger trace of purity inviolable, and holy innocence, than shines in the seraph countenance of Glorvina! (308, original emphasis)

This passage chronicles the disintegration of Horatio's conception of Glorvina as Truth personified. He can no longer continue viewing her as "a child," as he and his father have been so wont to do. But why should the notion of a Glorvina who is capable of deception be so

devastating to him? Part of the answer lies in her status as colonial subject, and part of it lies in her gender.

Remembering that Glorvina is representative of all of Ireland, it would certainly be understandable that Horatio, the displaced colonizer, should be fearful of being deceived by her. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, in fact, performances by the colonized are often seen as threatening.[12] In George Bernard Shaw's play *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), for instance, an Englishman, Broadbent, finds himself the dupe of a Scotsman, Tim, who plays to his stereotype of the drunken, goodhearted Paddy. Broadbent's Irish friend, Larry, scorns him for falling for Tim's act:

> Man alive, dont you know that all this top-o-the-morning… business is got up in England to fool you…? No Irishman talks like that in Ireland, or ever did, or ever will. But when a thoroughly worthless Irishman comes to England, and finds the whole place full of romantic duffers like you, who will let him loaf and drink and sponge and brag as long as he flatters your sense of moral superiority by playing the fool… he soon learns the antics that take you in. (122)

In *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, Declan Kiberd asserts that there was some historical truth to Bernard Shaw's account. He proposes a reading of *John Bull's Other Island* informed by "Irish cunning," and notes that historically, "An art of fawning duplicity was perfected by many who acted the fool while making shrewd deals which often took their rivals unawares" (58; 30). The English colonizer could never be certain whether the Irish colonial subject was being authentic or simply mirroring back the expected part.

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[12] See, for instance, Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (1978) or Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975).

Horatio's concern, then, acknowledges a pattern that Owenson was certainly aware of – the Irish playing the expected part of the "stage Irishman," thereby deceiving the English and achieving something that they desire.[13] Owenson herself seems to have engaged in the practice of the stage Irish when she attended London salons in character as Glorvina in order to kindle English interest in Ireland. But the threat of Glorvina's deception seems even more potent than that of the stage Irishman, as it is combined with her gender. Considering that up until this point, Horatio has read Glorvina as the natural woman, discovering that she is capable of deception would constitute the ultimate dissimulation. The natural woman, as we saw with Amelia in *Lovers' Vows*, is on the side of Truth, not artifice. The possibility that Glorvina lied about a love affair with another man hence represents the destruction of the natural woman fantasy that Horatio has been cultivating since his arrival in Ireland.

If Glorvina is a symbol of Ireland, then Horatio is a symbol for England. His fear of Glorvina as a deceptive performer is suggestive of English attitudes towards their Irish subjects, as well as the colonial relationship between the two nations more broadly. Horatio fears the possibility of Glorvina's performance because performance (both musical and otherwise) is associated with an Irish political will for independence. Moreover, a performing Glorvina would be particularly monstrous to Horatio because of her femininity; according to Owenson, a performing woman is a political woman. The political woman, in crossing the boundary from the private to the public sphere, violates the gender binary on which British society at this time was predicated and threatens male political supremacy. Indeed, in *The Wild Irish Girl*, Owenson allows that Irish women, like herself or Glorvina, might be uniquely suited to participate in nation-building because of their aptitude for and training in performance. Women's distinctly

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[13] For more on the development and decline of the stage Irishman trope, see *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (1996) and *The Irish Writer and the World* (2005) by Declan Kiberd.

natural talents for performance may be deployed by them in seemingly *un*natural ways to articulate a political consciousness.

Horatio's panic, at least over this particular letter, is revealed to be overblown. The letter was addressed to Horatio's father, the Earl of M—, and while its contents are never shared, it most likely expresses gratitude for his willingness to settle the Prince's debts rather than romantic love. And in the novel's Conclusion, which shifts for the first time out of Horatio's narration into a third person narration, Glorvina refers to Horatio, in her own unobscured voice, as "my love" (331). On the other hand, the text never fully defuses Horatio's anxiety over Glorvina's potential to deceive. After all, she was indeed engaged to another man and did not disclose it to Horatio until he stumbled upon her at the altar. The structural shift from epistolary to third person narration makes it difficult to assess to what extent Horatio experiences resolution on this question.

An Inconclusive Conclusion

One final scene significantly informs the lingering question of Glorvina's performance. During the Conclusion, Horatio is irresistibly drawn back to Inismore, in spite of his belief that Glorvina has betrayed him. He finds the castle dark and empty, and the novel enters strongly into the Gothic register as he unexpectedly hears the sound of Glorvina's harp:

> …he flew to that room where the harp of Glorvina always stood: like the rest it was unoccupied and dimly lit up by the moon beams. The harp of Glorvina, and the couch on which he had first sat by her, were the only articles it contained: the former was still breathing its wild melody when he entered, but he perceived the melancholy vibration

> was produced by the sea breeze… which swept at intervals along its strings. Wholly overcome, he fell on the couch… (324-325).

Horatio is "overcome" by the disturbing, unnatural image of Glorvina's harp playing itself. The novel's reliance on Gothic tropes is significant here. E.J. Clery describes the Gothic as a genre as dependent on "vivid, static images" acting almost as "stage properties" (xvi). In the inaugural Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), author Horace Walpole resorts to the use of stage directions, and in his Preface to the First Edition refers to the novel as a kind of "drama" with "actors" (6). Hence since its inception the Gothic has been conceived of as a genre concerned with certain elements of performance, making it quite fitting for Owenson to deploy at this moment in *The Wild Irish Girl*, in which the question of Glorvina's performance culminates.

This scene from *The Wild Irish Girl* is in fact strongly reminiscent of the opening scene of *The Castle of Otranto*: the son of Manfred, the prince of Otranto, is mysteriously crushed to death by a giant plumed helmet that has fallen from the sky. For Manfred, this event seems to be an omen that promises the fulfilment of an ancient family curse. The helmet itself has often been read as a symbol for the "return of the repressed," which emerged as a major concern of the Gothic novel (Clemens 3).[14] In the case of *The Castle of Otranto*, what has been repressed is Manfred's knowledge of his family's impending demise; in the Gothic conclusion to *The Wild Irish Girl*, the abandoned harp which produces its own music is equally symbolic of the return of the repressed – in this case, of Horatio's knowledge of Glorvina's engagement in various kinds of gendered and national performances.

The harp constitutes a disturbing return of that repressed knowledge because in producing its own music, it enacts a kind of simulated performance with the expected performer, Glorvina,

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[14] Valdine Clemens defines the return of the repressed as the "emergence of whatever has been previously rejected by consciousness" (3).

removed. It suggests that Glorvina's musical performance does not need to be carried out by human agency. In representing all of the effects of performance produced independently of human agency, Owenson points out that performance is *always* already an effect. In other words, if a performance can occur without a performer, then more generally performance may be said to not necessarily be the expression of some natural interiority. This idea, pushing back as it does against the very notion of "naturalness," somewhat troubles or complicates Glorvina's assertion that her music-making is both national *and* natural. And it certainly acts as a final rebuttal of Horatio's position that Glorvina's performance is *only* an external expression of a natural inner state.

Although anachronous to *The Wild Irish Girl*, the idea of performance as truth effect is the same idea captured by Butler as gender performativity in *Gender Trouble.* Gender performativity argues that gender is not an expression of a natural interiority but rather a series of habitual acts that together constitute the illusion of seamlessness. But although "gender is always a doing," it is not "a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (34). Butler rejects the kind of interiority that would allow Horatio to construct the natural woman. Instead, genders are "truth effects," produced by the very acts that are understood as expressions of genders (186).

The role of the natural woman in *The Wild Irish Girl* is similarly exposed as a truth effect via the Gothic harp. This scene demonstrates how, if the Irish harp can play itself; the female performer is ideologically, but not strictly mechanically, necessary to the performance. Therefore, performance, musical or otherwise, may be used to deceive or may even be fundamentally characterized by deception; it appears to be incompatible with the ideas of nature or truth, both of which are embodied by the natural woman. Yet previously, Owenson suggests,

through Glorvina's insistence on the dual natural/national nature of her music, that performance is at least in part the outward expression of an innate female Irish sentimentality – this naturalness is what seems to give Glorvina the right to enter into Irish politics. The tension between these two opposing views of performance – as truth effect and as expression of natural interiority – is never fully resolved in the novel. The liminal moment engendered by the performance briefly excavates Horatio's repressed knowledge of Glorvina's status as a performer, suggesting that perhaps he will acknowledge her performances not just as natural, as he has done all along, but also as performative. But the lack of resolution around his liminal transformation leaves that question unanswered.

The return of this repressed knowledge in the form of the harp renders Horatio in a liminal state, just as Glorvina's first musical performance does at the novel's outset. As earlier, the liminal state is experienced first as a physical phenomenon: "his heart seemed scarcely susceptible of pulsation – every nerve of his brain was strained almost to bursting – he gasped for breath" (325). His entrance into a liminal state here is particularly important because it suggests he experiences the wind-blown harp as just as much of a performance, in spite of Glorvina's absence, as that first performance at which she was present.

Reading this scene through a lens of performance studies justifies understanding Horatio's physical response to the harp as a liminal state, but so does reading it through a lens of the Gothic. Like stage properties, the liminal state constitutes another shared characteristic of both the Gothic and the dramatic. Jarlath Killeen explains liminality in the Irish Gothic as "a moment of the suspension of normal rules and roles, a crossing of boundaries and a violation of standards, and a breakdown of old forms and temporary invocations of new forms" (21). The old form that breaks down in this moment is Horatio's conception of Glorvina as the Wild Irish Girl.

