‘Acting a Part’ in Jane Austen’s Fiction

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Abstract

Building on the recent studies on the influence of the theatre on Jane Austen's fiction and the recent reappraisal of the links between the novel and drama in the eighteenth century, this thesis develops a specific aspect of drama in which Austen was invested throughout her life and which informs her understanding of character: the question of acting. By recovering the ways in which Austen weaves acting techniques from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries into her novels, the modern reader is able to understand how acting shapes Austen's conception of social behaviour and communication. Acting in the eighteenth century was understood as the representation of human passions on stage. Actors used a system of theatrical gestures that visually translated the character's internal feelings. Austen adapts these techniques in her novels in sequences where characters' feelings are perceived as articulated through the body, placing them in a framework of theatricality. By exposing the theatrical dynamics that surround characters' actions, Austen's fiction problematizes the neat dichotomy between literal and metaphorical acting, blurring the distinctions between sincerity and duplicity. Most controversially, Austen's novels demonstrate that even the truth must be acted. This thesis examines the question of acting in Austen from the *Juvenilia* to *Emma* by contextualising her novels within the contemporary theatrical culture of her time, through an analysis of contemporary acting manuals, theatrical reviews, and theatrical prints and portraiture.

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Abbreviations

Emma (1816)*	*E*
Juvenilia	*Juv*
Mansfield Park (1814)	*MP*
Pride and Prejudice (1813)	*PP*
Sense and Sensibility (1811)	*SS*

All quotations from the above are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. References to individual novels are given in the text.

Introduction

> That puss Cassy, did not shew more pleasure in seeing me than her Sisters, but I expected no better;—she does not shine in the tender feelings. She will never be a Miss O'neal [sic];—more in the Mrs Siddons line.[1]

In November 1814, Austen wrote to her niece Fanny Knight urging her to consider the true state of her feelings for John Plumptre, whom Fanny considered marrying, arguing that 'nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound *without* Love, bound to one, & preferring another.'[2] The letter is often quoted as evidence of Austen's belief in the necessity of strong feelings before marriage, without which the risk of celibacy is preferable. In the midst of these reflections on love and marriage, Austen's playful complaint about her niece Cassandra's (Cassy) disappointing reception is easily overlooked. This brief aside nonetheless deserves closer attention as this seemingly inconsequential comment holds far-reaching clues to our understanding of an important aspect of Austen's life and work: her love and appreciation of the theatre in general, and acting in particular. The letter reveals an easy familiarity with contemporary actors and their styles, such as Eliza O'Neill the new star of the London in 1814, known for her rendition of tender feelings, and Sarah Siddons the majestic tragedienne of the turn of the century.

Jane Austen's love of the theatre is now widely accepted, the dismissal of the theatricals in *Mansfield Park* no longer seen as reflecting Austen's own view of the theatre.[3] Her nineteenth-century critics quickly recognised the dramatic qualities of her

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[1] Jane Austen, *The Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 287.
[2] Ibid., 286.
[3] For the antitheatrical strain in *Mansfield Park* see Marilyn Butler's seminal *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Lionel Trilling, 'Mansfield Park', in *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955), 181-202. See also Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 'Antitheatrical Prejudice in the Nineteenth Century', 295-349, esp. 299-307, which links Austen's rejection of the theatre to the wider antitheatrical discourse of the Romantic period; Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality*

novels, in particular her composition of dialogues. In 1821, Richard Whately admired her strength in 'giving a dramatic air to the narrative, by introducing frequent conversations which she conducts with a regard to character hardly exceeded even by Shakespeare himself.'[4] Thomas Macaulay in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1843 also compared Austen to Shakespeare.[5] George Henry Lewes followed these critics' assessments, coining the phrase 'prose Shakespeare' in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1847 by misattributing it to Macaulay, reiterating in 1859 that 'Miss Austen is like Shakespeare'.[6]

Modern critics have developed these observations further, uncovering the many direct and covert references in Austen's novels to both Shakespearean and contemporaneous plays. Jocelyn Harris outlines the many Shakespearean allusions and reworkings in her mature fiction.[7] Margaret Kirkham analyses Austen's use of Shakespeare further, and introduces her links to eighteenth-century drama through her allusions to the popular adaptations of the controversial German sentimental playwright August Van Kotzebue.[8] The publication of the two illuminating studies entitled *Jane Austen and the Theatre* in 2002 by Paula Byrne and Penny Gay has paved the way for a new appreciation of the influence of eighteenth-century drama on Austen's writing. Byrne in particular analyses the different models eighteenth-century drama offered Austen both in terms of character and social concerns.[9]

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in the Nineteenth-Century Novel (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), 1-26.

[4] *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Brian Southam 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968-87), i, 97-98.

[5] Ibid., 122-23.

[6] Ibid., 125, 167.

[7] Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen and the Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[8] Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), 93-97, 110-16, 121-29.

[9] Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002); Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

This thesis builds on these studies and aims to examine further a specific aspect of the theatre in which Austen was extremely interested and invested throughout her career, the question of acting. This shaped her discussion in her novels of both social conduct and communication of feeling. As *Emma*'s narrator declares, there is 'seldom, very seldom', any truth that is not 'a little disguised, or a little mistaken' in Austen's fiction.[10] With 'disguise' comes the idea of dissimulation and therefore acting. Austen frequently puns on the double meaning of 'act' and its cognates as both 'to perform actions, to do things' and 'to behave, to comport oneself', and 'to perform an assumed role in a play; […] to be an actor'.[11] Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* confirms the currency of both senses in the eighteenth century, defining 'to act' as 'to be in action' and 'to bear a borrowed character; to counterfeit'. When Austen's characters try to determine their interlocutors' true feelings, they frequently reach for the vocabulary of acting, applying a metaphorical meaning of acting to their behaviour. This double meaning leads Austen's characters to wonder if others are not 'acting a part'. These interrogations are moreover dramatized in sequences that mirror theatrical scenes, highlighting the ambiguity of characters' actions. Austen, through this linguistic play, complicates the possibility of distinguishing between authentic and affected feelings and behaviour. Her characters' position in theatrical frames of reference when interacting socially implies theatricality is inescapable. Most controversially, Austen suggests that even the truth calls for acting.

Austen's interest in acting finds its origins in the private theatricals staged at Steventon rectory between 1782 and 1789, now carefully documented, which illustrate

[10] Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816), ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 470. All references in the body of the text will be to this edition.
[11] *OED*, 2.a., 2.b., 3.b.

the Austen family's enthusiasm for acting.[12] This passion continued in her adult years, visiting the Bath, Southampton, and London playhouses at every opportunity. Austen's correspondence shows she was extremely sensitive to the actor's art and had a sharp critical eye for acting styles, as the excerpt above illustrates. Austen's letter to Fanny Knight reveals that these were also a way for Austen to approach character and discuss behaviour. This thesis explores the connection between assessments of character and acting in Austen's fiction, from the juvenilia to the mature fiction.

The idea that Cassy does not 'shine' in feelings introduces a paradox that animates Austen's work: an emotional, and therefore internal state, is experienced as an external phenomenon, as 'shine' implies visibility. This is a crucial and thorny aspect of feeling in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. John Mullan demonstrates that eighteenth-century sociability rested on the communication of passions and sentiments, which are frequently not expressed orally but articulated through the body.[13] Feelings can only be ascertained if they manifest themselves physically. This also transposes an inherently personal experience onto a communal plane. Deidre Shauna Lynch neatly summarises the paradox that characterises sentiment in the period, to which the expression of feelings is central: 'sentiment calls attention to that externalising of meaning that accommodates what is personal to social scrutiny, that describes a private process as if it occurred in public.'[14] This suggests parallels with acting as performers' bodies are also under 'public scrutiny'. As this thesis argues, Austen explored this social reality in her fiction, through the construction

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[12] Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin, 1997, rev. 2000), 32-33, 41-43, 57-58; Gay, 3-6; Byrne, 3-28; William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters, A Family Record*, rev. edn., Deirdre Le Faye (London: British Library, 1989), 43, 46-47, 57-60, 63-64.

[13] John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), esp., 'Richardson: Sentiment and the Construction of Femininity', 58-114.

[14] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 44.

of scenes that adapt contemporary acting techniques. In so doing, Austen placed her characters in a theatrical dimension that shows the inescapability of theatricality. Recovering Austen's knowledge of contemporary acting techniques throws new light on her novels' discussion of feeling and social behaviour.

The Actor's Art in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

Even though the royal patent system, which limited the number of playhouses, and the Licensing Act of 1737, which required every new dramatic composition to be submitted to the Examiner of Plays, greatly affected the conditions of theatrical productions in the period, the theatre remained an important cultural institution. The ground-breaking studies of Robert D. Hume, Jane Moody, Gillian Russell, and David Worrall demonstrate that the theatre continued to thrive in the period despite the many obstacles it encountered and audiences flocked in their thousands to the Haymarket, Lyceum, and the newly rebuilt Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres, as well as to more unauthorised theatrical venues.[15] Nor was this entertainment the sole purview of the metropolis. Royal-patent playhouses flourished in provincial cities such as Southampton, Bath, Bristol, and Birmingham, as well as Dublin and Edinburgh, also enjoying the presence of leading London performers as these toured the country. The period also witnessed the development of literary and theatrical criticism, allowing those who could not attend the theatre to keep informed of the newest productions and the latest acting successes. Performers were indeed the driving forces of the theatre in the eighteenth century, which according to Allardyce Nicoll was the 'age of the actor'.[16]

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[15] Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983); Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London: 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Camrbridge University Press, 2000); *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); David Worrall, *Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship, and Romantic Period Subcultures, 1773-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[16] Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Early Eighteenth-Century Drama 1700-1750*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 39.

Felicity Nussbaum has more recently established that the period also witnessed 'the age of the *actress*'.[17]

The pervasiveness of the figure of the actor in contemporary visual culture attests to the cultural and social agency actors and actresses enjoyed in the period. Royal academicians such a Johann Zoffany and Sir Joshua Reynolds celebrated their achievements through theatrical portraiture.[18] These were widely disseminated through their reproduction in affordable engravings and their inclusion in the new annual public artistic exhibitions. The latter were moreover reviewed in newspapers, making these works known to a wide audience, reaching people outside of London. All of these cultural avenues enabled intellectually minded people who were not part of these artistic circles, to which Austen and her family belonged, to keep abreast of the latest works. The actor's art could therefore be experienced on stage as well as on the page and canvas, these different media all reflecting the contemporary conception of drama outside of the playhouse. Influences of these works can be traced in Austen's fiction, which is also informed by the satirical prints lampooning actors and their practices.

Drama at the turn of the century was widely understood as the representation of human nature and the passions that animate it. For Samuel Johnson, Shakespeare's unique ability to depict human nature made him a true 'poet of nature':

> [T]he poet holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour [sic] of manners and of life. […] His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion.[19]

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[17] Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performances, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 6.

[18] For a comprehensive exposition of the links between the theatre and visual arts in the eighteenth century see Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (London: Pinter, 1991).

[19] Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare' (1765), in *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1968), vii, 59-113 (62).

Echoing *Hamlet*, Johnson underlines the importance of mimesis, for drama is here understood as a direct reflection of human nature, which is driven by 'passions'. Johnson also stresses the universality of this principle. Although Johnson discusses Shakespeare 'on the page' as he mentions 'readers', his comments apply more generally to the period's understanding of drama.

The work of the playwright Joanna Baillie illustrates the continuation of these ideas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1798, Baillie set out to compose a series of plays that illustrate 'all that language of the agitated soul', an idea strikingly similar to Johnson as she repeats the word 'agitated'.[20] Her project originates in the belief that 'any person harbours in his breast, concealed from the world's eye, some powerful rankling passion of what kind soever it may be', which echoes Johnson's principle of universality.[21] This also suggests that the passions that animate men are invisible to the naked eye. Baillie's plays were 'part of a scheme to show the effects of a mastering passion on a character' and the ways in which that central passion manifests itself differently in comedy and in tragedy, the 'concealed passion' externalised in the process.[22] Passions were thus at the heart of the drama of the period, their representation on stage central to the actor's art.