However, liminality is never guaranteed to be permanent in either the Gothic or the theatrical modes. Killeen understands the liminality created by the Gothic as "temporary," and Fischer-Lichte, likewise, remarks that the liminal transformation brought on by a performance is equally likely to be temporary except, perhaps, in the case of multiple exposures to that performance. According to Fischer-Lichte, the transformation is more likely to last with repeated exposures to the performance. The structure of the remainder of the novel, which shifts from a third person narration into a final letter from the Earl of M—to Horatio and Glorvina, makes it difficult to assess how temporary this moment of liminality is for Horatio and whether he will ultimately incorporate this revelation about performance and Glorvina more permanently. If Horatio could consolidate his repressed knowledge of Glorvina's status as both natural performer and performative Irish citizen, it might indicate movement away from the limiting, strictly essentializing impulse toward the Irish.

But arguably more important than resolving the question of the duration of Horatio's liminality, his liminal moment in reaction to the spectral harp also constitutes a kind of liminal moment for readers of *The Wild Irish Girl*. That is, up until this point, the reader has experienced the novel only through Horatio's narration; the Conclusion is the first time that the narrative steps out of his point of view and is able to more fully show the reader Horatio's blind spots. Earlier in the text, the reader may perceive Horatio's selective interpretation of aspects of Glorvina's character, such as her education or her abilities as a musical performer. But this scene opens up more fully, for the first time, a space for the reader to judge Horatio and to understand the events of the novel differently from him.

The reader's liminal state is likely to extend through Glorvina's final performance of the novel after her father, the Prince, expires at her wedding altar. Glorvina is distraught at the death

of her beloved father and enters into grief-stricken singing, in a voice which Owenson describes as "scarcely human" (331). Botkin connects Glorvina's funerary song with the keening performed by female mourners earlier in the novel. She describes keening as "(feminine) articulations of grief (and implicitly of nationalism)," and argues that Owenson recognizes them as both "subversive" and "potentially threatening to the hegemonic order" (47-48). Davis similarly proposes that Glorvina's "inarticulate ravings… speak louder than words" and thwart the colonizer's (represented by both O'Melville men) desire to know the Other (138).

Glorvina's breakdown into inarticulate sounds conjures up feminist theorist Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément's description of the hysteric in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975). Drawing on Freud's work with hysterical women, they posit the hysteric as a descendant of the sorceress, with a body which is "transformed into a *theater* for forgotten scenes" (5, emphasis mine). The hysteric is framed as a kind of performer who physically enacts what has been repressed in her history. Glorvina's turn to what Davis calls "orality" should thus be understood as yet another emergence of her repressed status as intentional performer (138). This hysterical performance on the wedding altar is particularly subversive because it represents a performance outside the realm of male/English signification just as she ought to be agreeing to a highly symbolic English/Irish union. Moreover, Glorvina's behavior in this scene highlights the contrast with her previous, more constructed, self-conscious behavior as the Princess of Inismore.

Although *The Wild Irish Girl* lifts the veil on Glorvina's performances, it ultimately resists any definitive characterization of them as natural or performative. This reading diverges from many other readings of the novel. Critics have long recognized Glorvina as a symbol for Ireland; Tracy further argues for two levels of allegory on the basis of Glorvina's gender. Either way, most have traditionally read *The Wild Irish Girl* as a somewhat straightforward political

allegory that they variously understand as optimistic (like Tracy) or essentializing. Although I also recognize the two levels of allegory sustained by the text, I suggest that Owenson's project in *The Wild Irish Girl* is more complicated.

The final narrative shift into the Earl of M—'s letter to Horatio and Glorvina denies any easy sense of closure. The Earl continues to insist upon marriage between the two, despite the grotesque, aborted parody of a wedding that has just occurred, while Horatio and Glorvina are refused voicedness. Tessone concludes that Glorvina "to the end remains an enigma, both for Horatio and the reader" (185). In some ways this is true – Owenson never fully resolves the uncertainty surrounding Glorvina's naturalness, allowing for the possibility that Glorvina is the consummate performer. This deliberate ambiguity suggests that *The Wild Irish Girl* is a text that captures a moment of cultural transition. Owenson lingers between two contrary impulses in terms of conceptualizing both femininity and Irishness – the essentializing and the deconstructionist. The novel implies an emerging Irish female subjectivity which includes participation in the political sphere, while also demonstrating that subjectivity to be highly fragile and contested.

Finally, Owenson leaves open the question of to what extent Glorvina knowingly engages with performance and performativity for Horatio's benefit. In depicting the spectacular breakdown of Horatio's image of Glorvina as the natural woman, Owenson opens up a space in which Glorvina's subjectivity might be possible. Yet she structures the conclusion of the text in such a way that Glorvina never fully claims or enters into this subjectivity. *The Wild Irish Girl* leaves readers in the uncomfortable position of making the determination of what will happen to female performers in the next act.

Chapter 2:

"I really cannot act": Performance, Sincerity, and Subversion in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*

Jane Austen's third novel, *Mansfield Park* (1814), chronicles the life of its heroine, Fanny Price, a poor relation to the wealthy Bertram family who resides at the title estate. When Fanny is a child, the Bertrams take her in as a way to relieve the burden of Mrs. Price's many children. A shy, quiet, and anxious girl, Fanny is overlooked by most residents of the Park with the exception of her cousin Edmund, who takes a special interest in her wellbeing and education, and with whom Fanny falls in love as she gets older. This affection is put to the test with the arrival of the attractive and glamorous Crawford siblings, Henry and Mary, who come to stay in the neighborhood. With their patriarch, Sir Thomas, away visiting his estate in Antigua, the Bertrams and the Crawfords grow inappropriately close. Maria Bertram, who is engaged to the ridiculous Mr. Rushworth, harbors an illicit attraction to Henry, as does Maria's sister Julia; Henry encourages them both through his indiscriminate flirting. Meanwhile, Edmund and Mary are drawn to each other in spite of her outspoken disdain for his future career as a clergyman.

The two families, along with the eldest son Tom Bertram's friend Mr. Yates, are struck by the idea to put on private theatricals, and ultimately land on Elizabeth Inchbald's then-wildly popular *Lovers' Vows*, which I discuss more fully in the Introduction. Fanny is the only member of the company who cannot be persuaded to join them in performing. She recognizes how the performance serves as justification for the covert displays of attraction between Maria and Henry, who play opposite each other as mother and son, and between Edmund and Mary, who play a pair of lovers. The theatricals quickly become an obsession for the company and threaten to grow from a private show, taking place within the family confines, into a semi-public one. The

performance is, however, averted when Sir Thomas returns from Antigua somewhat earlier than expected, whereupon he dismantles the stage and burns all copies of the players' scripts.

After the crisis of the theatricals, Maria quietly marries Mr. Rushworth and both she and Julia depart from Mansfield, vaulting Fanny to a position of unwanted attention as the sole remaining young woman at the Park. Henry, after first being determined to make Fanny fall "a *little*" in love with him, finds himself inadvertently in love with her and asks for her hand in marriage (156, original emphasis). In spite of Sir Thomas' insistence that she acquiesce to Henry's proposal, Fanny refuses, and consequently is sent to her parents' house in Portsmouth as punishment. After languishing there for several weeks, Fanny is finally recalled to Mansfield when the married Maria elopes with Henry, and Julia elopes with Mr. Yates. These disasters finally prove sufficient motivation for Edmund to separate himself from Mary permanently. By the end of the novel, Edmund, as well as the rest of the Bertram family, has grown to see the value of Fanny's upright, moral nature, and he returns her love at last.

As a result of the aborted theatricals, *Mansfield Park*, and even Jane Austen more generally, are sometimes understood to be "anti-theatrical" (Gay ix).[15] However, more recent criticism of the novel has explored the ways in which *Mansfield Park* is "deeply theatrical" beyond the attempted staging of private theatricals (Urda 282). Gay remarks that in all of Austen's novels, contemporary social life is in fact characterized by a "pervasive theatricality" made manifest in a "set of coded, that is, 'theatrical,' behaviours, in dress, deportment, and etiquette" (23).

Critics struggle to understand the function of Fanny Price in this theatrical world as a character who avowedly "cannot act" (Austen 99). C. Knatchbull Bevan, for example, reads the

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[15] This point of view was most famously articulated by Lionel Trilling in "Jane Austen and *Mansfield Park*," in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature* (1958).

novel as upholding a strict binary between the true, natural self, as embodied by Fanny, and the falseness of role-play, as embodied by the Crawfords and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the Bertrams. This reading seems at first glance supported by the text; *Mansfield Park* appears to uphold Fanny, like Glorvina, as the natural, aperformative woman, in contrast with other characters like Maria, Julia, and especially Mary. And yet, as Joseph Litvak notes, *Mansfield Park* has nonetheless "failed to produce the critical unanimity that so unambiguous a work ought to permit" (331). Litvak numbers among those who view Fanny as equally implicated in, rather than exempt from, the theatricality that surrounds her.[16]

I propose reading *Mansfield Park* through two critical lenses that, though they are at times held in tension with each other, support Litvak's understanding of Fanny as a performer. These two lenses, performance studies and performativity studies, offer differing routes of arriving at that same conclusion. Each approach separately and overlappingly provides ways of understanding the function of the performing woman in *Mansfield Park.*

Through performance studies, we see that Fanny is in a way guilty of performance by association. Some performance studies scholars, such as Fischer-Lichte, have argued that the audience is a constitutive, defining element of any performance. Fanny routinely constitutes the players' best audience and even helps them run lines. Her presence during rehearsals is what makes the rehearsals performances. And in spite of her protests, her presence alone signal her tacit consent to the performance, a fact which is underscored by her eventual agreement to perform the role of Cottager's Wife, although the show is thwarted by the unexpected arrival of Sir Thomas.

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[16] This view is shared by Emily Allen in *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (2003).

Performativity studies uncovers Fanny's unconscious performances by a different avenue: according to Butler, no one is exempt from representing their gender through a series of stylized, gendered acts. Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that there is nothing natural or innate about gender. Instead, gender "is always a doing," or performative (34). It is a kind of effect generated by a series of actions that we understand as gendered, and through repetition, these acts are habituated and naturalized. Although this theory would of course have been anachronistic to Austen herself, it nonetheless seems remarkably apt to apply to *Mansfield Park.* Performativity is after all what Gay hints at when she describes Austen's world as pervasively theatrical in its extensive social codes, and what Litvak implies when he argues that "All along, in eschewing acting, Fanny has in fact been playing a role, albeit 'sincerely'" (348).

Often, performance studies and performativity studies will inform my reading in complementary ways. For example, one area of interest for performance studies is cultural performances, what Carlson has described as "repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior" (71-72). In performativity studies, Butler narrows that field to cultural performances specifically of gender. At other times, these theoretical frameworks will be in tension with each other, particularly around the notion of a performer's phenomenal and semiotic bodies, which collapses when viewed through a lens of performativity. However, as I discuss in the Introduction, this is not a tension I seek to resolve. Rather, I view it as productive, and both theories are useful to my reading of *Mansfield Park.* Moreover, although performativity ultimately collapses the phenomenal/semiotic binary, this binary is nonetheless operational in the text itself and is therefore important to examine using those terms. Not only do performance studies and performativity studies clarify Fanny's relationship to various kinds of performance,

reading the novel with these two lenses also allows us to consider the relationship between these cross-disciplinary fields more generally.

Reading *Mansfield Park* through both performance and performativity studies is particularly important because often the novel's performances, theatrical and musical, are deployed in the service of constructing particular kinds of performative female gender identity. Litvak suggests that *Mansfield Park* depicts two kinds of female performance – "'good' acting and 'bad' acting" (336). The terms "good" and "bad acting" implicitly point to gender performativity, although Litvak never makes the connection to performativity explicit. Good acting suggests a performance of femininity that conforms to the ideal of femininity, while bad acting suggests a performance of femininity that violates or trespasses that ideal. Both are performative but are judged differently.

Bad acting is, I will suggest, often more visible and more easily recognizable than good acting in *Mansfield Park* as it is commonly marked by theatrical performance. The most obvious form of bad acting is Mary's, as well as Maria's, literal acting in *Lovers' Vows*. By performing in the play, they stray into bad acting because it aligns them with the abject figure of the Jezebel, an expected gender role for women but nonetheless not perceived as a "good" one. Bad acting empowers women to transgress against their ideal gender role of the natural woman, such as when Maria displays her proscribed attraction to Henry Crawford during rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*. Mary Crawford is the novel's primary bad actor. She acts badly, for instance, when she refers to Maria's elopement with Henry by the unmodest, unfeminine term "folly" (309). Gay argues that Mary becomes an even more flagrant bad actor by exhibiting an increasingly "stagey quality of her gestures and speech" as the novel progresses (116).Ultimately, the women who are "bad" actors are all cast out of Mansfield Park, an outcome which would seem to support

Litvak's conclusion that subversive theatricality in the novel is finally repressed. He characterizes bad acting as the only subversive form of feminine performance; good acting, he suggests, persists at Mansfield in the form of Fanny Price but is not "subversive."

In contrast with bad acting, good acting for women refuses to acknowledge that it is acting at all. While Mary and Maria are bad actors, Fanny participates in "good" acting, performing her duties as the natural woman so sincerely that even she believes that that's what she is, as when she refuses to perform in *Lovers' Vows*. She chafes under being "told that she must do what was so impossible as to act" (102). But I will argue that by reading *Mansfield Park* through performativity studies, it becomes clear Fanny's good acting can at times function subversively – perhaps more effectively than Mary's bad acting. Although for the most part Fanny's performative enactments of femininity accord with male expectations for correct female behavior, at one crucial junction they diverge: when Fanny refuses the hand of Henry Crawford, in spite of the urging of every major male character for her to accept him. Viewing this gesture as subversive requires an understanding of how subversion is defined in performativity studies.

Butler notes that the subversive potential of gender performativity lies in its very nature as a series of repeated acts; the persistent reoccurrence of gendered acts allows for the possibility of a "subversive repetition" (44). A subversive repetition of the female gender might reorganize the anticipated elements of femininity in a new or unexpected way. Subversive gender performance "will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality… compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine… enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire" (189). Successful gender subversion shows gender to be fundamentally performative. But importantly,

for Butler, the most effective forms of gender subversion continue to "operate within the matrix of power" (42). That is, to some extent, subversion must "pass" as non-subversion in order to effect change from inside the ideology of binary gender.

With this understanding of performative gender subversion in mind, it becomes possible to see Fanny's refusal of Henry Crawford as an example of a Butlerian subversive performance of gender. In refusing Henry, Fanny stays true to her role, that of the natural woman, yet she does it in such a way that resists outward male authority. The natural woman is fundamentally characterized by her truthfulness. Fanny views marriage as a state that entails love, and so to marry without love would be to do so dishonestly. She refuses to violate the command of honesty, thereby using a tenet of sanctioned, appropriate femininity to gain agency and achieve what she wants. Ultimately Sir Thomas cannot condemn her for her choice because she was always performing her part "correctly." Fanny's performance is consequently, according to performativity studies, the most subversive of the novel because it is never recognized as such, either by her or by anyone else, and allows her to remain a part of the matrix of power at Mansfield going forward, even as it shifts the cultural expectation around a woman's ability to choose her own partner. This analysis of Fanny's performative subversion, grounded in an understanding of subversion derived from performativity studies, relies first on establishing Fanny's participation in the novel's performances via performance studies, in spite of her own denial of that fact.

Fanny as the "Natural Woman"

Much like Glorvina in *The Wild Irish Girl*, throughout most of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny is read by others as natural and artless. But unlike Glorvina, Fanny also understands herself as natural and artless, denying her ability to perform or dissimulate in any way. In order to identify Fanny as a performer via performance studies, the reader must first combat Fanny's own self-perception. The narrative perspective of *Mansfield Park* provides the reader with a clearer view of Fanny's thoughts and feelings than *The Wild Irish Girl* does in regards to Glorvina. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, we observe and analyze Glorvina along with Horatio, although the novel also leaves gaps where it is possible to see what Horatio does not. In contrast, *Mansfield Park* is narrated in Austen's classic free indirect style, giving us partial access to Fanny's perspective through a narrator who is often aligned with her. After Fanny is publicly exhorted by Tom and Mrs. Norris to take a part in the theatricals, for example, Austen shares a scene in which Fanny privately reflects on their request: "To be called into notice in such a manner… to be told that she must do what was so impossible as to act… had been too distressing at the time, to make the remembrance when she was alone much less so" (102). Even in a moment of solitude, Fanny meditates on the impossibility of her performance.

In addition to the insight we gain into Fanny's status as the anti-performer through the glimpses of her consciousness, Fanny is signaled as nonperforming in several other ways. Primarily, the text frequently reminds us of Fanny's dislike of being looked at. If, as I will argue, performance is fundamentally defined by engagement with a watchful audience, then Fanny's dislike of being looked at indicates her unwillingness to perform. When Sir Thomas returns from Antigua, for instance, he is struck by Fanny's increased beauty, and Edmund, knowing her desire to be invisible, entreats her to prepare for increased visibility to other men in the future:

> Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny… any body but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty before; but the truth is, that your uncle never did admire you till now – and now he does. Your complexion is so improved! – and you have gained so much countenance! – and your figure – Nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it – it is but an uncle. If you cannot bear an uncle's admiration what is to become of you? You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at. (133)

Austen embeds Fanny's discomfort with being looked at directly in Edmund's dialogue when he protests her turning away from him as he catalogues her appearance.

Anna Despotopoulou connects the theme of looking in the novel with Laura Mulvey's work in feminist theory around the male gaze and woman as "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" (Mulvey 2088, original emphasis). Despotopoulou suggests that Fanny "powerfully withstands the male gaze of Sir Thomas, Henry Crawford, and even Edmund by consistently avoiding being looked at" (571).[17] There may be some agency in refusing, as much as possible, to be subjected to the male gaze. Despotopoulou suggests that by avoiding the gaze of men, Fanny is able to deploy her own gaze and construct her own worldview.