The developing genre of the acting manual guided actors in the stage reproduction of the passions so important to drama. The dramatist Aaron Hill in 1753 was one of the first to systematise the principles of acting in *An Essay on the Art of Acting*. Hill identified ten major passions upon which all of the actor's art rested:

> And, first, it should be noted, that there are only ten dramatic passions—that is, passions, which can be distinguished from their outward marks, in action; all others being relative to, and but varied degrees of, the foregoing.
>
> These are the ten Dramatic Passions:

[20] Joanna Baillie, *A Series of Plays* (London, 1798), 10.
[21] Ibid., 11.
[22] Paul Ranger, *'Terror and Pity reign in every Breast': Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1991), 91.

> Joy, Grief, Fear, Anger, Pity, Scorn, Hatred,
> Jealousy, Wonder, and Love.[23]

As 'outward marks' suggests, dramatic passions are visible signs. Later theorists enlarged Hill's list and included such minor passions as modesty or gratitude, reproving or pardoning. As Joseph Roach explains, acting was 'a structured sequence of passions, accented by moments in which the actors held a climactic tableau indefinitely, [which] became the signature of eighteenth-century acting style.'[24] Speeches were divided up in lines or short sections, each dominated by one clearly identifiable passion, whose 'outward marks' the actor then had to portray on stage.

If passions are to be externalised, a careful management of the body is required. As Roach observes, 'the actor's body constitutes his instrument, his medium, his chief means of creative expression'.[25] Contemporary acting manuals support this idea. Henry Siddons, Sarah Siddons's son, in his hugely popular *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (1807), outlined the different expressions of passions, illustrating them with examples from plays and accompanying images. Taking the work of the German author Johann Jakob Engel as his source, Siddons adapted his material by quoting English plays and referencing English dress to suit his readers.[26] His volume is representative of the understanding of acting in the period.[27] For Siddons, 'countenance', the body's outward appearance, is at the heart of acting:

> The countenance is the principal seat of the movements of the soul—the most eloquent part of the visage are the eyes, the eyebrows, the forehead, the mouth,

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[23] Aaron Hill, *An Essay on the Art of Acting*, in *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill*, 4 vols. (London, 1753), iv, 353-414 (357). John Hill, in *The Actor* (London, 1750), had also outlined the principles of acting but did not analyse passions individually.
[24] Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 69.
[25] Ibid., 11.
[26] Engel was a playwright and acting theorist who published *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1785-6), 'Ideas on Mimesis', a treatise in which he attempted to establish 'an exact equivalence between inner (emotional) states and their external (physical) expression by a detailed examination of the manifestation of key emotions', George W. Brandt and Wiebe Hogendoom, *German and Dutch Theatre, 1600-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 155.
[27] See Ranger, 91-93.

> the nose; in short, the *whole head*, as well as the neck, the shoulders, the hands, and the feet: there is no change of posture which may not have its particular expression or indication. […] The gestures are the exterior and visible signs of our bodies, by which the interior modifications of the soul are manifested and made known.[28]

While each body part is treated in isolation, the whole body is involved in the formation of a theatrical gesture. The 'movements of the soul', the internal, emotional state of an individual, are materialised on the body. As 'eloquent' suggests, gestures are understood as a language, a key aspect of eighteenth-century acting.

To assist performers in the management of their countenance, theatre practitioners elaborated a system of gestures based on the manifestation of passions in everyday life, published in acting manuals, with detailed explanations and illustrations of the operations of passions. As William B. Worthen neatly summarises, acting was 'an integrated system of histrionic conventions—including gesture, facial expression, vocal tone—that controlled the meaningful passions of the dramatic role.'[29] Actors relied on a codified system of gestures immediately understandable to audiences. Dene Barnett similarly observes:

> The fundamental technique of eighteenth-century acting was the use of a vocabulary of basic gestures, each of which had an individual meaning known to all in advance. […] The function of gestures was […] to express by face and hands and posture the passion which moved the character.[30]

Barnett distinguishes the basic categories under which gestures fell, from indicative and imitative gestures, through gestures of address and emphasis.[31] A category significant for an analysis of Austen's knowledge and use of contemporary acting techniques are expressive gestures, 'an attitude or movement used to represent a passion of the

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[28] Henry Siddons, *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (London, 1807), 21-22, 27.
[29] William B. Worthen, *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 72.
[30] Dene Barnett, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of Eighteenth-Century Acting* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1987), 18.
[31] Ibid., 27-28.

character portrayed'.[32] As the word 'expressive' suggests, theatrical gestures did not just supplement the text of the play but were a direct visual translation of a character's thoughts and feelings; theatrical gestures are a language.

The visual and physical elements on stage are imbued with the same linguistic dimension as any other system of signs. The actor's body thus becomes another site for interpretation. In its most extreme expression, a play performed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries should still be fully intelligible to a deaf or foreign audience. Gestures were expected to convey meaning before delivery. According to the *Thespian Preceptor*, a popular acting manual which underwent several editions,

> the eye must speak before the word is uttered; the character must be delineated in the face, which, as well as the action of the body must accord with every speech.'[33]

The whole character must be made visible and understandable in the actor's face. 'Speak' also implies the eye acquires linguistic power and supersedes speech. Acting manuals advised actors to especially concentrate on the management of their eyes. For Paul Hiffernan, 'the direction of the eye must always illustrate the sense of the words.'[34] Contemporary critics support the view that drama's power rested with its actors and the expressive power of the visual elements of the stage. The visual aspect of drama was often placed above its aural qualities in the analysis of its effects on audiences. In 1812, the journal *The Theatrical Inquisitor* argued that 'the conduct of the scene […] is the spell that must rivet the spectator, whose passions are to be roused by what he sees rather than by what he hears.'[35]

This understanding of acting can be seen as an early form of Roland Barthes' principles of semiotics. According to Barthes, any society is made of up of arbitrary

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[32] Ibid., 36.
[33] *The Thespian Preceptor* (London, 1807), 23.
[34] Paul Hiffernan, *Dramatic Genius* (London, 1770), 79.
[35] *Theatrical Inquisitor*, September 1812, 49.

systems of signs which all form a 'language'.[36] Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century audiences understood theatrical gestures as a system of signs as each gesture corresponds to a specific feeling. Barthes' understanding of theatricality is also strongly reminiscent of the eighteenth-century emphasis on the body. In his analysis of Charles Baudelaire's failed dramatic endeavours, Barthes argues that the actor's body constitutes theatricality:

> What is theatricality? It is theatre-minus-text, it is a density of signs and sensations built up on stage starting from the written argument; it is that ecumenical perception of sensuous artifice – gesture, tone, distance, substance, light – which submerges the text beneath the profusion of its external language. […] Authentic theatricality [is] the actor's disturbing corporeality.[37]

Barthes' argument challenges studies of drama that place the text at the centre of the genre. The material and bodily elements of a performance find their origin in the text, as they derive 'from the written argument', but this verbal dimension becomes secondary, 'submerged' under the thickness of the sensual dimension of the theatrical experience. Similarly, the eighteenth-century emphasis on gestures, which convey the meaning of a play, makes the spoken words subservient to physical gestures. Barthes then underlines the 'disturbing' nature of the actor's physicality, also a source of anxiety in the eighteenth century. Kristina Straub demonstrates the anxiety about actors' sexuality centred on the visuality of the actors' body on stage.[38] These preoccupations were not limited to theatre professionals but were debated in society at large as filtered through acting manuals and theatrical reviews.

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[36] See Roland Barthes, 'Le Mythe Aujourd'hui' in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), 'Myth Today', in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), and *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1984).
[37] Roland Barthes, 'Baudelaire's Theatre', in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 26-27.
[38] See Kristina Straub's illuminating *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), 1-23.

At first aimed at theatre professionals, acting manuals flourished in the eighteenth century and were progressively marketed at budding actors and amateur performers. The turn of the century witnessed a craze for private theatricals, which spurned the sales of those acting guides.[39] The ideas presented in these specialised volumes were moreover filtered through the theatrical reviews of the time, illustrating their widespread currency in the period. A letter from Lady Harcourt to Sarah Siddons, with an accompanying sketch of the actress in an attitude, illustrates the prevalent understanding of acting as the representation of passions on stage: 'I have produced a mixture of attention and terror and wish to know if you think I have succeeded.'[40] (Figure 1) The passions of 'attention' and 'terror' are clearly underlined.



Figure 1: Lady Harcourt's sketch of Mrs Siddons in 'a mixture of attention and terror', MS. D.D. Harcourt c.573, fol. 65, Bodleian Library.

[39] See Sybil Rosenfeld for a comprehensive presentation of the 'rage' for private theatricals at the turn of the century, *Temple of Thespis: Some Private Theatres and Theatricals in England and Wales, 1700-1820* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1978), 8-13 (11).

[40] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. D.D. Harcourt c.573, fol. 65. The pencil drawing is on a folded sheet within another sheet that serves as an envelope. There is no record of which side is the recto and which the verso.

Given the history of home theatricals in the Austen family, it is difficult to imagine they would not have either consulted or discussed these manuals and argued over the interpretation of parts. The young Jane Austen would have participated in those discussions. She was therefore exposed to acting from an early age. Given her intellectual curiosity and keen interest in the theatre, Austen would surely have read theatrical reviews. In March 1814, when she saw Kean perform in *The Merchant of Venice* shortly after his London debut in *Richard III* in January 1814, Austen told Cassandra 'we were quite satisfied with Kean'.[41] Such an anticipation of a performance proves Austen consulted theatrical reviews and discussed acting successes. Her inclusion of contemporary acting techniques confirms this. This artistic choice is also in line with the development of the novel in the period.

The Novel and Drama in the Eighteenth Century

Austen would also have been exposed to theatrical lessons from the fiction she read. What seems like a fanciful suggestion is in fact supported by the recent developments in the study of the eighteenth-century novel. Critics today aim to re-establish 'the vigorous two-way traffic between the new form of the novel and the ancient art of the drama' and recover the complex and sometimes fraught relationship between the genres, a tension familiar to eighteenth-century readers and theatregoers.[42] As the subtitle to George Colman's one-act play *Polly Honeycombe, a Dramatick Novel* (1760) suggests, the boundaries between the two genres were extremely permeable and fluid.

Many eighteenth-century novelists began their careers as playwrights and later moved to fiction, most famously Henry Fielding. Other writers such as Elizabeth

[41] *Letters*, 257-58.
[42] Byrne, xi. See Ros Ballaster, 'Rivals for the Repertory: Theatre and Novel in Georgian London', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, 27:1 (Summer 2012), 5-24.

Inchbald and Frances Burney continued to work in both genres simultaneously. Their experience in the theatre informed their fictional writing.[43] As Moyra Haslett argues:

> In its incorporation of dialogue, its reliance upon dramatic character and scenarios, and its frequent awareness of itself as a work realised in the audience of its readers, the novel continues a generic conversation with theatre throughout the eighteenth century.[44]

As her first critics noted, dialogue constitutes an important part of Austen's fiction. In this it also allows the novel to approximate the mimesis of drama, as characters expose themselves to the reader directly, without the filter of third-person narration.

The transposition of theatrical techniques in a novelistic form requires an approximation of mimesis. Another important influence of the drama on the novel are its theatrical practices, and more specifically its acting techniques. Nora Nachumi discusses Inchbald's dramatization of her characters' emotions through the body, including in her novels the 'widely recognised system of theatrical gesture'. [45] Francesca Saggini's study of Frances Burney and the theatre provides a very helpful model to approach Austen's own use of contemporary dramatic techniques. It is the most recent investigation of the formal links between the novel and drama:

> The characters' affective reactions, as expressed through their movements and gestures, are carefully noted in the text, now recoded as an outright semiotic score through which the author directs – one might even say arranges as a mise en scène – the reader's 'mental' visualisation of them.[46]

Saggini refers here to the eighteenth-century understanding of acting as an integrated system of signs, which the novel assimilates.

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[43] The 'Georgian Theatre & the Novel: 1714-1830' project, led by Ros Ballaster, aims to uncover the many different ways in which the two genres collaborated and competed, <http://georgiantheatrenovel.wordpress.com/ >[accessed 30 July 2014]

[44] Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 65.

[45] Nora Nachumi*, Acting like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theatre* (New York: AMS Press, 2008), 79-115 (80).

[46] Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theatre Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 4.

Daniel Pollack-Pelzner recognises the need for a similar analysis of Austen's fiction. Critical discussions of Austen lack:

> an account of the actual stage practices that she incorporates in her narrative technique—not merely dramatic entrances and exits, such as Sir Thomas's return from Antigua that forms the curtain call of *Mansfield Park*'s first volume, or the parade of couples strolling in and out of view in the Sotherton park episode—but actual stage directions: explicit, nonnarrative indications of how a character speaks or behaves.