While Despotopoulou's reading is compelling, it fails to sufficiently acknowledge how for Fanny, being seen is also associated with the "bad" acting performed by her cousins and Mary Crawford. This is made quite clear as Fanny prepares for the ball Sir Thomas throws in her honor; she reflects that her two fears for the evening are "doing wrong and being looked at" (181). In Fanny's mind, "doing wrong" is indistinguishable from "being looked at." Spectacle, or even simply visibility, are positioned as transgressions. A woman who "does right" should not, would not be looked at. Although by attempting to remain invisible, Fanny may achieve agency

[17] Jones also notices the male "voyeuristic" tendencies of *Mansfield Park*, but she locates it within a tradition of the Picturesque (129).

in spite of herself, her driving motivation for not being looked at is self-protective rather than assertive.

Fanny attempts to further avoid being observed by remaining silent, as well as invisible; her silence in particular reveals some of the limitations placed on women who are good actors. Fanny is often characterized as reluctant to speak, even amongst her family circle. Austen's narrator directly states that "Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called on to speak their opinion than Fanny" (32). And her "favourite indulgence," we are later told, is "being suffered to sit silent and unattended to" (151). Fanny's silence only bolsters her ability to be viewed as the natural woman, since it often allows men to read what they believe to be truth on her phenomenal body. In performance studies, the phenomenal body is the performer's "real" body, while the semiotic body is that of the performed character. Although a gap between the two bodies may always be said to exist, in the most convincing performances, the gap appears to be minimized or collapsed.

Fanny's is most often perceived by men solely in terms of her "real" phenomenal body as a result of her resistance to being seen and heard, which diminishes her projection of a semiotic body. Early in her stay at Mansfield, Edmund gifts Fanny with paper to write to her brother William. "Fanny's feelings on the occasion," Austen writes, "were such as she believed herself incapable of expressing; but her countenance and a few artless words conveyed all their gratitude and delight" (10). It is in this encounter, where he first interprets the reactions of Fanny's phenomenal body, that "her cousin began to find her an interesting object" (10). Austen's use of the word "object" is telling in that it signals the way in which Fanny, like all good female performers, is caught in a double bind. Fanny resists being objectified by staying invisible and

silent, but this very muteness enables the men around her to read her phenomenal body as an object instead.

Even more than Edmund, Henry Crawford objectifies Fanny's silent phenomenal body, demonstrating how even the figure of the supposedly non-performing natural woman is subject to selective male scrutiny and interpretation. As Henry determines to make Fanny fall in love with him, he remarks to Mary that "in that soft skin of hers [Fanny], so frequently tinged with a blush as it was yesterday, there is decided beauty; and from what I observed of her eyes and mouth, I do not despair of their being capable of expression enough when she has any thing to express" (155). In this passage we hear an echo of Horatio from *The Wild Irish Girl*, attempting to trace Glorvina's interior life by minutely analyzing each blush and sigh. Yet Henry's statement here is noteworthy on its own because he goes one step further: he assumes that since he did not observe any expression in her eyes and mouth, she must have had nothing to express, that the absence of expression on the phenomenal body mirrors a corresponding absence of interior feeling. He views her body purely in terms of its "natural" phenomenality, ignoring the semiotic interpretation that he conducts upon it and thereby revealing that he believes Fanny's assertion that she is incapable of performance.

Indeed, Henry's attitude is reminiscent of Baron Wildenhaim from *Lovers' Vows*; both fail to understand that their interpretations of the bodies of seemingly natural women do not guarantee them unfettered access to what they believe to be their "real" mental and emotional state. Ironically, as a result of men's selective reading of her phenomenal body, the natural woman, with a phenomenal body that is always subjected to male audienceship, may be said to be performing regardless of her consent and regardless of her audience's recognition of that performance. Tom, also, echoes the idea that a female performer's consent is unnecessary when

he tries to convince Fanny to participate in *Lovers' Vows* by telling her, "it will not signify if nobody hears a word you say, so you may be as creepmouse as you like, but we must have you to look at" (99). Again, Austen emphasizes that the only thing necessary to constitute a female performance is her objectified body. Fanny's anti-performance resistance to being seen and heard is insightful but futile in a culture that insists on putting women's bodies on display on- and offstage.

Fanny's silence extends beyond her speech; she also refuses to participate in the ubiquitous, largely sanctioned female musical culture that her cousins and particularly Mary Crawford are so invested in. In fact, when she first arrives at Mansfield Park, her lack of interest in music is one of the traits that most distinguishes her from her cousins. Maria and Julia marvel to their Aunt Norris, "Do you know, she says she does not want to learn either music or drawing" (12). Mrs. Norris responds, "To be sure, my dear, that is very stupid indeed, and shows a great want of genius and emulation… it is not at all necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are; – on the contrary, it is much more desirable that there should be a difference" (12). For Maria and Julia, musical performance is a way of creating the impression that they are women of a certain class status; their music marks them as different from their non-musical, impoverished cousin Fanny. In her unwillingness to play music, Fanny is nonetheless still engaging in "good" acting by knowing her place in the Mansfield hierarchy, as is callously articulated by Mrs. Norris in the above quote.

Music making is cast in *Mansfield Park* as one of the primary, if ambivalent, forms of female performance. On the one hand, as Mrs. Norris encapsulates, music was thought to be partially an expression of natural "genius," just as Horatio conceives of it in *The Wild Irish Girl.* On the other hand, there is also an element of "emulation," or artfulness, about music making; it

is a skill that must be taught to be acquired. Bevan views it less ambivalently, arguing that "as is so often the case in Jane Austen, the performing arts, acting and music, are opposed negatively, in *Mansfield Park*, to nature" (596). I suggest that generally Austen presents female musicianship as an acceptable form of performance, or good acting. When wielded appropriately, it can be an effective tool with which women can attract partners in the marriage economy. Yet when placed on a spectrum from not-performance to performance, such as that articulated by Michael Kirby in performance studies, music-making tends toward the performance end of the spectrum.[18] Fanny, understanding herself as natural rather than artificial, is certainly safer to stay away from musical education altogether.

Unlike music, the theatricals are most definitely a form of bad acting, so it is even more important that Fanny refuses to perform in *Lovers' Vows* with the rest of the Bertrams and the Crawfords. When Tom exhorts her to play the Cottager's wife, an "irreverent role" that Claudia L. Johnson notes is "curiously at odds with Fanny's meek character," Fanny demurs, panicked (333). She exclaims, "Me!... Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act… It would be absolutely impossible for me" (99-100). Bevan again takes Fanny at her word and suggests that she is, in fact, incapable of conflating, as the Crawfords do, a role with her sense of true self. Trilling similarly argues that *Mansfield Park* seeks to uphold above all else the "honest soul" (76). Indeed, Fanny frequently frames her refusal to perform in terms of inability rather than unwillingness, as when she reflects on it as an "impossible" task. If this is the case, then Fanny's assertion of the impossibility of her performance is an attempt to dissociate herself from any forms of bad acting that surround her.

However, it is also possible that in exclaiming "I cannot act," Fanny means "I must not

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[18] For more on acting as a continuum rather than a simple binary, see Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting," *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (2002).

act." This alternate sense of the phrase fits with a reading of Fanny as ultimately implicated in many of the novel's performances—which would render any disavowal of her performance abilities empty. Her denial of her ability to perform may be, at its core, a reluctance to understand herself as a performer – a reflection, as I hope to demonstrate, of her status as a "sincere," or self-believing, performer of the part of the natural woman.

The Performances of Mansfield Park

Aside from Fanny, who positions herself as the anti-performer, Mansfield Park is rife with women who self-consciously engage in both performance and performativity. The "theatricality" that according to Litvak "inhabits Mansfield Park before, during, and after the theatrical episode" is a broad term that for Litvak includes explicit forms of performance, such as the theatricals, as well as cultural performances of the self, what I have named here as performativity (344). Urda also sees Mansfield as a space occupied by theatrical characters, although she makes an exception of Fanny. Bevan proposes that the Crawfords are the origin of this theatricality, saying that they "bring to Mansfield a manner of personal living in which the self is lost in the role" (608). Bevan describes the Crawfords as both the source of Mansfield's infatuation with performance, as well as sincere, or self-believing performers.

In this section, I will outline the pervasive culture of female performance, particularly musical performance, in which *Mansfield Park* takes place, as a means of putting Fanny's resistance to performance in a broader context while at the same time further exploring what kinds of performances of femininity do *not* succeed at subverting the ideal of femininity. Maria and Julia Bertram, along with Mary Crawford, all reveal, via their education in such forms of

performance as music, the British cultural investment in specific kinds and degrees of female performance. It is important to understand this larger cultural context in order to better appreciate the unlikeliness of Fanny's nonconforming position as the anti-performer. I will trace how these performances are intended to bolster a certain kind of performative femininity (performance as an agent of performativity and performativity as an agent of the social norm), in which performance is the natural outward manifestation of a correspondingly natural interiority.

I will also trace how these performances are at times manipulated by their self-aware performers to subvert or transgress that performative (performance as a threat to performativity and thus to the social norm). It is the self-conscious performance executed most notably by Mary that allows us to begin to differentiate between Fanny and the other female performers of the novel. I will be drawing on the field of performance studies to distinguish cynical, or self-conscious, performances from sincere performances. I argue that Mary Crawford represents a form of cynical, or self-aware performance, according to the definitions laid out by Erving Goffman in the area of performance studies, while it is Fanny who is revealed as the novel's sincere performer who may be said to lose her self in her role. This difference in awareness of one's own performance is what will ultimately determine which female performers accomplish true Butlerian subversive gender performativity, undermining the standards of gender that most gender performativity reinforces.