These, Pollack-Pelzner argues, are a form of closet drama and constitute what he calls 'miniperformances in prose'.[47] This thesis builds on this idea, arguing that Austen also transposes contemporary acting practices into her novels, which shape her discussion of the communication of feelings and social behaviour.

The extensive and skilful use of dialogue and insertion of acting techniques in Austen's novels are not the only aspect of the dramatic qualities of her texts. They address an issue inherent to theatricality, the idea of visuality and visibility.[48] All acting requires an audience. This means a dimension of visibility and is part of a theatrical situation. Joseph Litvak, following Michel Foucault, analyses nineteenth-century novels that dramatize the 'society of surveillance' of their time, which according to Litvak, are implicated 'in a widespread social network of vigilance and visibility—of looking and of being looked at—which renders them inherently, if covertly, theatrical.'[49] Austen's theatrical scenes display this pattern of vigilance and visibility. Her characters are inscribed in theatrical networks through looking and spectating.

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[47] Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, 'Jane Austen, the Prose Shakespeare', *SEL 1500-1900*, 53:4 (Autumn 2013), 763-92 (779, 774).

[48] Critics disagree on the dominant characteristic of theatricality. Josette Féral in the introduction to the special theatricality issue in *Substance*, 31:2-3, issue 98/99 (2002), 3-13, presents the different critical positions, of which the presence of an audience is one, 10. See also 'Introduction' to *Theatricality*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-39, for the different applications of the concept.

[49] Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), ix-x.

As this thesis demonstrates, Austen constructed 'miniperformances in prose' through the adaptation of contemporary acting techniques, which would have been immediately recognisable to her contemporary readers. Such scenes were included in fiction throughout Austen's lifetime. As late as 1814, Maria Edgeworth in *Patronage* could construct a sequence in which a character proceeds to perform a series of passions for the company's entertainment:

> Lady Angelica […] consented to give the exhibition of the passions. She ran into the Oriel—attired herself in a most appropriate manner, and appeared first in the character of Fear—then of Hope.[50]

Lady Angelica performs 'attitudes'. This shows Edgeworth anticipated her readers' knowledge of contemporary theatrical gestures. Austen's familiarity with this practical aspect of drama is evidenced from her earliest writing, as this thesis demonstrates. It also helped shape her exploration of the question of metaphorical acting in society.

This thesis examines Austen's discussion of the issue of acting through the construction of dramatic scenes that adapt the conventions of contemporary acting techniques. These scenes are, to borrow Pollack-Pelzner's phrase, 'miniperformances in prose'. The methodology combines formal analysis of Austen's work with careful contextualisation of her fiction in relation to the acting culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Contemporary acting manuals and theatrical reviews are the primary sources for this analysis.

Because Austen's characters depend entirely on their interlocutors' outward display, and feelings must be exteriorised to be communicated, characters are positioned in a dynamic of theatricality. Conversely, a character's conscious modification of his or her body indicates acting. There are two dimensions to Austen's

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[50] Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage*, ed. Conor Carville, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Marilyn Butler and Mitzi Myers, 12 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999-2003), vii, 191.

exploration of acting: an analysis of a character's behaviour through acting practices and a conception of a character's behaviour as an act. While the character is sincere in his or her feelings, it stresses the inescapability of the theatrical dimension. It also shows that feelings depend on externalisation to be communicated, an idea that challenges the view of Austen's art as one of internalisation. Acting in Austen is an extremely complex issue as it has many forms. It can be an outright deceit, a conscious projection of feelings that are dissonant from the character's true sentiments. It can also take the form of a concealment of authentic feelings to avoid another character's attempt to discover those feelings. There is also the inevitable externalisation of authentic feelings. As such these are acted or performed, and constitute the most complicated aspect of 'acting' in Austen as it can be understood as 'sincere acting', a paradox Austen's novels discuss. Characters either construct themselves or are perceived as performers. Austen's novels uncover these ambiguities.

The first chapter examines Austen's first lessons in acting, both practical and theoretical. The Steventon theatricals represent her first experience of staged drama. James Austen's prologues and epilogues reveal the Austens' sensitivity to acting as well as a metaphorical understanding of life as a series of parts. This thesis demonstrates the influence and pervasiveness of these ideas on Austen's fiction. The first chapter also offers an analysis of a literary model that introduced Austen to the novelistic adaptation of dramatic techniques, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54). The chapter then examines Austen's earliest application of these lessons in the juvenilia through the case studies of 'The Three Sisters' and 'Love and Freindship'.

Chapter 2 discusses *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) as Austen's first sustained exploration of the links between acting and feeling.

Acting is understood metaphorically. This issue is formulated through the idea of 'acting a part' and 'perform(ance)', which serve to highlight the porous boundary between acting and social behaviour. The novels also begin Austen's contention that a sincere communication of feelings requires acting, an ambiguity Austen develops in *Mansfield Park*. Acting techniques are more seamlessly integrated than in the juvenilia. Many sequences in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* are framed like theatrical scenes, highlighting the question of the characters' sincerity. They also introduce the paradox that sincerity can be conveyed through acting.

Because of its unique inclusion of private theatricals, *Mansfield Park* (1814) is treated in isolation (Chapter 3). Theatricality overrides the world of the novel in a way unprecedented in Austen's work, developing the thorny topic of the necessity of acting. The novel rests on the opposition between 'external smoothness' and a 'want of real harmony', which implies that acting pervades the Mansfield estate.[51] It explores more fully the paradox of the sincerity of acting through the characters' rehearsals of Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*; the novel inverts the conventional location of authenticity in life and duplicity on stage. References to contemporary theatrical culture, especially theatrical portraiture, further complicate the reader's understanding of the characters.

An analysis of *Emma* (1816) in Chapter 4 is offered by way of conclusion. While 'acting' is still important in this novel, it also marks a departure in Austen's exploration of the question, concentrating with Emma Woodhouse on the figure of the playwright rather than the actor. *Emma* does have a main actor in the figure of Frank

[51] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 224. All references in the body of the text will be to this edition.

Churchill, but the novel contains fewer sequences clearly constructed as theatrical scenes. The novel also addresses the controversial issue of the pleasures of acting.

Northanger Abbey and *Persuasion* are purposefully not included in this thesis. They are only briefly discussed by Byrne and Gay, and Byrne omits *Persuasion* altogether. Despite its inception in the 1790s and the centrality of the theatre to its plot, *Northanger Abbey* does not explore the question of acting as systematically as the other novels. Its revision alongside the drafting of *Persuasion* can explain the few traces of acting techniques for Austen's last completed novel focuses largely on the internal life of its heroine.

Chapter 1: The Steventon Theatricals and Austen's Early Fiction

This chapter explores Austen's earliest experience of acting, first on stage with the Steventon theatricals, secondly through her brother James's prologues and epilogues to these productions. The letter introduced the young Jane Austen to the theoretical questions around acting practices in the period, as well as to the metaphorical understanding of 'acting'. This chapter discusses another important element of Austen's early exposure to acting, her literary training in how the novel can transpose dramatic techniques into a diegetic form. The chapter offers a brief analysis of Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, a work that taught Austen how the novel can achieve a 'dramatic' quality. The decision to focus on *Grandison* is motivated by the fact that Austen adapted it in a short five-act play, which shows how this novel in particular captivated Austen's 'dramatic imagination'.[52] The chapter then examines Austen's application of these techniques to her own writing through an analysis of two epistolary novels from the juvenilia, 'The Three Sisters' and 'Love and Freindship'.

The Austens' own 'itch for acting' (*MP*, 143) is now a well-recognised fact. Austen's elder brothers staged home theatricals at Steventon rectory between December 1782 and the winter season of 1788-89, when Jane Austen was between the ages of six and thirteen.[53] There is no evidence that Austen performed in one of these family productions, and her precise degree of involvement can only be critical guesswork, but her writing supports the view that she intently observed their

[52] Family tradition attributed the piece to her niece Anna Austen, but Brian Southam persuasively argues the text's sophistication can only point to Jane Austen; *Jane Austen's* 'Sir Charles Grandison', ed. with an introduction and notes by Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 4-11.
[53] See Introduction.

developments as it reveals a familiarity with contemporary theatrical practices.[54] James Edward Austen-Leigh noted in his *Memoir* that his aunt was 'an early observer' of her relatives' enterprises, and was the first to speculate on their influence on *Mansfield Park*.[55] If biographical experience informed the animated preparations of the theatricals at Mansfield, there is every reason to believe there were also heated debates at Steventon regarding decisions of play, staging, and acting, to which Austen would have assisted and perhaps even contributed. Austen would therefore have been exposed to the issues that surround a theatrical production, including acting, from a very young age.

The Steventon theatricals represent Austen's first experience of staged drama. These domestic performances recreated a small-scale version of eighteenth-century stage practices, providing the young Jane Austen with an insight into the world of the professional theatre without setting foot in the London playhouses. In the autumn of 1786, the Reverend George Austen allowed his children to fit the rectory barn with painted scenery. This would have contributed to sharpening Austen's understanding of the use of space on stage and refining her sense of the dramatic impact of entrances and exits. Following the convention in the period, her brother James composed prologues and epilogues to accompany the plays performed.[56] These pieces offer a chronicling of, and a social commentary on eighteenth-century stage practices, including acting. They therefore reveal the specific theatrical issues that animated the Austen family and would

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[54] Tomalin, 42, speculates Austen was given the small part of the maid Lucy in the performance of Sheridan's *The Rivals* in July 1784; Byrne, 6, believes it is more likely the young Austen was 'a keen spectator'.

[55] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen: And Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 28.

[56] Prologues and epilogues were a convention of the time, often spoken by the actors of the main piece, they 'work[ed] in combination with the play to which they [were] attached on order to complete meaningful aesthetic and ideological work among the theatre patrons', *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-Raisers, and Afterpieces: The Rest of the Eighteenth-Century London Stage*, ed. Daniel J. Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 21.

have held Austen's attention. The question of acting appears frequently in James's writing, both as a practical consideration for stage performance and as a metaphorical understanding of social behaviour. As this chapter demonstrates, these ideas permeate Austen's early fiction. As this thesis argues, these questions held a long-lasting interest for Austen, as she developed them in her mature fiction.

James's prologues and epilogues address a wide range of contemporary theatrical concerns but underline the centrality of the actor's art. The prologue to Thomas Francklin's *Tragedy of Matilda* (1775), performed in 1782, which illustrates the different changes in scenery in the eighteenth century, also argues that actors' efforts and talents should determine the play's success: in the age of Roscius,

> No canvass Palace pleased the wondering sight,
> No rosined lightening flashed its forked light;
> No iron bowl the rolling thunder forms,
> No rattling pease proclaim the driving storms […]
> T'was simple Nature then they kept in view,
> Thence well earned plaudits from their audience drew.[57]

James refers to modern developments in scenery through the artificial production of natural weather phenomena such as thunder and lightning, which he opposes to the actor's raw talent drawn from 'simple Nature'. James discusses a point that Frederick Burwick argues is central to drama and became prevalent in the Romantic era:

> The entire history of the drama could be studied in terms of the opposition of two basic elements: *spectacle* and *mime*. […] The gimmicks of stagecraft, […] the visual enchantments of stage effects may become an end rather than a means. […] In the Romantic era, this tension between staging and acting was unusually high, and the debate over stage illusion raged at all levels: among actors, directors, playwrights, and critics.[58]

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[57] James Austen, *The Complete Poems of James Austen: Jane Austen's Eldest Brother*, ed. with an introduction and notes by David Selwyn (Chawton: Jane Austen Society, 2004), ll. 5-8, 13-14. All references in the body of the text will be to this edition.

[58] Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 231.

James's prologue addresses the opposition between 'the gimmicks of stagecraft' and 'mime', or the acting of 'simple Nature'. The eighteenth-century stage indeed witnessed revolutionary developments through the introduction of new lighting techniques, increasingly complex stage effects, and lavish set designs.[59] James's emphasis on the merit of acting without stage tricks can be partially explained as a defence of the Austens' own scenery: in 1782, the barn had not yet been fitted and performances would have taken place in the living room.[60] On a naked stage all credit is due to the actors' talents and elaborate scenery cannot detract the audience's attention from the actors' performance. Contrasting old and new theatrical practices, James's prologue argues for the primacy of the actor's art. The young Jane Austen would therefore have been alerted to the audience's first duty to the actor's art.