Austen endows Edmund with one of the most ironic lines of the novel when he attempts to discourage his siblings from taking part in the theatricals. Julia points out, "Nobody loves a play better than you do, or can have gone much farther to see one," to which he replies, "True, to see real acting, good hardened real acting; but I would hardly walk from this room to the next to look at the raw efforts of those who have not been bred to the trade, — a set of gentlemen and

ladies, who have all the disadvantages of education and decorum to struggle through" (85). What Edmund fails to recognize is that in fact "gentlemen and ladies" like the Bertrams *have* been "bred to the trade" of acting by way of the "education and decorum" he disclaims. What Edmund describes as "education and decorum" in fact fall into the category of "cultural performances" as laid out by Fischer-Lichte (163). More explicit forms of cultural performance, like music making, are deployed in the service of undergirding the more implicit workings of gender performativity, resulting in a complicated network of different kinds of performance of varying degrees of theatricality.

More theatrical forms of performance, like music, formed just one element of the larger performative feminine culture of accomplishments, in which women were instructed by figures like the Reverend Thomas Gisborne to pursue "various branches of elegant and profitable knowledge" (461). Austen parodied this obsession with accomplishments in the list that Charles and Caroline Bingley and Mr. Darcy make in *Pride and Prejudice*. Their list of the typical, polite activities for young ladies includes such accomplishments as painting tables, netting purses, singing, dancing, and reading (29). Roy Porter further adds "the arts of dressing, conversing agreeably… and cultivating a taste in decoration, furnishing, and the arts" to the list (42). According to Porter, for young, unmarried women, like Maria and Julia Bertram, such an education in accomplishments was primarily intended for the marriage economy – ladies were being groomed to be refined and entertaining companions for their future husbands (40).

However, many of these endeavors could threaten, at times, to inch further along the spectrum from "good," sanctioned performance to "bad" performance. Music and dancing were especially suspect in being learned and exhibited for the purpose of self-display. Music was seen as a natural expression of an interior spirituality, as we have seen is the case in *The Wild Irish*

Girl. However, the interior, personal aspect of music could easily become both too public and too physical. Paula Gillett has even noted how eighteenth-century Britons feared that female musicians put themselves on display in a way that was dangerously close to the act of prostitution (7-8). Moreover, by participating in an activity that relied so much on the body – the hands and fingers, the voice – a woman risked becoming nothing more than an aristocratic ornament and diminishing her value as an individual with depth and interiority – in other words, straying from her position as the natural woman. So-called naturalness was and is deeply invested in the idea of a real or true inner core which manifests itself in exterior expressions.

To prevent music making from entering into the territory of bad performance, women musicians were most often confined to pianoforte or voice, comparatively inactive instruments. Pianoforte, especially, was the ideal instrument for the female performer, as the instrument itself separated the musician from her audience and required a modest, seated position. Lucy Green, in *Music, Gender, Education* (1997), suggests that the harp was also increasingly considered an acceptably feminine instrument, though less so than the pianoforte, which could serve as a physical shield to the performer's body. That Mary Crawford's instrument of choice is the harp, rather than the more innocuous pianoforte, underscores her proximity to unsanctioned, subversive forms of performance, just as in *The Wild Irish Girl* the harp underscores Glorvina's proximity to revolutionary Irish politics.

As her harp intimates, Mary does at times wield her performance abilities in self-conscious, deliberate, even dangerous ways. Goffman provides useful terminology for this type of performance. He argues that performance exists on a spectrum, from disbelief in one's own performance to complete belief in one's own performance. The first kind of performance, in which the performer is aware of a divergence between the performed role and the self, he terms a

cynical performance. This is the kind of performance undertaken by Maria and Julia, and most particularly Mary. The second kind of performance is one in which the performer is not aware of any distinction between the role and the self, and this he calls a sincere performance. This is the type of performance I find to be delivered by Fanny.

As the cynical performers of the novel, Maria, Julia, and Mary self-consciously engage in manipulative performances of the female gender. Their education in performance may, ironically, have helped to pave the way for them to be aware of the performative society in which they live. These women engage in musical performance as a means of constructing particular kinds of self-selected gender identity. For Maria and Julia, musical performance is a way of creating the impression that they are women of a certain class status; their music marks them as different from their non-musical, impoverished cousin Fanny. For Mary, playing the harp is a way of producing and displaying her physical attractiveness. She exploits the connection between music and the female body to draw erotic attention to her physicality.

Mary's erotic musicianship is not necessarily, though, a prohibited form of performance. On the contrary, music-making often allows Mary to call attention to her body in predetermined, acceptable ways. It is in the context of sanctioned musical performance that Edmund finds her so attractive. Austen describes their courtship in this way: "A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself; and both placed near a window, cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man's heart" (44). This passage gives us a view of Mary through Edmund's eyes – and in his view, Mary, like her harp, is a beautiful aesthetic object, almost a stage property. As she sits docilely at her harp, her performing body is under control – seated, trapped in the house, even framed by a window – boxed in in a multiplicity of ways.

The threat of bad female performance, then, is not located in the act of musical performance itself, but rather in Mary's self-conscious wielding of musical performance to serve her own ends. Twice in the novel Austen represents Mary as a kind of siren, whose performance lures spectators in. In spite of Edmund's early disapproval of Mary's lapses in moral judgment, as soon as she sits down to play at the pianoforte, her secondary instrument, he finds himself again drawn in by her. Then Fanny "had the mortification of seeing him advance too… by gentle degrees towards the instrument, and when it ceased, he was close by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear the glee again" (77). Here is displayed the transformational, quasi-supernatural potency of the performance, rendering Edmund in a seemingly hypnotic, liminal state in which his doubts about Mary's character are overcome. Later, Fanny, too, falls victim to Mary's siren song. After hearing her play the harp for the first time, Fanny "went to her [Mary] every two or three days; it seemed a kind of fascination; she could not be easy without going" (140). Mary is able to purposefully deploy her music in a way that exerts a magnetic pull on those around her.

Austen underlines the cynicism of Mary's performances, as well as the ubiquity of the culture of female accomplishments even outside of Mansfield Park, when Mary questions Fanny about Edmund's stay in London. Mary concernedly attempts to gather more information about the family he is visiting, the Owens, and their daughters:

> "Are they musical?... That is the first, question, you know," said Miss Crawford, trying to appear gay and unconcerned, "which every woman who plays herself is sure to ask about another. But it is very foolish to ask questions about any young ladies – about any three sisters just grown up; for one knows, without being told, exactly what they are – all very accomplished and pleasing, and *one* very pretty… Two play on the piano-forte, and one

> on the harp – and all sing – or would sing if they were taught – or sing all the better for not being taught – or something like it." (195-196)

Mary is clearly aware of the connection between "musical" and "pretty" that she herself exploits. Just as Mary at her harp is rendered to Edmund a "pretty" object, Mary similarly fears that the Owens girls might be able to deploy musical performance in such a way as to render themselves "very pretty." This passage also emphasizes the way in which Mary's speech and gestures are also performances; she exhibits a "stagey" quality that fails to take in the narrator, who emphasizes that Mary is merely "trying," but not succeeding, to "appear gay and unconcerned." The discomposure that underlies her acting is further revealed in the jagged syntax, a series of clauses set off brokenly by em dashes. This scene shows Mary's awareness, even if it's embedded in her desire to manipulate in order to better fit traditional gender standards, of the performativity of gender.

In spite of her siren-like abilities, Mary's musical performances are probably among her most acceptable and appropriately feminine in the novel. Indeed, as she exhibits transgressive acts, such as her sexual pun on "*Rears* and *Vices*" in the Navy, Edmund attempts to recall her to performing correctly: "Edmund reverted to the harp, and was again very happy in the prospect of hearing her play" (41). As compared with her music, her other performances are significantly more subversive in terms of the extent to which they trouble the gender binary and thus reveal the performativity of gender. Mary's portrayal of Amelia in *Lovers' Vows* (another instance of ironic casting, as Amelia is the play's natural, artless woman) empowers her, in a scripted way, to declare her feelings for Edmund, reversing social convention. And, even more taboo, performing enables the spoken-for Maria to engage in passionate embraces with a man other than her fiancé. In these examples, Mary and Maria use performance to enact a more sexually

liberated version of femininity, and potentially uncover "natural" femininity as itself a performance.

Litvak summarizes the problem of theatricality in *Mansfield Park* with a question: "at what point does the very act of 'obeying' turn into its opposite…?" (336). The answer seems to be: when the female performer steps onstage. This conscious taking on of a role by a woman activates Goffman's cynical performance, as it alerts the actor to a disconnect between the role and herself and the fact that the role is unnatural. Musical performance does not, in and of itself, trigger a cynical performance, as the role of "musician" may not appear to run counter to the performer's sense of interior or natural identity. But music-making may serve as a kind of gateway performance, moving the performer further along the spectrum from not-performing to performing, that makes it both easier and more likely that the performer will later engage in the kind of theatrical performance that is clearly recognized as taking on a role separate from the perceived self.

So Mary, Maria, and Julia's musical performances function as rehearsals for their later performance of *Lovers' Vows*, wherein they stage subversive performances of femininity; their performances in *Lovers' Vows* in turn function as a rehearsal of their later transgressive performances of femininity "off-stage." A married Maria goes on to elope with Henry Crawford, Julia elopes with the foppish Mr. Yates, and Mary makes light of both of these events as mere "folly" (309). To elope is to transgress, or to not follow, the rules of what a "good woman" should do, but the rules can easily stay in place and in as much as the woman who elopes just moves from "good woman" to "bad woman" she does not challenge or undermine the idea of "woman" as a natural category. These are such visibly "bad," transgressive performances – not

merely subversive, but transgressive – that all three of them are effectively cast out of what Gay has called "Mansfield Park's *theatrum mundi*" (122).