James then directly discusses the topic of acting with the case study of tragic performance, in line with the genre of *Matilda*, a tragedy.[61] The prologue presents a burlesque version of tragic acting, at the conventional climactic point of the lover's death:

> When by his Rival's tin her lover dies
> The Lady first with cambric wipes her eyes,
> Then backwards falling (whilst her slave with pain
> Adjusts the drapery of her rumpled train)
> In desperate rage her beauteous tresses tears,
> By different fits scolds, prays, cries, raves & swears;
> Then gently falling on her Lover's breast,
> In quiet slumbers sinks at last to rest.
> Tears from each eye this scene pathetic draws,
> And critic galleries loudly shout applause. (ll. 19-28)

[59] For an overview of late eighteenth-century stage developments see Christopher Baugh, 'Scenography and Technology' in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43-56.
[60] Byrne, 4.
[61] Like many eighteenth-century tragedies, Francklin's play closes on a happy ending and avoids the death of the protagonists.

James plays on the stock trope of tragedy in which the heroine's lover dies from a duel with his rival. Far from a dignified and majestic display of feeling, such as those for which Sarah Siddons was celebrated, James's tragic actress offers a burlesque version of grief. Following the eighteenth-century century understanding of acting, James details the actress's gestures. The concatenation in one line of the different expressions of despair - 'scolds, prays, cried, raves & swears' - evokes frenzied acting, a sort of staccato performance that mimics the gestures of tragic acting, lending the scene an excessive and absurd quality. Rather than provoking tears, such acting would trigger the audience's laughter. The actress moreover relies on props to represent her dramatic character's feelings, the cambric handkerchief acting as a metonymy for grief. The lines hold an added layer of parody when we consider the gender of the prologue's speaker, Edward Austen: a man is seen imitating a female actress, which heightens the ridicule of the 'actress's' performance. This excessive display of grief also offers a paradoxical opportunity for comedy, a possibility Austen explores in her juvenilia and in her mature fiction, as discussed below in this chapter and in Chapter 2.

James's prologue also reveals an easy familiarity with the realities and pitfalls of professional acting. Contemporary reviewers commented on actors' ill-judged arrangements of dress and figure on stage. *The Times* reviewing Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* at Covent Garden in 1785 observed that:

> Miss Younge played with great propriety, but she will not be offended when told, that we could not suppress a smile, when we observed the great care she took of the decent form of her petticoats when she was preparing for her husband's dagger.[62]

The reviewer underlines the absurd and farcical nature of this gesture when Younge's character, Imoinda, faces death. The appearance in James's prologue of the servant

[62] *The Times*, 10 January 1785.

struggling to adjust the train, which interrupts the flow of the lines, mirrors the disruption of the emotional tension such a movement would have during a performance. The contrast between the urgency of the situation and the futility of sartorial preoccupations also contributes to create a comic scene. The prologue satirises unfortunate professional stage practices, perhaps alluding to a performance he had witnessed himself and mentioned to his family, the image then a family joke. The young Jane Austen was therefore exposed to the realities of professional acting without visiting the London playhouses. Austen's own ventures into dramatic writing display a sensitivity to this practical aspect of drama.

Austen made several incursions into dramatic writing in the three playlets 'The Visit', 'The Mystery', and 'The First Act of a Comedy', and the full five-act adaptation of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*.[63] As Byrne and Gay argue, the playlets show Austen's early familiarity with the popular comedies of the London stage.[64] The characters' physicality is central to the playlets, which reveals Austen had performance in mind when composing these pieces.

'The Visit' is dedicated to her brother James, the theatrical man of the family. Byrne speculates it was performed as an afterpiece to Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, staged at Steventon over the Christmas period of 1788-89, a conjecture the allusion to the farce in Austen's playlet supports.[65] The use of the stage terms 'revealed' and 'exeunt severally' confirms Austen's 'compliance with the conventions of the printed drama' and illustrates a sharp understanding of the effects of entrances and

[63] Byrne, 21, believes that the plays were written by James but, as Peter Sabor suggests, the reference in the dedication to 'The Visit' to 'those celebrated Comedies called "The School for Jealousy" and "The travelled Man"' could point to other playlets Austen composed which have since been lost; Jane Austen, *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61. All references in the body of the text will be to this edition.
[64] Byrne, 19-24; Gay, 1-2.
[65] Byrne, 21.

exits, which she developed in her mature fiction.[66] 'The Visit' rests on situational comedy, which relies heavily on the actors' bodies. Austen plays with the simple trick of having fewer chairs than guests, leading characters to sit on each other's laps. To this farcical situation Austen adds the inversion of gender expectations typical of her juvenilia as male guests sit on the women's knees. The scene is in line with the raw, physical energy and delight in subversive humour displayed everywhere in the juvenilia. It also uncovers that Austen did not shy away from the thrill of physical proximity between men and women acting allowed, to which she returned in *Mansfield Park*. Unlike word-play, the comedy of the scene is only truly brought to life through performance. The playlet's ending proves Austen had performance in mind and was thinking about its visual effects. The three united couples come forward, forming a 'tableau' like in many comedies of the period. In Oliver Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) for instance, the curtain falls on Tony Lumpkin taking Miss Neville by the hand and Marlow and Kate Hardcastle joining hands.[67] Austen therefore considered the practical aspects of drama when writing. These then informed her novelistic writing and her discussion of social behaviour, as this thesis contends.

James's prologues address another issue that will prove central to Austen's mature fiction, the idea that social behaviour is an act. The 'Prologue to a private Theatrical Exhibition at Steventon. 1788' is James's most sustained analysis of the question and provides a definition of acting that permeates Austen's fiction:

> Hence high & low, the fair sex & the brave,
> The Monarch's courtier, & the courtier's slave,
> All speak a language foreign to their hearts,
> And each one in his time plays many parts.
> And if, our real opinion to conceal,
> To talk of feeling, when we do not feel,
> If this be acting, sure in scenic powers

[66] Gay, 1.
[67] Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer* (London, 1773), V.

> No age, no nation ever rivalled ours. […]
> Now quit the scenes of public strife,
> And let us view the Farce of private life;
> Such plots, such denouements & transformations,
> That even envys self must grant us merit,
> And own we carry our parts with care & spirit. […]
> Nay I have heard – not that I think it fact,
> That man & wife have each their part to act,
> That when the pair on life's grand scene appear,
> Then every word is Love, & Life & Dear –
> But the house empty & the curtain down,
> Husbands can storm, & gentle wives can frown. (ll. 5-12, 37-42, 49-54)

The prologue echoes the famous lines on the 'seven ages' of man in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages.[68]

James attacks the theatricality and hypocrisy of the late eighteenth century, which here crosses gender and social boundaries.[69] Life is understood as a series of 'parts', of succeeding roles, an idea that Austen develops in her mature fiction. James provides a clear definition of acting as concealing thoughts and projecting feelings that do not mirror the individual's own, encapsulated in the idea of 'speak[ing] a language foreign to their hearts'. This idea reappears in Austen's writing. Her characters are frequently confronted with the possibility that others may have been disingenuous in their professions of feelings. The question of 'acting a part' is central to her novels, which address the social implications that James introduces, and demonstrate that acting crosses gender boundaries.

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[68] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), II. vii. 142-46.

[69] Recent critical studies have analysed the complex facets of the theatrical nature of late eighteenth-century society; see in particular Worrall; Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability, and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

The Steventon theatricals and James's prologues and epilogues thus initiated Austen to the practices of stage performance in the late eighteenth century. She also learnt the comic potential of excessive and bad acting, in particular female tragic performances. This she exploited in the juvenilia. Her heroines Mary Stanhope in 'The Three Sisters' and Laura in 'Love and Freindship' cast themselves as tragic figures. Their performances are burlesque versions of tragedy, from which much of the comedy of the stories derive.

Before discussing these texts, an analysis of Austen's other source of lessons in acting and dramatic techniques is necessary to fully understand how her fiction, from its earliest inception, acquired the dramatic qualities which critics and readers alike so admire. Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* represents Austen's introduction to the dramatic novel. This novel is chosen as a case study, because, although Austen was equally familiar with *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, epistolary novels that also display dramatic properties, *Grandison* seems to have held Austen's creative imagination more as she adapted Richardson's novel in a short five-act play. Austen's claim in 'The History of England' that Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore* (1714) 'is a tragedy and therefore not worth reading' (*Juv*, 179) can explain why Austen chose *Grandison* with its happy ending over the other novels. *Pamela* and *Clarissa* had also already been adapted for the stage, representing less of a challenge.[70]

Like *Clarissa*, *Grandison* foregrounds its status as a dramatic text. In the novel's Postscript, Richardson presents *Clarissa* as 'a Dramatic Narrative'. He explains in the Preface that the letters record 'affecting conversations, many of them written in the

[70] For a detailed discussion of the different stage adaptations of *Pamela* see 'Domestic servitude and the licensed stage' in Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, Pamela *in the Marketplace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114-42. For the adaptation of *Clarissa* see Caroline Gonda 'Promoting the Interests of Virtue: Robert Porrett's *Clarissa: or, The Fatal Seduction* (1788)', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 25 (2002), 173-83.

dialogue or dramatic way', adding that the very conditions of the letters' composition determine their dramatic nature: the writers' immediate circumstances, their 'hearts […] wholly engaged in their subjects', dictate a dramatic mode of writing.[71] For Richardson, the characters' complete absorption in their material naturally infuses the writing with dramatic qualities. His 'new Manner of Writing—to the Moment', approximates the condition of drama as it imbues his writing with a sense of present experience, which approaches the condition of live action on stage.[72]

Mark Kinkead-Weekes provides the most comprehensive exploration of the dramatic qualities of Richardson's fiction and calls for a broadening of the critical understanding of the 'dramatic', which can exist outside of the stage and the playtext: 'the spoken voice begins to predominate, language and gesture become vividly present and spontaneous, the distance of the letter modulates into the involvement of the drama.'[73] Richardson thus manages to approach the mimesis of drama through voice as well as through the presentation of the external manifestation of his characters' feelings. The 'dramatic narrative' cancels the letters' written qualities by infusing them with the aural and visual dimensions of drama.

The nature of correspondence in the eighteenth century entails such an aural dimension. Read aloud, letters achieved the status of public, performed texts, a communal experience distinct from our modern understanding of the letter as a private act. Harriet Byron, Richardson's heroine, alludes to this contemporary practice when she anticipates her family's responses and has to specifically inform her cousin Lucy Selby of the sections she consents be read aloud. In *Emma*, Miss Bates shares Jane's

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[71] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (1747-48), ed. with an introduction and notes by Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985, repr. 2004), 1495, 35.
[72] Samuel Richardson, 'To Lady Bradshaigh, 9 October 1756', in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 329.
[73] Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (London: Methuen, 1973), 460.

letters with the Highbury community, which shows the practice still prevailed in Austen's lifetime. Written under these conditions, letters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be understood as performances.

Sequences in *Grandison* are frequently formally presented like scenes from a playtext. Many letters follow the typographical conventions of drama to consciously reproduce its experience:

> By the way, Lucy, you are fond of plays; and it is come into my head, that, to avoid all *says-I's* and all *says-she's*, I will henceforth, in all dialogues, write names in the margin: So fancy, my dear, that you are reading in one of your favourite volumes.[74]

Richardson recreates the disposition of a playtext, making those sequences indistinguishable from printed drama. It also removes the markers of narration, lending the novel a greater mimetic dimension. Without adopting the layout of drama, Austen emulated this practice in her mature fiction by composing long sequences of uninterrupted dialogue where the character's spoken voice alone allows the reader to identify the speaker.

The dramatic quality of *Grandison* is further complicated by the fact that some letters are understood as performative in the sense that they achieve an action through the written word. The Selbys implicitly accuse Harriet of acting as they frequently criticise her for concealing the true nature of her feelings for Grandison. Her letters aim to achieve at a distance, through the act of writing, the same effect as if she were speaking directly to her correspondents. Harriet's reluctance to disclose the reasons behind her refusal of Lord D.'s marriage proposal is discussed in terms of 'affectation' and regarded as a performance:

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[74] Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54), ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), i, 273.