According to Butler, these cynical performances would not constitute successful gender subversion because they violate the performative binary too obviously, both to the performer herself as well as to her audience, and both performers and performances are disowned, as is earlier foreshadowed by Sir Thomas burning all copies of *Lovers' Vows*. Mary, Maria, and Julia so deeply violate the ideal of femininity that rather than working to denaturalize it, they unintentionally renaturalize it.

Mansfield Park occurs in a pervasive culture of female performance, especially musical performance. Musical performance in the novel is generally an accepted practice that accords with expectations of womanhood/femininity/natural female gender – it can be justified as the outward expression of a natural interiority. But musical performance, in its tendency toward the performance end of Kirby's spectrum, increases the likelihood that women will later participate in cynical, theatrical performances that, by virtue of their self-aware nature, transgress the very gender identity they once bolstered. Cynical performance allows transgression of gender binary and of the rules associated with (natural) womanhood, but it does not subvert either of those. It's sincere performance that, perhaps in spite of itself, is subversive, and is the kind of subversive gender performance that can reveal gender as performative. In contrast, I hope to demonstrate how Fanny, in spite of her insistence otherwise, is in fact a sincere performer whose sincerity allows her to achieve true subversion.

Implicating Fanny

Just as Horatio's reading of Glorvina as the Wild Irish Girl proves unsustainable as the novel progresses, so, too, is Fanny eventually implicated in the culture of performance that pervades Mansfield Park. The denials of female performance – Horatio of Glorvina's and Fanny of her own – are ultimately untenable in both texts. In this section, I will develop how performance studies theory and performativity theory reveal the ways in which Fanny, in spite of her own insistence otherwise, participates in almost every kind of performance in the novel. Performance studies implicates Fanny by acknowledging the crucial role played by a performance's audience, and Fanny is watchful audience to all of the Park's performances, both those that are explicitly theatrical as well as those that are performative or cultural.

Performativity studies implicates Fanny in performance by a different means – Fanny, like all women, may be said to perform her femininity through her comportment, dress, and so on. Butler argues that there is "no position" outside of gender performativity (*Gender Trouble* 7). Every person who exists in the social world engages in performativity as a means to construct his or her gender, whether knowingly or not. Taken together, these two fields of theory paint a compelling portrait of Fanny as equally guilty of performance as Mary Crawford. Yet Fanny's performances remain sincere and self-believing; she truly identifies with her role as the natural woman. This steadfast belief in her own performance allows her performance to go unrecognized by both herself and her audience, rendering it the most subversive one of the novel.

Fanny is most obviously complicit in Mansfield Park's performances because of her constant status as spectator. As I discussed in the Introduction, Fischer-Lichte suggests that performance is created in the moment of interaction between performer and audience. Without the interpersonal encounter between performer and audience, the performance cannot properly be said to exist. Performance requires an audience, although, as Carlson notes, it is occasionally

possible for the audience to be the self (73). Other theorists have gone even further in ascribing importance to the audience: Fischer-Lichte summarizes the work of Max Herrmann, who argued that "the actual creator of performing arts is the audience" (12). She explains, "there is no such thing as passive participation in performance. Instead, each individual shares responsibility for the shape of the performance. Being present in a performance implies a level of consent with the performance" (22).

Although this is certainly a contemporary view of performance, informed by recent work in the field of performance studies, some scholars have noted that it would not have been wholly foreign in Austen's time. Urda cites Lisa Freeman, who reported that the 18th-century British theatre was one of "interaction in which the audience was as much a part of the performance as the players… No single controlling gaze regulated the space of performance… the power of performance was routinely shared and exchanged between audience and performers" (291). Part of the reason for the spectator's power over a performance lies in performance's creation of liminality, in which the boundaries between spectator and actor are blurred and may be crossed, with the result that "the roles of these actors and spectators may switch" (Fischer-Lichte 18).

Recognizing that performance is fundamentally characterized by an interaction with an audience, it becomes easy to see how Fanny is incriminated in the novel's many explicit theatrical and musical performances. Austen describes how, during rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*, "Fanny believed herself to derive as much innocent enjoyment from the play as any of them… it was a pleasure to her to creep into the theatre, and attend the rehearsal of the first act… Fanny began to be their only audience" (112). At this moment the narrator has clear access to Fanny's mental state and Fanny acknowledges that she is as invested in *Lovers' Vows* "as any of them." Yet as an audience member she believes her participation is "innocent," unlike that of her

cousins who are actors. But as we have seen, she is deceiving herself. Her presence in the audience, and also as a line reader, implies her consent and participation in the performance. Austen reinforces Fanny's participation in the theatricals by placing her on an equal level of engagement with everyone else in terms of both her time commitment and her mental and emotional investment in the project. Fanny reflects on how initially, "Every body around her was… busy, prosperous and important," and soon thereafter "she was… far from finding herself without employment or utility amongst them" (108, 113). Litvak's question, when does the act of obeying become its opposite, is here transfigured to when does the act of spectatorship become its opposite?

Fanny's position as Mansfield's first and best audience has been noticed by much recent scholarship. Susan C. Greenfield remarks that "Fanny becomes the one who attends: unobserved, she becomes the keenest observer of them all" (316). For Despotopoulou, the watchful Fanny deploys her gaze as a powerful means of combating the male gaze to which she is subject; Jones likewise explores how Fanny's "female gaze… defines a mental landscape" (136). Allen, as summarized by Urda, "argues… that Fanny's sympathetic spectatorship, her identification with others, is akin to assuming a role, to performing, albeit mentally" (296). And finally Urda herself suggests that Fanny's "role as prompter and spectator is perfectly acceptable, even too acceptable, to people such as Mary and Edmund," who need and desire an audience for their performances (297).

This body of criticism suggests that Fanny is a spectator throughout the novel, not just during the *Lovers' Vows* episode, and her spectatorship makes her a tacit part of the performances she observes. As discussed earlier, she is also an avid audience for Mary Crawford's musical performances. She is equally as susceptible to Henry Crawford's

performances. During *Lovers' Vows* rehearsals, Fanny reluctantly acknowledges that although "she did not like him as a man… she must admit him to be the best actor" (112). Later, she finds his reading of Shakespeare as siren-like as Mary's harp playing: "All her attention was for her work. She seemed determined to be interested by nothing else… She could not abstract her mind five minutes; she was forced to listen; his reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading extreme" (228). Fanny also observes the many social and cultural performances of Mansfield keenly. Austen describes how Fanny "looked on and listened" as the *Lovers' Vows* players select the play, attempting to cover their selfish desires with social niceties (90). Toward the end of the novel, Fanny owns her spectatorship in a conversation with Mary about Henry's flirtation with Maria, asserting "I was quiet, but I was not blind" (246). Indeed her very desire to be silent and invisible is what empowers her to become the consummate spectator. Her position as Mansfield Park's permanent audience member highlights her essentialness to the performances she observes, which always require an audience.

Performance studies offers one avenue for uncovering Fanny's deep involvement in various kinds of performance; another is through Butler's theory of gender performativity. Fanny, like every other character in the novel, may be said to engage in gender performativity (a kind of habituated series of performances of her femininity). This is what Litvak suggests, without naming it as performativity, when he describes how in the narrative trajectory of the novel, "theatricality virtually disappears into that inner space [of the self], submerged in the form of rigorously inculcated habits of mind and modes and of response" (346). Hence many of Fanny's socially-correct behaviors, both those that are openly theatrical, such as her leading the line of dancers at the ball thrown in her honor, as well as those that are less explicitly theatrical

but still encoded and ritualistic, may be understood as Fanny displaying her femininity in such a way as to begin to reveal the performativity of gender.

Fanny's performances can be further excavated at the intersection of performance and performativity studies through the notion of sincerity. Goffman provides the term "sincere performer" in regard to performance studies; he defines the sincere performer as one who "fully taken in by his own act… sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (61). Gender performance in this case is occurring without notice, and thus passes as gender expression. Gender is always performative but when the performance is sincere, the performer does not recognize the performativity of gender. For Fanny, gender is performed sincerely. She enacts the part of the natural, artless, and non-performing woman, and she does it so well and so thoroughly that, like Goffman's sincere performer, she conflates the role with her identity. Thinking about Fanny's sincere performance of a certain type of femininity through gender performativity is useful because it provides justification, or at least explanation, for her sincerity, as well as connects her sincerity to her success at subversion.

Another set of ideas from performance studies is useful in investigating Fanny's unknowing participation in performativity. In a sincere performance, the performer understands there to be no gap between her semiotic, or represented body, and her phenomenal, or actual, physical, body. Butler, in "Gender is Burning," describes how this seamless conflation of body and role is also the goal of "successful" gender performance: when a gender performance "works," "the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable" (129). But occasionally, Austen records a slippage between Fanny's phenomenal and semiotic bodies, revealing Fanny to be engaging, albeit unaware, in a performance of femininity. Both performance studies and performativity studies seem to allow for this possibility. In performance

studies, an obvious gap between performed body and body of the performer might be viewed as a bad or unconvincing performance. In performativity studies, such a gap means that the gender performance simply does not "work;" the performer does not "pass;" it might also be a place where it is possible to see the performativity of gender.

Sometimes Fanny unwittingly capitalizes on the gap between the two kinds of bodies, as when she feels anxious over Edmund and Mary's upcoming rehearsal of the scene where Amelia declares her love for Anhalt. Austen writes that "She worked very diligently under her aunt's directions, but her diligence and her silence concealed a very absent, anxious mind" (114). In this case the actions of Fanny's semiotic body deliberately disguise the inner workings of her phenomenal body. Austen's narrator demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how Fanny's phenomenal and semiotic bodies operate at intentionally cross purposes; yet the use of the word "concealed" seems to suggest that although in reality Fanny's physical and performed bodies are misaligned, the performance still "works" for her audience. The actions of her semiotic body, performing the role of the dutiful niece, successfully mask the turmoil experienced by her phenomenal body.

At other times, Fanny's semiotic body interferes with her phenomenal body, as when she attempts to rebuff Henry Crawford's affections:

> Fanny knew her own meaning, but was no judge of her own manner. Her manner was incurably gentle, and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence, gratitude, and softness, made every expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial; seem at least, to be giving nearly as much pain to herself as to him… The effect of the whole was a manner so pitying and agitated… that

> to a temper of vanity and hope like Crawford's, the truth, or at least the strength of her indifference, might well be questionable… (221)

This passage demonstrates a definite misalignment between Fanny's phenomenal and semiotic bodies. In attempting to voice her real refusal of Henry, her semiotic body, displaying the mildness so characteristic of the "natural woman" character, mediates her meaning. What's more, Fanny is at a loss to understand why Henry leaves this interview determined to persist in his pursuit of her, although the narrator tells us that "he was not so irrational as Fanny considered him" (221). Her confusion underlines how very sincere her performance is; it simply doesn't occur to her that there would be any distinction between what she feels and how she expresses it. It is also a rare moment when Fanny's performance doesn't "work" in the way it was supposed to, and in that failure, declares itself as performance.

Fanny, it turns out, is clearly implicated among the novel's other, more obvious and self-aware performers. Fanny is complicit in performances like the *Lovers' Vows* rehearsals through her constant and willing spectatorship. In positioning herself as audience member rather than actor, Fanny imagines she is exempt from blame when Sir Thomas comes home and condemns the production. But in fact her spectatorship necessarily entails her consent to the theatricals and is even what endows them with credibility as a performance. Fanny's socially-encoded behavior, such as opening the ball, that other critics have already noted as theatrical in nature, also reveals the performativity of gender. We can see Fanny as a sincere performer through the varying workings of her phenomenal and semiotic bodies. The close reading of Fanny as a sincere performer, yet a performer nonetheless, lays the necessary groundwork to discuss in what ways her performances might be subversive.

Conclusion

In the world of *Mansfield Park*, theatrical acting, the kind that occurs during rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*, is dangerous for women because it constitutes a form of cynical performance, alerting women to other roles they may also be performing. Goffman reminds us that cynical performances, unlike sincere performances, are "intended to deceive" their audience (59). That is, when they agree to act, women are self-consciously adopting a role that they (and others) recognize as separate from their selves. Such cynical theatrical performances seem likely to activate future cynical performances of gender. That is because, as Goffman explains, "no one is in quite as good an observational position to see through the act as the person who puts it on" (61). Engaging in theatrical performance encourages the actor to consider ways in which her semiotic body may differ from her phenomenal body – an awareness that is apt to spread, as Tom Bertram notes, like an "infection" to other, less explicitly theatrical forms of performance, such as the everyday acts of gender performativity (124).[19]

Maria, Julia, and Mary become more prone, after the theatricals, to engage in increasingly transgressive performances of femininity – culminating in the married Maria's elopement with Henry, Julia's elopement with Mr. Yates, and Mary's inappropriate commentary on Maria and Henry's affair. In "Gender Is Burning," Butler suggests how successful subversion denaturalizes the performative ideal. But all of the aforementioned performances so deeply violate that ideal that rather than working to denaturalize it, they instead unexpectedly reinscribe it. This outcome is most apparent in Edmund's reaction to Mary's comment about the "folly of our two relations," Maria and Henry, after the two have eloped; he relates to Fanny how his

[19] For a thorough investigation of the infection/acting metaphor in *Mansfield Park*, see Joseph Litvak's "The Infection of Acting: Theatricals and Theatricality in *Mansfield Park*" (1986).

response to Mary was one of horror and disgust. Litvak holds that it is Mary, Julia, and Maria who represent the truly subversive performers of the novel. However, much as Cixous and Clément contend that the hysterical woman reifies the need for female discipline, Mary et al.'s wayward performances of femininity are cast as the failures that uphold the figure of the natural woman (with its own good/bad binary).

The cynical performances that Mary, Julia, and Maria engage in are finally recognized as such by their audience, the Bertram family, most notably Edmund and Sir Thomas. Edmund laments to Fanny, at the conclusion of his relationship with Mary, "How have I been *deceived*!" (312, emphasis mine). Sir Thomas, likewise, realizes how the "anxious and expensive education" with which he provided Maria and Julia was "directed to the understanding and manners" – in other words, their semiotic bodies – "not the disposition" (315). They and their performances are consequently framed as the naturally abject underside of the natural good woman, with the result that all three are largely exorcised from the novel.

Fanny, in comparison, maintains the sincerity of her performances at all times. The fact that she refuses a role in *Lovers' Vows* shields her from gaining a cynical awareness of her performative status; she never accepts a role that runs counter to the one she already occupies and so she never accepts that she performs a role. It is the very sincerity of her performances that renders Fanny, ultimately, the most subversive performer of *Mansfield Park*, at least in one particular decision – her refusal to marry Henry Crawford.

In her rejection of Henry as a husband, Fanny makes a choice that we might say is "in character." That is, her role as the natural, artless woman entails that she remain true to her moral center and be supremely honest – much as in *Lovers' Vows* where Amelia is incapable of telling a lie. The natural woman is a character who is fundamentally incompatible with deception.

Fanny understands marriage as a state that requires love; to marry without love would therefore constitute a form of deception. Hence she ponders on "how wretched, and how unpardonable, how hopeless and how wicked it was, to marry without affection" (219). Therefore, she must refuse Henry's offer of marriage. Yet her refusal of Henry simultaneously violates another of the dictates of her character: to be obedient to authority. But while her cousins perform their femininity cynically, the sincerity of Fanny's performance as a woman who "cannot act" protects her from meeting the same narrative fate as them. Unlike Maria and Julia, Fanny faithfully maintains her part.

In fact, she clings to the importance of "authentic" "true" love of a woman for her husband to such a degree that she ends up resisting the daunting, authoritative figure of her uncle, Sir Thomas, who upbraids her for her disobedience in refusing Henry's proposal, and attaining agency in her choice of partner. This is what Butler has described as a subversive repetition of gender, one which "offers the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement" (*Gender Trouble* 42). Subversion stays within acceptable ideological parameters while working at cross-purposes with that ideology. Subversive performance doesn't just not follow the rules, it reveals those rules to be social constructs and thus undermines them.

Fanny's sincerity prevents her performance from being recognized as such, both by herself and by those around her, allowing her to remain within "the matrix of power" that is Mansfield Park. This, according to Butler, is what defines a successful subversion; in contrast, the other female performers are exiled. Their subversive performances are disavowed and therefore deprived of their efficacy. Meanwhile, Fanny's performance of the natural woman subverts the very ideal of the natural woman by exposing its interior contradictions – Fanny's

uncle expects her to be artless and honest except when it comes to marriage, in which case she is expected to accept the best financial offer. This exposure of the internal contradictions of the role of the natural woman is subversive in another way: it uncovers the "performativity of gender itself" (189). By displaying the inconsistencies of her role of the natural woman, Fanny demonstrates how gender is never natural and is always a performance.

It is important, though, not to overstate the extent of Fanny's subversion in *Mansfield Park*. After all, she herself remains ignorant of it – her sincerity enables her subversion but simultaneously makes her oblivious to its existence. She refuses Henry not, as her uncle accuses her, in an attempt to be willful, but rather to stay in character as the natural, honest women. Fanny's obtainment of Edmund at novel's end therefore appears to occur almost in spite of herself. What's more, although this one decision – not to marry Henry Crawford – subverts the feminine ideal, all of Fanny's other behaviors appear to reinscribe it. Butler acknowledges that gender performance is not likely to be universally successful at subversion. It "repeats in order to remake – and sometimes succeeds" ("Gender Is Burning," 137). Fanny's rejection of Henry is her lone success at subversively performing femininity in an otherwise extended line of failures.

Nonetheless, Fanny's hyberbolic enactment of the natural woman does not need to be self-aware to be powerful. Her performance works for her audience within the novel because it most closely approximates what is understood as real femininity. By engaging in "good," sincere acting, Fanny unwittingly commits gender subversion, performing her part so perfectly as to ultimately obtain what she wants. In the pervasively theatrical world of *Mansfield Park*, Austen endorses Fanny's sincere performance of the natural woman as the only form of female performance likely to be acceptable as well as efficacious. Austen's authorial approval of Fanny as a performer is revealed in two narrative outcomes, the awarding to Fanny of her desired

partner, Edmund, and the banishment of the novel's cynical female performers. Litvak concludes that *Mansfield Park* represses all forms of "subversive theatricality," which for him are embodied by the Crawfords (352). But as practiced by Fanny Price, subversive, *sincere* theatricality lives on at Mansfield, portending, perhaps, an eventual change in the script.