> We all see, and own, your struggle between virgin-modesty and openness of heart, as apparent in many passages of your letters. […] Upon my word, my dear, you need not be backward to speak quite out.[75]

While to 'see' Harriet's struggle can be interpreted as an anodyne figure of speech, it also indicates the letter itself functions as a signifier of Harriet's emotional confusion; it is an act. This visual impression acknowledges her letters' dramatic power, as the visibility the character's emotions on the actor's body was central to eighteenth-century drama. Harriet's internal struggle is externalised on the page, like an actor's passions on stage. Mrs Selby's exhortation that Harriet 'speak out' reinforces the impression that letters are experienced as immediate utterances, like dramatic speech.

Richardson's characters also construct many sequences as theatrical scenes, which contribute to the reader's experience of a 'dramatic narrative'. These clearly influenced Austen's own writing. Volume 2, Letter 16, illustrates the complexity of *Grandison*'s dramatic quality. It is part of a series of letters in which Harriet informs Lucy of the Grandison sisters' history. They contain an exact 'to-the-moment' experience: Charlotte Grandison asks Harriet to read aloud, in their presence, the passages that concern her and Caroline. The writing and reading of these sequences is to be imagined as almost simultaneous, which transforms the letters into a form of direct speech. What follows is a complex text that is both a narration addressed to Lucy as well as an ongoing conversation between Harriet and the Grandison sisters. The letter is a complex layering of narratives as it combines both the Grandisons' story at the time of Caroline Grandison's union with Lord L., and Harriet's personal experience of and reactions to the different elements of this story. This conflates two temporal situations, one concerning events distant from the moment of writing, and the other much closer to the time of composition and sometimes coinciding with it.

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[75] Ibid., i, 302.

The first person Harriet addresses in writing is Lucy, but this communication is interrupted after two sentences by an apostrophe to Caroline, 'Ah! Lady L. [Caroline] was this *quite* right', uniting narration and direct speech as Harriet transcribes her own spoken words as she writes.[76] The italics also provide a form of stage direction giving an indication of where the stress in the delivery of the line should fall. Harriet then pursues a one-sided exchange with Caroline. While written to Lucy, Harriet's questions are addressed to Caroline. They are transcribed in real time, as they are spoken, allowing Lucy to experience this exchange almost as if she were present. Within Harriet's narration of this scene lies Charlotte's own retelling of past events. She reports in direct speech the conversations between her and her sister Caroline; the prevalence of dialogue lends the letters a natural dramatic quality. Caroline frequently interrupts Charlotte's account to correct her sister's recollections: 'Wicked girl! interrupted Lady L. I remember that was what she said.'[77] This creates a multi-layered text, a play within a play, where past and present voices coincide.

Caroline's narration of the confrontation between the Grandison sisters and their father, filtered through Harriet's writing, is furthermore presented as a theatrical scene. Caroline describes her sister's gestures in detail, which allows her audience (in this case Harriet and Lucy) to visualise the scene: 'after half a dozen creeping motions more, we found ourselves within the door, and in our father's sight, my sister leaning upon my arm.'[78] The doorframe acts as a threshold between the safety of the passage to the dining-room, which functions as wings, and the dining-room, which acquires the function of stage. Charlotte characterises the meeting itself as a dramatic episode:

> Miss Grandison said, It is best for *me* to answer Miss Byron's curiosity, I believe, as I was a stander-by, and only my father and my sister were the players.

[76] Ibid., i, 333.
[77] Ibid., i, 334.
[78] Ibid., i, 334.

Players! repeated Lady L.—It was a cruel scene.[79]

The vocabulary of the theatre invites the reader to consider this episode as theatrical. Charlotte distinguishes between 'players', active participants of a scene, and their audience, the passive peripheral witnesses, to which as 'stander-by' she belongs. It is this very position that moreover confers on her the power to present these events. Yet the authority Charlotte acquires as 'principal talker' (*E*, 328) reverses the sisters' roles as she becomes a 'player' in Harriet's letter and Caroline a 'stander-by', who only has the possibility of commenting as opposed to showing. Charlotte paradoxically appropriates the attention that is really due to her sister: Caroline is the heroine of the story, yet in performing it to satisfy Harriet's curiosity, Charlotte effectively disempowers Caroline a second time as she is the passive audience of her own story. Charlotte is moreover also a player in this scene despite her declaration, as she physically assists Caroline and is involved by Sir Thomas. She therefore assumes the ambiguous and incompatible positions of audience and active participant, a situation Austen replicates in her juvenilia and her mature, as this thesis will illustrate. This particular kind of narration, where a character is both inside and outside the action of a 'scene', is unique to the novel.

Charlotte then proceeds to convey the conversation with their father as if it were a theatrical entertainment, modulating her voice to create distinct characters, which Harriet then transcribes as dramatic dialogue for Lucy:

> Miss Grandison then gave the following dialogue. She humourously, by her voice (an humble one for her sister, a less meek one for herself, an imperious one for Sir Thomas) marked the speakers. I will prefix their names.[80]

[79] Ibid., i, 334.
[80] Ibid., i, 336.

Borrowing the typographical conventions of printed drama, Harriet's letter takes on the visual appearance of a play. The modulation of tone implies a performance. Charlotte's ability to adapt her voice to personify different characters is a clue to the reader that she has a natural tendency to act, a fact the novel supports. Charlotte occasionally suspends her performance to give Harriet her personal reflections. Harriet herself interrupts the dialogue to express her own comments, which complicates the reading of the sequence. It is both drama and narrative. The more arresting movements are relayed, such as 'kneeling', a dramatic gesture that allows the reader to visualise the scene.[81]

Sir Thomas intriguingly adopts the metaphor of acting to characterise their behaviour. He in particular focuses on their gestures, which are unmistakably identified as theatrical:

> What devil's in the wind now! What tragedy-movements are here!
> What measured steps!—In some cases, all women are natural actresses. But come, Caroline, the play is over, and you mistake your cue.
> Good Sir!—Her hands help up—I wept for her; and for my own remoter case, if you will, Miss Byron.
> The prologue is yours, Caroline. Charlotte, I doubt not, is ready with her epilogue. But come, come, it is time to close this farce—Take your places, girls, and don't be fools.[82]

Just as Sir Thomas use the metaphor of acting to diminish his daughter's distress, so does Charlotte exploit theatrical resources, detailing speech, gestures, and the audience's response, to create an arresting tableau. The sentence 'Good Sir!—Her hands help up—I wept for her' replicates the experience of a performance. The dashes link all three elements together, as if suggesting they happened simultaneously, as they would during a staged performance. Charlotte includes her response to this spectacle, her tears, in accordance with an eighteenth-century understanding of drama as 'the art of exciting the passions in an audience'.[83] Focusing on the position of the hands,

[81] Ibid., i, 341.
[82] Ibid., i, 335.
[83] John Hill, 5.

Charlotte describes the very 'tragedy-movements' her father so derides. The isolation of the hand in particular suggests a theatrical scene.

As the introduction demonstrates, acting manuals isolated the different parts of the body and stressed that each change of movement was associated with a specific meaning. Paul Hiffernan explains that 'every movement of the hands is to have its appropriate meaning and indication, not applicable to any other.'[84] Caroline's hand gesture accompanies her words in the same way that an actor's gestures were expected to translate the feelings within a play's lines. Actors were judged on the fittingness of their gestures to the meaning of text, as explained in the introduction. In this Richardson adapts theatrical techniques to the novel. In so doing, Richardson also alerts his reader to the visuality of the scene, constructing a visually arresting sentimental tableau, which would also have taught Austen how to infuse her fiction with dramatic qualities.

Richardson constructs such theatrical tableaux to heighten points of overwhelming emotional intensity. The Clementina plotline is particularly conducive to such sequences. In his letters to his friend Dr Bartlett, Grandison presents events as theatrical scenes to convey the intensity of the emotions experienced:

> I hastened in. The admirable Lady met me halfway; and throwing herself at my feet—Forgive me. […]
>
> I kneeled to her, as she kneeled; and clasping her in my arms, Forgive you, madam! Inimitable woman! […]
>
> She was ready to faint and cast her arms about me to support herself. […]
>
> I raised her; and leading her to a chair, involuntarily kneeled on one knee to her; holding both her hands in mine as she sat, and looking up to her with eyes that spoke not my heart, if they were not full of love and reverence.
>
> Camilla had run down to the marchioness—O madam It seems she said—*Such* a scene! Hasten, hasten up. They will faint in each other's arms.[85]

[84] Hiffernan, 79.
[85] Richardson, ii, 567-68.

Grandison details the characters' gestures with careful precision, constructing an affecting tableau like those reproduced on the frontispieces of printed plays. (Figure 2) The short clauses help to build the emotional intensity. Grandison records the words

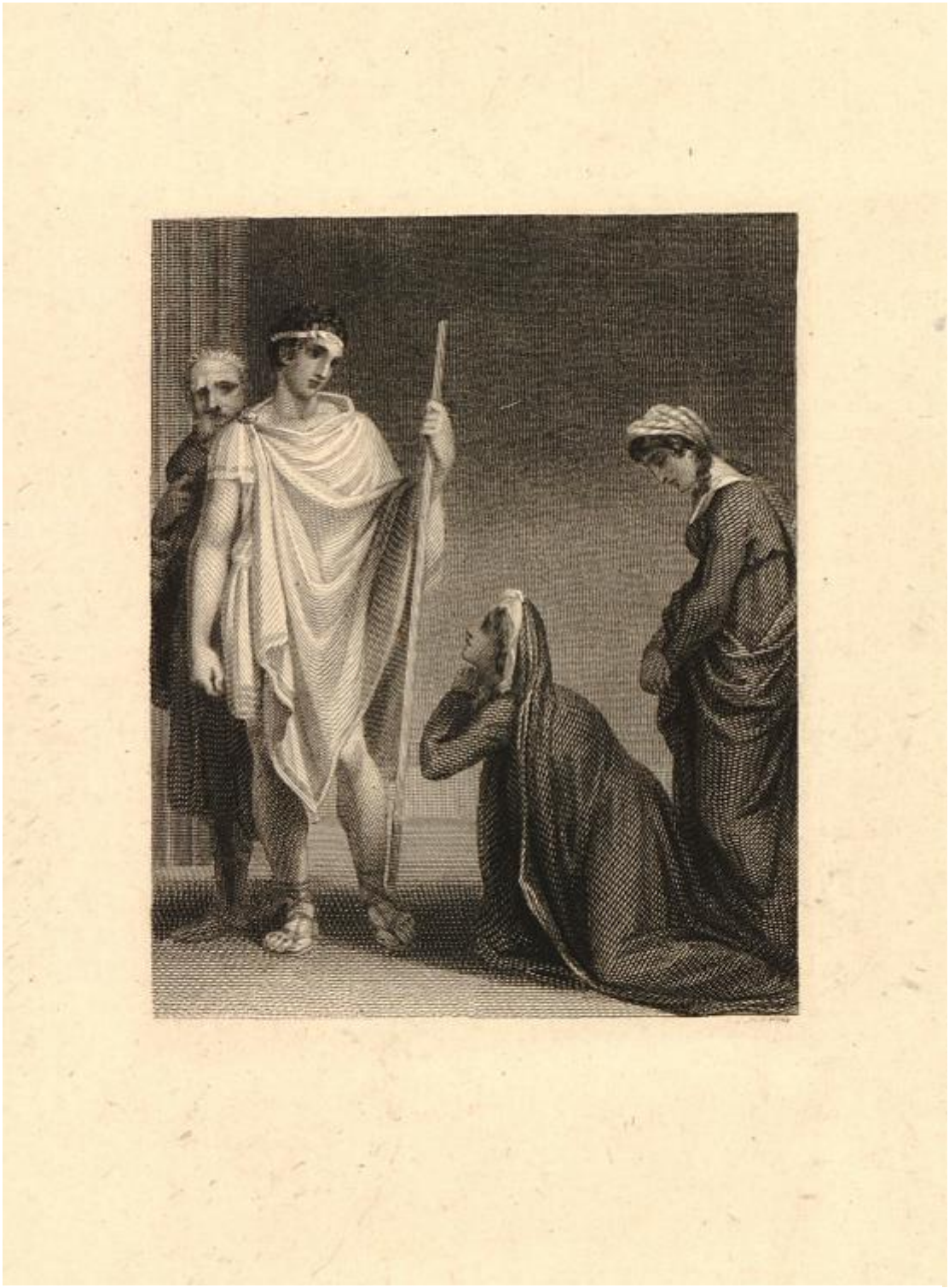


Figure 2: The Distressed Mother, Inchbald's British Theatre (1808), British Museum

spoken without introductory phrases, which instils the feeling of immediacy that characterises dramatic dialogue. This allows Dr Bartlett to imagine the scene as if he had been there. Grandison includes a description of his eyes, which visually translate his feelings. The idea that eyes 'speak' was, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 (*Mansfield Park*), very important to eighteenth-century theatre. As John Hill in *The Actor* explains:

> That the changes of the actor's countenance may appear just, it is not enough that the passion which he is to describe to them barely discovers itself in his eyes; it must be seen there with an uncommon force and vivacity.[86]

The dramatic impression Grandison lends to this incident is confirmed by Camilla's reference to a 'scene' that the Marchioness della Porretta should witness. That she can predict their fainting suggests the episode follows conventional codes. This leads to another again to a play within the play of Grandison's letter, Camilla standing in the wings of the main action.