Conclusion: Rewriting the Script

Both Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* and Austen's *Mansfield Park* feature a main female character who is commonly understood by the men in the text as Rousseau's natural woman, a figure associated with purity, honesty, and "real" femininity and opposed to performance. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, the narrator, Horatio, insists upon a reading of Glorvina as the natural woman. He views Glorvina as the wild, exotic Other in contrast with what he believes to be the more civilized but corrupt English women of his acquaintance. In order to maintain this fantasy, Horatio absorbs all potentially contradictory elements of Glorvina's character into it, reframing, for instance, her intellect and extensive education as divinely-given, and therefore natural, genius.

Yet it becomes clear that Horatio is a bad reader of Glorvina and that his conception of her as the Wild Irish Girl is inaccurate or at least incomplete. Glorvina is a talented musician whom Owenson symbolically links to both the national bardic tradition and the movement for Irish independence through her choice of instrument (the harp) and music. Glorvina herself asserts that her music-making is both natural *and* national, an expression of her innate Irish sentimentality *and* a deliberate articulation of an emerging political consciousness. But Horatio attempts once again to reduce Glorvina's music to merely the former.

By the end of the novel, Horatio's conception of Glorvina as the anti-performer is significantly challenged, first when he encounters her reading a letter from a person he assumes to be a secret lover, raising the possibility of her deception, and then when he experiences the Gothic moment of her harp being played by the wind. The harp scene in particular renders Horatio in the liminal state characteristic of performance, but in its structural shift from third

person to epistolary narration, the text finally resists any definitive characterization of Glorvina's performance as either natural or performative.

In *Mansfield Park*, it is Fanny herself who insists on being read as the natural woman, incapable of performance. In claiming this identity, Fanny marks herself as different from a world populated by performing women who engage in theatre and theatrical social customs. She demonstrates her resistance to performance in her reluctance to be looked at or to speak. Yet by reading *Mansfield Park* through the lenses of performance studies and performativity studies, it becomes clear that Fanny *is* a performer of the role of the natural woman. Fanny is guilty of performance in several ways: she serves as the novel's primary audience and spectator, which indicates her consent to and participation in those performances; moreover, she performs her femininity through engaging in social rituals like opening the ball that her uncle throws in her honor.

Nonetheless, Fanny plays her part of the natural woman sincerely, believing that she is not acting the role but inhabiting it. In her sincerity, she is positioned as a "good actor," a performer who doesn't appear to be performing, in contrast with some of the other women of the novel, who in their cynicism toward their roles are positioned as "bad actors." Fanny's sincere performance of femininity also enables her to achieve subversion of that female gender ideal. She carries the injunction of honesty to its extreme in her refusal to marry Henry Crawford, which she views as engaging in a false union with a man whom she does not love. Fanny's performance of the natural woman reveals not only the interior contradictions of that part but also, more generally, the performativity of gender. Through upholding Fanny as her heroine, Austen endorses sincere gender performances as the only kind likely to be both acceptable and subversive.

Although performance is supposedly antithetical to the natural woman, these texts demonstrate that the natural woman is a gender ideal constructed in and through performances of all kinds. Performing the natural woman is often classed as a form of "good acting," but it is acting nonetheless. What's more, its essence as performative means that, according to Butler, it always already contains the basis for its own subversion. Each of the female performers in the texts examined here – Amelia from *Lovers' Vows*, Glorvina from *The Wild Irish Girl*, and Fanny from *Mansfield Park* – all play the part of the natural woman to a hyperbolic extreme, subverting the part by exposing its inconsistencies. Fanny's refusal to marry Henry reveals how patriarchal ideology demands her purity and honesty *except* when it is expedient for her male guardian to force her to marry well, in which case it doesn't matter whether she truly loves her husband. Amelia deploys her honesty to openly court her resistant tutor Anhalt, and Glorvina relies on her naturalness to gain entrance into the political sphere as a "natural" outcome of her talent as a performer.

My analysis of these novels, informed by performance and performativity studies, leads to several broader implications and questions. First, it indicates that performance studies is a theoretical framework that can be fruitfully used to examine performances not just as they are represented live onstage, but also as they are represented on the page in literary texts. Concepts like liminality, engendered in the audience by the performance, and the performer's phenomenal and semiotic bodies are highly useful to examine written accounts of performance and overlap with similar concepts in fields like Gothic literature and performativity studies in interesting and productive ways.

An important related line of questioning, that remains unexplored here, could explore the ways in which my readings, inflected by performance and performativity studies, intersect with

postcolonial and class readings of *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park*. In some ways, the presence of the natural woman in both novels seems to point to commonalities between the woman living in a colonized nation (Glorvina) and the woman living in a colonizing nation but as a member of the lower classes (Fanny). Both are burdened with the same set of gender expectations, presenting the possibility of subversive female solidarity across imperial boundaries. In spite of the gender role shared by Glorvina and Fanny, one important distinction between the two is that in *The Wild Irish Girl*, it is Horatio who insists upon understanding Glorvina as natural and artless – the extent to which Glorvina plays the part of the Wild Irish Girl sincerely or cynically remains ambiguous – while in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny is most certainly a sincere performer who believes her own act. In the colonial setting, gender norms are enforced by the English male, while in the English setting, they are self-enforced by the performing, lower-class woman. Yet although Fanny has problematically internalized the ideology of binaristic gender, she nonetheless seems to more definitively achieve subversion of her gender role than Glorvina, whose fate at the end of the novel remains unclear. The colonial as well as class significance of this difference must remain an open question for the time being.

Building upon this question, future scholarship might continue to examine and compare representations of female performers in other texts from across the Empire. It is immediately apparent that other works by Austen merit the same treatment, as they often include performing women; *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, connects Marianne Dashwood's musicianship to an excess of feminine sentiment, while *Pride and Prejudice* parodies the culture of female accomplishments that required training in forms of performance like music. Lizzie Bennet stubbornly resists the notion that she is an accomplished musician and takes pride in her

mediocrity as a performer. Emma, of the novel of the same name, on the other hand, admires her rival, Jane Fairfax's, musical talent and vainly wishes she were more motivated to improve.

Within Irish literature, much attention has been paid, as discussed in Chapter 1, to the figure of the stage Irishman, the "Paddy" who subversively performs Irishness as a means of taking advantage of the English colonizer. But as suggested by the name "stage Irishman," this figure is most often associated with men. Glorvina in *The Wild Irish Girl* opens up the possibility that women might be capable of performing stage Irishness as well. Other Irish texts that feature performing women should be read carefully for the presence of cynicism towards those performances.

Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929), for instance, features an Anglo-Irish protagonist, Lois Farquar, who reflects in this way on her performances of her femininity and youth, such as dancing down an avenue of trees: "She could not hope to explain that her youth seemed to her also rather theatrical and that she was only young in that way because people expected it. She had never refused a role. She could not forgo that intensification, that kindling of her personality at being considered very happy and reckless even if she were not" (40). She worries that explaining or justifying her performance would be betraying "an illusion… [she was] called upon to maintain" (40). This excerpt situates Lois as a cynical performer reluctant to reveal to her audience the extent of her cynicism. Kiberd proposes that Lois' impersonation of "the kind of woman others may want her to be" is not "ignoble," but that eventually she comes to find it demeaning and hollow (369). *The Last September* would be ripe for precisely the kind of analysis I have performed on *The Wild Irish Girl* and would be particularly compelling given the differences between each novel's time period (early 20th century versus early 19th century) and population (Anglo-Irish Protestant versus Irish Catholic).

Another provocative choice of text might be James Joyce's short story "Clay" from his collection *Dubliners* (1914). The central character, Maria, is painfully aware of her invisibility in Irish society as a result of her advanced age and unmarried status. The story narrates her journey to and visit with the family of Joe, a man whom she helped to raise as a child. The evening concludes with Maria's performance of the song "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls" from the Irish operetta *The Bohemian Girl*. She repeats the same verse twice, potentially in an attempt to avoid singing the painful and ironic verse that begins "I dreamt that suitors sought my hand" (89). Maria's "mistake" in doing so raises the possibility of her as a cynical performer who deliberately rewrites her music in accordance with her preference (89). "Clay" would prove a fascinating comparison with both *The Wild Irish Girl* and *The Last September*, both of which center around young and either noble or wealthy female performers; Maria, in contrast, is poor, debased (a former prostitute), and elderly. Moreover, Joyce's short story would be the first text under consideration to be written by a man.

In *Lovers' Vows*, Amelia's suitor, the foppish Count Cassel, suggests to Amelia that in civilized countries, love has been replaced with "intrigue" (345). When Amelia complains that intrigue is a "poor, uncomfortable substitute" for love, the Count enigmatically replies, "There are other things – Song, dance, the opera…" (345). It's unclear, from his phrasing, whether the performance activities he lists are for him on the side of intrigue or of love. In the case of *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park*, arguably performance serves both ends for its heroines. The enactment of naturalness, honesty, and artlessness by Glorvina and Fanny is just that – an act. But their performances of femininity also enable them to achieve, at times, subversion of traditional gender roles and consequently, agency, subjectivity, and self-love. By playing their parts unwaveringly, these female performers helped to rewrite the script for those who would

follow: since the mid- to late-19th century, not only natural womanhood but womanhood itself has come to be commonly understood as performative, not through the rejection of the natural woman but through, as in *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Mansfield Park*, performing her.

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