Richardson thus infuses his novel with dramatic qualities through the inclusion of lengthy sequences of dialogues and the construction of theatrical scenes where the characters' gestures allow the reader to visualise them, approaching the condition of drama. Richardson's fiction therefore presented Austen with sophisticated examples of how to weave theatrical techniques into a novelistic form. Aural and visual elements are both central to the dramatic novel. Austen tried her own hand at this form in her juvenilia.

'The Three Sisters' is one such experiment. An epistolary piece, it draws on the use of dramatic techniques in Richardson's epistolary fiction, exploring the boundaries between novel and drama. It also introduces the idea of characters' acting. The story exploits the theme of sibling rivalry as the Stanhope sisters try to out-manoeuvre each

[86] John Hill, 164.

other into accepting or refusing Mr Watts. This leads to comic changes of decision and sees the sisters 'practising a little deceit' (*Juv*, 77). This implies acting taints their interactions. This acting transpires in the presentation of events as theatrical scenes in which the body features prominently as the signifier of the character's emotions.

As in Richardson's fiction, the letters include many transcriptions of uninterrupted dialogue, which break the diegetic nature of the writing. As Francesca Saggini contends, novelists' challenge was to 'dissociate narrative text from its customary function as diegetic "narrated action," bringing it closer to the mimetic "spoken action" typical of the drama.' [87] Through dialogue, characters present themselves directly to the reader without a narrator's interference, like characters in a play. Mrs Stanhope's enquiry into her daughter's intentions with regards to Mr Watts is for instance reported in direct speech, occupying almost the entirety of Mary's second letter to Fanny. Each speech section has one or two sentences, mirroring the quick exchanges of drama.

The dialogues are only interrupted to either identify the speaker or provide concise information on characters' movements or physical reactions such as 'Mr Watts stared' (*Juv*, 83), without added interpretation. As such they operate as stage directions. Austen opts for the 'says-I' and 'says-she' Richardson dispensed with. While this cancels the visual effect of a playtext *Grandison* achieved, it also integrates dramatic techniques more smoothly into the narrative. Austen also introduces the question of acting in a more sophisticated way: she weaves contemporary plays into the fabric of her texts, adding an extra layer of theatricality to her fiction, a technique she developed in her mature fiction.

[87] Saggini, 192.

Mary loudly advertises her love of acting by clamouring for a theatre in her new home if she marries Mr Watts. A popular pastime amongst the aristocracy and the gentry in the late eighteenth century, with which Austen was familiar from personal experience, characters' desire to act in her fiction often coincide with metaphorical acting off-stage, a trope Austen dramatises more extensively in *Mansfield Park*. Mary announces their first production, Hannah Cowley's *Which is the Man?* (1783), a comedy Eliza De Feuillide requested be performed at the local Steventon theatre in 1787, and which the Austens then considered staging for their Christmas theatricals the same year.[88] Mary imagines performing Lady Bell Bloomer, a fashionable young widower, freshly stepped out of her mourning dress. While Mary has little in common with Lady Bloomer as her union with Mr Watts is barely secured, her wish to incarnate a young widow can be seen as an unconscious expression of her vexation that she is unlikely to be as fortunate as Cowley's heroine: '[Watts] has a large fortune and will make great Settlements on me; but then he is very healthy.' (*Juv*, 74) The settlements refer to the property legally to be settled on Mary by pre-nuptial contract in the event of her future husband's death. Mr Watts's good health implies that, although in Mary's eyes 'quite an old Man, about two and thirty' (*Juv*, 74), he is unlikely to die soon. The humour is typical of Austen's juvenilia. Mary's choice of part is an unconscious disclosure of her secret wishes. As in the mature fiction, and *Mansfield Park* in particular, the sophisticated integration of play and part serves to illuminate Austen's characters and alert the reader to potential metaphorical acting.

Mary may be a self-confessed dramatic enthusiast, she, unlike her sisters, fails to conceal her off-stage acting. Her sisters quickly recognise her hypocritical behaviour

[88] *Family Record*, 57-59; Richard A. Austen-Leigh, *Austen Papers, 1704-1865*, privately printed (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyre, 1942), 126.

while their own 'scheme' (*Juv*, 80), which implies deception and acting, remains undetected. Georgiana's greater theatrical sophistication is illustrated in her ability to recount events by framing sequences as theatrical scenes. This implies her experience of the event has a theatrical dimension, revealing her identification of Mary's acting. Georgiana's letters combine the same use of dialogue as Mary's epistles, with a more dramatically sophisticated presentation, for Georgiana details tone, countenance, and stage setting, allowing her correspondent to imagine the episode as if it were a performed play. Austen brings her prose 'closer to the mimetic "spoken action" typical of the drama'.[89]

In this 'The Three Sisters' offers a 'miniperformance in prose'.[90] Georgiana opens her narration of the sisters' first encounter with Mary's entrance, which frames the episode as theatrical, as it mirrors the entrances and exits that demarcate scenes on stage:

> Mary came into the room to appearance in great agitation. She sate down. We made room for her at the fire. She seemed at a loss how to begin and at last said in some confusion
>
> "Pray Sophy have you any mind to be married?"
>
> "To be married? None in the least!" […]
>
> "Well then said Mary with triumph in her Eyes, *I* have had an offer from Mr Watts." (*Juv*, 79-80)

'Appearance' and 'seemed' alert the reader that Mary's behaviour is an act. Concentrating on the characters' exact positions and movements in the room, Georgiana provides specific information for her correspondent to visualise the scene. The short sentences, without subordinate clauses, mirror stage directions. Georgiana also focuses on the feelings Mary's body and tone betray, identifying 'agitation', 'confusion', and 'triumph'. As in Baillie's *Plays on the Passions*, Georgiana sets out to

[89] Saggini, 192.
[90] Pollack-Pelzner, 764.

identify the 'powerful rankling passion' that animates Mary. As in the acting manuals and theatrical reviews of the time, Mary's eyes are an important element of the expression of her feelings. Following the understanding in the period that the body and facial expressions should precede delivery, Austen inserts the eyes' expression before Mary speaks. Georgiana thus creates a small theatrical sequence for her correspondent. Because of this theatrical frame, it is impossible for the reader to ascertain which of Mary's feelings are authentic. Austen continued to explore this ambiguity in her mature fiction.

Mary's performance reaches its climax when she announces her engagement to Mr Watts during a social call. Georgiana again presents this visit as a theatrical moment, where dialogue is interrupted by stage directions such as '(said Mary in a peevish accent)' (*Juv*, 82), which provide indication of speaker and tone, allowing the reader to experience the scene as in a theatre. Mary's theatrical tendencies are also translated by Georgiana's writing, which underlines the passions visible on Mary's body:

> Mary pretended Bashfulness, and answered in Confusion, her Eyes cast down to "Mr Watts". […] The subject being now fairly introduced and she found herself the object of every one's attention in company, she lost all her confusion and became perfectly unreserved and communicative. (*Juv*, 86)

Mary's behaviour is clearly presented as a simulation, as 'pretended' indicates. Carefully detailing each of Mary's movements, Georgiana's letter suggests a performance, as these gestures are connected to specific words, echoing the practice in the period of dividing dramatic speeches into different passions. This casts Austen's character as an actress. Through dialogue and a delineation of 'characters' affective reactions', Austen 'directs – one might even say arranges as a mise en scène – the reader's "mental" visualisation of them', thus achieving dramatic effects in a fictional

form.[91] Indications of tone and gesture also function as stage directions that invite an oral performance.

The experience of communal reading was extremely important in the eighteenth century and authors expected their work to be treated as pieces to be performed.[92] As Saggini observes, 'even when novel and play reading took place in a purely domestic context, it nevertheless showed off all the characteristics of a performance.'[93] Austen's fiction features many scenes of reading aloud, from Edward Ferrars's 'spiritless' and 'tame' rendering of Cowper, to Mr Collins's 'monotonous solemnity', and Henry Crawford's superb delivery of *Henry VIII*.[94] Austen herself was, according to her niece Caroline, 'considered to read aloud remarkably well'. [95] Henry Austen in the 'Biographical Notice' to the 1817 edition and *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* recalled:

> She read aloud with great taste and effect. Her own works, probably, were never heard to so much advantage as from her own mouth, for she partook largely in all the best gifts of the comic muse.[96]

Austen's letters reveal her frustration with her family's reading of her works, highlighting the importance of delivery for Austen. In 1813, informing Cassandra of Mrs Austen's interpretation of *Pride and Prejudice*, she complained of '[their] mother's too rapid way of getting on—& tho' she perfectly understands the Characters herself,

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[91] Saggini, 4.
[92] Patricia M. Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), argues that 'fiction took the place of conversation manuals in teaching speech', 180-215 (183); Lucy Newlyn, 'Reading Aloud: An "Ambiguous Accompaniment"', in *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 334-71.
[93] Saggini, 5.
[94] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 80; Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77. All further references in the body of the text will be to these editions.
[95] Caroline Austen, 'My Aunt Jane Austen' (1867), in Austen-Leigh, *Memoir*, 174. See also 98, 130, for the family's reading of her novels.
[96] Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice of the Author' (1818), in *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Bank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 330.

she cannot speak them as she ought.'[97] This disappointment illustrates that the oral performance of her novels was extremely important to Austen and that she wrote with this aural dimension in mind.[98]

Kathryn Sutherland persuasively argues that the practice of reading aloud shapes Austen's writing to a much greater extent than has been previously thought.[99] According to Sutherland, 'the method [of the juvenilia] is communal and performative.'[100] Austen intended her texts to be 'heard'. Sutherland insists that the mature novels are equally structured as 'audio performances'.[101] The juvenilia, with their detailed presentation of characters' tones and emotional score, share this aural dimension. They direct interpretation, which shows Austen anticipated the domestic performance of her texts, as does the inclusion of acting techniques. 'The Three Sisters' details Mary's tone and gestures, allowing for the part to be acted out, in the process inviting the reader to consider whether the character is acting within the narrative.

Mary is indeed the leading actress of the piece. A paradoxical and highly amusing phenomenon occurs, which simultaneously exposes Mary's acting: as the company's attention turns to her, Mary gains confidence and loses herself in her role. She is the complete opposite of the quiet Fanny Price or reserved Anne Elliot who shy away from the limelight. Like a professional actress, Mary courts attention, the company becoming the audience of the play of which she is the lead performer.

Austen experimented further with the adaptation of theatrical techniques in a novelistic form in the epistolary novel 'Love and Freindship', casting its characters as

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[97] *Letters*, 203.
[98] Michaelson, 197, also argues Austen anticipated performance but does not discuss the internal evidence other than the presence of dialogues.
[99] Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 206-07.
[100] Ibid., 207.
[101] Ibid., viii, 296-301.

actors. Its heroine is one of the juvenilia's most indefatigable actresses and dramatic letter-writers. Laura records the various adventures that befell her and Sophia in their youth as a tale of caution to the young Marianne, framing many episodes as theatrical sequences. Laura shares Mary Stanhope's theatrical turn of mind. As in 'The Three Sisters', Austen adapts techniques that bring the story closer to 'the mimetic "spoken action" typical of the drama' and its protagonist is seen performing throughout.[102] Dedicated to Eliza de Feuillide, the Austens' eccentric cousin who actively promoted the Steventon theatricals, Austen may have created Laura as a gift to Eliza in honour of her love of acting.[103]

Laura has an additional natural claim to the theatre as she is the granddaughter of 'Laurina an Italian opera-girl' (*Juv*, 138). This lineage can be seen as conditioning her, the similarity of the women's names reinforcing their connection and the idea that Laura is destined to act. 'Love and Freindship' is the juvenilia piece in which the world of the theatre features the most prominently, alluding to provincial acting troupes, performers' career trajectories, and real-life contemporary actors, illustrating Austen's awareness of and familiarity with the realities of the professional theatre from a young age. Having spent the nine hundred pounds they stole from their mothers in less than two months, Philander and Gustavus who share Laura's parentage to Laurina 'engage [them]selves to some strolling Company of Players' (*Juv*, 139) and follow the typical experience of eighteenth-century actors:

> Philander and Gustavus, after having raised their reputation by their Performances in the Theatrical Line at Edinburgh, removed to Covent Garden, where they still Exhibit under the assumed names of *Lewis* and *Quick*. (*Juv*, 141)

[102] Saggini, 192.
[103] For Eliza's participation in the Steventon theatricals see *Family Record*, 57-59.

Austen inserts a joke that William Thomas Lewis and John Quick, two of the most popular comic actors of the time, are in fact her own characters.[104] The date 'June 13th 1790' is inscribed at the end of 'Love and Freindship' (Juv, 141). Earlier that year, *The Attic Miscellany* had issued the series 'The Actor', which satirised contemporary acting practices, with accompanying prints. Lewis and Quick featured amongst the actors targeted. (Figures 3.a. and 3.b.) These satirical attacks possibly participated in Austen's inclusion of these figures.

As in Richardson's *Grandison* and 'The Three Sisters', Austen adapts a dramatic mode in her epistolary piece. Laura's letters to Marianne are mostly comprised of dialogue, in which authorial intrusions only identify the speakers. The novel also foregrounds the importance of visual elements by addressing the difference between hearing, which characterises narration, and seeing, which typifies drama. 'Love and Freindship' includes a brief consideration of the supremacy of the emotional effects of the stage over the page. This issue emerges in Sophia's refusal to visit her husband in Newgate:

> "Oh! no, no, (exclaimed Sophia) I cannot go to Newgate; I shall not be able to support the sight of my Augustus in so cruel a confinement—my feelings are sufficiently shocked by the *recital*, of his Distress, but to behold it would overpower my Sensibility." (*Juv*, 118)

Sophia opposes 'sight', mimesis, to 'recital', diegesis, asserting the superior emotional strength of the former over the latter. Austen addresses this challenge by constructing sequences in which her reader can 'behold' her characters through writing. In her letters, Laura emphasises the visual elements of events, transforming her 'recital' of her adventures into immediate, dramatic pieces.

[104] Byrne, 29-30.

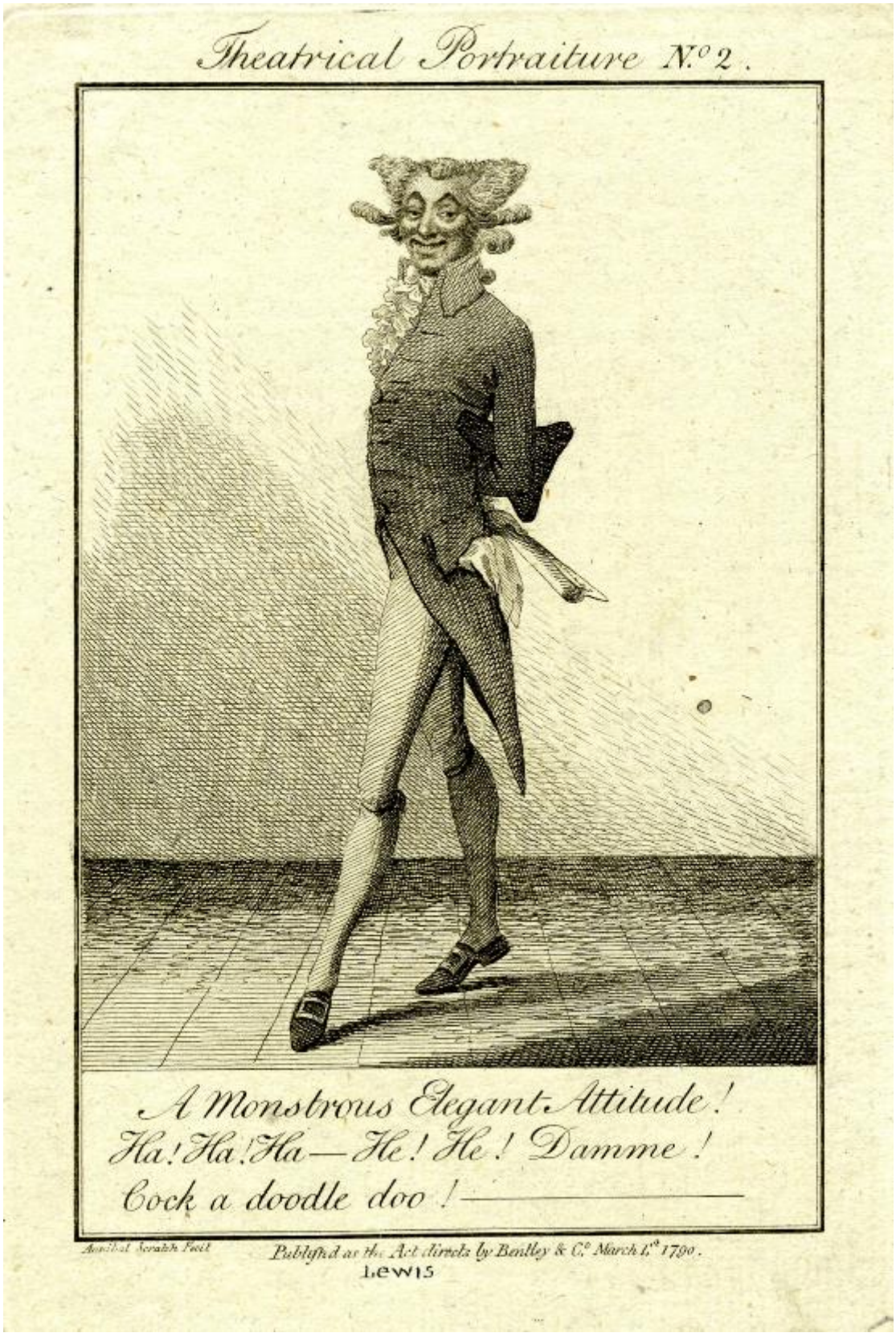


Figure 3.a.: The actor William Thomas Lewis in a 'Monstrous Elegant Attitude', plate illustrating the series 'The Actor', *The Attic Miscellany* (London, 1790), British Museum



Figure 3.b.: The actor John Quick, ‘An Actor of QUICK Conceptions’, plate illustrating the series ‘The Actor’, *The Attic Miscellany* (London, 1790), British Museum

Laura's writing frequently approximates theatrical display, encouraging her correspondent to visualise the story. The parentheses in which she indicates who speaks are often supplemented with information that are akin to stage directions, detailing either tone or gesture, such as '(replied my Husband in a most nobly contemptuous Manner)' or '(replied she hastily withdrawing her Eyes from a momentary glance at the sky)' (*Juv*, 111, 128). These pauses in the dialogue are indications that allow the reader to mentally recreate the scene and enable a performance of the text, an important feature of the experience of reading in the eighteenth century, to which Austen was particularly sensitive, as explained above.

In 'Love and Freindship', Laura's letters are performances in their own right. Laura stages herself throughout her letters. She repeatedly draws attention to the feelings she experiences, which are moreover displayed on her body, providing the 'semiotic score' that infuses the novel with dramatic qualities. The 'horrid Spectacle' (*Juv*, 129) of the upturned carriage illustrates this point for the young girls' emotional reactions, inscribed on their bodies, dominate the narrative. Laura focuses on the 'outward marks' of her feelings, allowing her reader to experience the event as a theatrical scene.[105] While an emphasis on the body's emotional script is part of Austen's parody of sentimental literature, it is also at the heart of eighteenth-century acting, where the performer's body supplements and even sometimes substitutes the play's text. Audiences expected to understand the meaning of a scene from an actor's gestures before they did from the delivery of lines, as the *Public Advertiser* suggests:

> In all her tragic characters Mrs. Siddons presents to you the very "form and figure" of tragedy itself. A person the most commanding, graceful and mournful action, a step perfectly consonant and a countenance so expressive, and so much at her will, that she absolutely speaks before the tongue, and is what she *represents*.[106]

[105] Aaron Hill, iv, 357.
[106] *Public Advertiser*, 4 October 1786, italics in the text.

Siddons's body becomes the play's text and 'speaks' before she delivers her lines. The idea that the body anticipated speech was prevalent in the period. The gestures visually translate the characters' feelings, becoming a language intelligible to all.

Austen's Laura tries to assume the 'form and figure' of tragedy in her narration. It is most apparent in her reported reaction to her husband's death, another example of a 'miniperformance in prose':

> "I will" (said he) and instantly fetching a Deep sigh, Expired—. Sophia immediately sunk again into a swoon—. *My* Greif [sic] was more audible. My Voice faltered, My Eyes assumed a vacant Stare, My face became as pale as Death, and my Senses were considerably impaired—.
> "Talk not to me of Phaetons (said I, raving in a frantic, incoherent manner)—"
> […]
> For two Hours did I rave thus madly and should not then have left off, as I was not in the least fatigued, had not Sophia who was just recovered from her swoon, intreated me to consider that Night was now approaching and that the Damps began to fall. (*Juv*, 130)

Laura describes the physical manifestation of her feeling, grief, in a manner that evokes eighteenth-century acting theory, detailing the tone of her voice, the appearance of her eyes, and her overall facial expression. As outlined in the introduction, gestures formed a vocabulary that enabled actors to communicate their characters' passions on stage. 'Grief' was one of the ten major passions Aaron Hill identified in his *Essay on Acting*, involving the whole body. Hill describes 'how an actor is to express grief' thus:

> It is a mournful and unstruggling resignation to defence, to apprehension of calamity: and therefore must require, to express it rightly, a sad look, careless air, and voice un-rais'd, and indolent.[107]

The *Thespian Preceptor* offers a later, similar analysis of dramatic grief:

> GRIEF, sudden and violent, expresses itself by beating the head and forehead, tearing the hair, and catching the breath, as if choaking [sic]—also by screaming, weeping, stamping with the feet, lifting the eyes from time to time to heaven, and hurrying backwards and forwards. This is a passion which

[107] Aaron Hill, iv, 363.

> admits, like many others, a great deal of stage-trick, if not well contrived, and equally as well executed, frequently fails of the desired effect.[108]

Laura follows these explanations: her voice, which falters, is therefore 'un-rais'd'. Her raving and constant agitation mirrors the manual's description of grief, characterised by continuous movement. Her 'vacant Stare' suggests absence or indifference, echoing Hill's 'sad look'. Laura also focuses on her eyes, which were considered the most expressive part of the face and required particular attention: for Henry Siddons, 'the soul […] speaks most frequently in the eyes'.[109]

'Love and Freindship''s most complex feature, is the question of point of view, a key issue for the 'dramatic narrative'. Laura presents the scene from an external point of view, when she is the source of the action. She analyses her own performance, which would be impossible in an actual play. This focalisation also betrays her behaviour as an act: her stylised gestures are part of Austen's parody of sentimental literature. Laura's ability to describe her actions in such an objective way suggests a degree of consciousness that cannot match the 'authentic' incoherence she portrays. Though at the time of the story Laura can have had no audience as Edward is dead and Sophia unconscious, the letter enables Laura to repeat her performance (and possibly perform it for the first time) with Marianne, her correspondent, placed in the position of a spectator. An 'audible' grief requires a listener. The reference to her energy signals Laura's acting in the sense of putting on a deliberate display of grief. Like James's tragic actress, her emotion is excessive and becomes comic. Her ability to stop immediately at the thought of getting cold, which is part of the story's comedy, alongside the idea of 'leaving off', implying a conscious act, indicate Laura's control over her emotions and therefore a deliberate 'acting' of that emotion.

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[108] *Thespian Preceptor*, 32-33.
[109] Siddons, 22.

Laura next displays her theatrical propensities in the coach journey that reunites her with old acquaintances. Her spoken realisation prompts the other passengers to look at her. Once their attention is secured, Laura launches into a full-blown performance, like Mary Stanhope's 'perfectly unreserved and communicative' manner once all eyes are on her:

> [E]very eye was directed to the corner in which I sat. "Oh! my Isabel (continued I throwing myself, across Lady Dorothea into her arms) receive once more onto your Bosom the unfortunate Laura." (*Juv*, 134)

Laura provides both dialogue and stage directions for the reader to experience the scene as stage drama. These markers also help Austen's readers perform the text. The close succession of Laura's speech and movements after the passengers' attention suggests a sort of causal link, as if she were waiting for this cue. Her language is stylised and hyperbolic, more akin to the language of stage tragedy than to that of realist fiction. She uses periphrasis more frequently than in the narrated sections of her letters, which suggests a theatricalising of her speech, as the reference to herself in this person indicates.

The idea of an audience is supported by the record of passengers' reactions: 'Pity and Surprise were strongly depictured in your Mother's Countenance.' (*Juv*, 135) Tragedy in the late eighteenth century was widely understood to follow the Aristotelian principles of pity and terror, as Blair noted in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.[110] Although Laura only mentions 'pity', it is clear she views her experiences as a tragedy. That Laura should anticipate a visible reaction is consonant with theatrical experiences in the period: 'audiences responded with their own physical displays of sensibility.' [111] Laura observes her audience, like Lucy Steele will in *Sense and*

[110] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1783), ii, 477.
[111] Nachumi, 94.

Sensibility, discussed in the next chapter. This awareness of the action around her betrays her mental control of the scene and therefore her acting.

Austen thus attempts, like Richardson, to create 'dramatic narratives' by introducing theatrical techniques in her fiction. Her decision to dispense with the layout of a play integrates those techniques more seamlessly. While these would have been apparent to her first audience, modern readers need to reconstruct this dimension. Austen developed and refined this method in her mature fiction, to explore the 'acting' that occurs in society.

Chapter 2: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813): Who is 'Acting a Part'?

With her first two published novels, Austen integrates acting techniques more smoothly to create 'miniperformances in prose', which highlight the inescapable theatrical nature of the communication of feelings and social behaviour. This allows for a sophisticated questioning of the (im)possibility of detecting (in)authentic behaviours and feelings, as both rely on externalisation. Real and inauthentic actions are indistinguishable. Austen introduces in these novels wordplay on 'act' and 'perform' to explore the ambiguities of acting. Even her most morally inflexible characters are involved in the novel's theatrical networks.

Sense and Sensibility

At the opening of the third volume of *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs Jennings makes what she surely intends as a dramatic entrance in her drawing-room in Berkeley Street in London, where the Dashwood sisters are staying. 'With an air of such hurrying importance as prepared [Elinor] to hear something wonderful' (*SS*, 291), Mrs Jennings signals through her body language a momentous *coup de théâtre*. Like an eighteenth-century actress on stage, her body speaks before she does. She announces what she believes to be 'news': Edward Ferrars and Lucy Steele's engagement. Mrs Jennings enjoys a brief moment in the spotlight, for Austen transcribes her narration to Elinor in its entirety in dialogue form. While Austen allows the Dashwoods' host to burst on the scene in such a theatrical manner, her revelation is ironically far from dramatic as her 'news' is obsolete: Elinor and the reader having been informed of the engagement for the entire second volume.

Mrs Jennings does however have one significant piece of intelligence to convey: Fanny Dashwood's reaction to the news. This she relates in a hyperbolic, theatrical style, accompanied by appropriately theatrical gestures:

> "[Fanny] fell into violent hysterics immediately, with such screams as reached your brother's ears. […] So up he flew directly, and a terrible scene took place, for Lucy was coming to them at that time, little dreaming of what was going on. Poor soul! I pity *her*. […] [F]or your sister scolded like any fury, and soon drove her into a fainting fit. Nancy, she fell upon her knees, and cried bitterly; and your brother, he walked about the room, and said he did not know what to do. […] [Y]our brother was forced to go down upon *his* knees too, to persuade her [Fanny] to let them stay till they had packed up their clothes. *Then* she fell into hysterics again, and he was so frightened that he would send for Mr. Donovan, and Mr. Donovan found the house in all this uproar." (*SS*, 293)

Hyperbolic language characterises Mrs Jennings's speech as she tries to construct a moment of heightened drama. Austen puns on the theatrical and metaphorical meanings of 'scene'. Mrs Jennings's minute description allows Elinor and the reader to visualise the incident, approximating stage action. The uproar she describes is reminiscent of Austen's juvenilia: with its copious crying, fainting, and other melodramatic gestures, it evokes the kind of upheaval painted in 'Love and Freindship' as well as melodramatic scenes in *Sir Charles Grandison*, where, as discussed in Chapter 1, characters also cry, faint, and fall on their knees.[112] What Mrs Jennings believes is a tragic and deeply affecting tableau is, for the reader, an instance of high comedy, full of the raw energy of the juvenilia: all hell breaks loose with a raging Fanny Dashwood, transformed into a 'fury', an unsuspecting Lucy Steele, whose entrance confirms Austen's command of comic timing and management of entrances and exits, the obligatory fainting young ladies overpowered by distress, and a husband afraid of his wife, throwing himself at her feet in a ridiculous imploring gesture. All of this concludes with great *éclat*, with the doctor's entrance onto this bewildering scene. As in the juvenilia, the comedy rests

[112] See Chapter 1.

on physicality, an inversion of gender expectations with Fanny dominating John Dashwood, and unrestrained emotions. Austen here makes fun of the clichés of sentimental literature by constructing a slapstick comedy tableau. She therefore uses acting techniques and the impression of performance to draw out the comic nature of the event.

Easily translatable on stage, Austen filters this scene through Mrs Jennings's narration. This instance of diegesis surely bears the trace of *Sense and Sensibility*'s inception as an epistolary novel, which allows us to conjecture Austen first composed her novels in the 'dramatic' style of Richardson.[113] This implies the dramatic nature of Richardson's novels continued to influence Austen when writing her first published novel. The scene acquires another theatrical dimension by being related in direct speech: Mrs Jennings parallels drama's messengers, who report off-stage actions that cannot be presented on stage. Austen surely plays with the fact that such 'action' can easily be performed: the characters' movements are all carefully detailed, the entrances of Lucy and Mr Donovan clearly indicated, allowing the reader to mentally visualise the scene and actors to straightforwardly perform it.

The passage enacts Lady Midway's mock meta-complaint in the epilogue to Frances Sheridan's comedy *The Discovery* (1763) that her character is unrealistic because she faces her trials with dignity and composure, exclaiming instead: 'Give *me*, threats, tears, hysterics and all that.'[114] While there is no record Austen knew Frances Sheridan's plays, textual evidence supports the view that she did. Gay demonstrates the parallels between the play and *Sense and Sensibility*, as well as Austen's familiarity

[113] Austen first drafted *Sense and Sensibility* as the epistolary novel 'Elinor and Marianne' around 1795; see Brian Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Developments through the Surviving Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 54.
[114] Frances Sheridan, *The Discovery* (1763), quoted in Gay, 42.

with Sheridan's *The Dupe* (1764).[115] Given the popularity of *The Discovery*, it is highly likely that Austen knew the play. Austen offers with Mrs Jennings's news an instance of the 'threats, tears, hysterics' that Sheridan mocks. *Sense and Sensibility* is therefore in dialogue with the criticisms acting faced in the eighteenth century. It also echoes the tragic actress of James's prologue to *Matilda*.

A 'miniperformance in prose' follows Elinor's summary of the affair to Marianne, but to this insertion of dramatic techniques in a novelistic form is added the exploration of the subsumed instances of acting that animate Austen's mature fiction. Like Joanna Baillie, Austen is concerned with 'the discovery of concealed passion, […] the tracing of the varieties and progress of a perturbed soul.'[116] Rendering the sisters' conversation in dialogue form, the narrative clearly focuses on the response: 'At these words, Marianne's eyes expressed the astonishment, which her lips could not utter. After a pause of wonder, she exclaimed, "Four months!"' (*SS*, 297) As explained in the introduction, dramatic speeches were understood as a sequence of different 'passions'. The narrator identifies the 'passions' that animate Marianne, here 'astonishment' and 'wonder', which her body moreover articulates: as 'express' implies, her physical features become the linguistic signs of her emotions. Henry Siddons included 'astonishment' in his volume on theatrical gestures, detailing it as 'merely a superior degree of admiration […] the mouth is more opened, the look more fixed, the eyebrows more elevated, and the respiration more difficultly [sic] retained'.[117] The word is therefore a clue for the reader to visualise this emotion. Marianne's feelings are moreover presented as externalised, which implies that communication of feelings

[115] Gay, 42-44.
[116] Baillie, 11.
[117] Siddons, 74.

sometimes cannot escape a theatrical dimension, as there is no indication that Marianne is feigning.

Marianne's 'pause of wonder' provides a further stage direction: 'wonder' was one of the ten major dramatic passions first identified by Aaron Hill. Austen thus offers her readers the 'semiotic score' Saggini observes in Burney's fiction.[118] The *Theatrical Speaker* explains that 'wonder' 'opens the eyes and makes them appear very prominent' and that '[t]he first access of this passion stops all utterance.'[119] The passage follows this principle as Marianne pauses, momentarily speechless. It also illustrates the contrast in the novel's treatment of the Dashwood sisters: Marianne verbally and physically externalises her feelings, clearly marked on her body, while Elinor's emotions remain internalised, concealed from view. While this would seem to associate Marianne alone with acting, her sister is in fact the better actress. The novel addresses their 'acting' in different ways, which complicates a single definition of acting in Austen's fiction.

With her effusiveness, Marianne has apparently obvious links to acting. Byrne has shown the influence of deluded sentimental heroines in eighteenth-century comedy, such as Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775), performed at Steventon in July 1784, and George Colman's eponymous *Polly Honeycombe* (1760), on Austen's creation of Marianne, all three deriving their romantic notions from books and eager to perform the sensibility of the fictional heroines they admire.[120] Marianne's feelings, despite their excessive display, are nonetheless genuine. On the other hand, Elinor, whose conduct does not immediately raise suspicions of acting is shown by Austen to be an unsuspected actress, as her social behaviour frequently

[118] Saggini, 4.
[119] *Theatrical Speaker*, 24-25.
[120] Byrne, 103, 105-18, 104. Gay, 32-35, identifies Marianne as modelled on heroines of 'she-tragedies' in the Siddons line, and, 35-42, Marianne as a 'tragedienne'.

conceals feelings that differ strongly from those she experiences. It is precisely in this absence of visible feelings that Austen discusses Elinor's 'acting'.

Elinor's reaction to Mrs Jennings's news introduces suspicions of acting in the Berkeley Street scene. While Elinor cannot share her host's surprise, she is nonetheless 'able to give such an answer, and make such observations, as the subject might be natural to produce' (*SS*, 294), implying she does not voice her authentic feelings. Elinor is not usually associated with acting, but practises this type of 'address' (*SS*, 166) frequently necessary in polite society, whose closeness to insincerity leads to accusations of hypocrisy.[121] As Gay observes, 'Elinor throughout the novel perform[s] the social roles required of her.'[122] This, by extension, characterises her behaviour as acting.

The novel discreetly camouflages Elinor's acting under the cover of 'self-command' (*SS*, 296). While the word obviously denotes Elinor's rational control over her emotions, contrasted with her sister Marianne's overindulgence in her feelings, it is also used in the context of situations where behaviour is consciously modified to project an external image different from the character's internal experience. It is therefore a form of acting.[123] Faced with Lucy's 'overpowering delight' at discovering the Dashwoods still in London, Elinor must pretend she does not understand Lucy's innuendoes about her engagement to Edmund: 'Elinor perfectly understood her, and was forced to use all her self-command to make it appear that she did *not*', as it would give Lucy the upper hand (*SS*, 247). This illustrates James Austen's claim in his 1788 prologue that people 'speak a language foreign to their heart'. 'Appear' emphasises the

[121] For eighteenth-century anxieties around politeness see Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[122] Gay, 50.
[123] Davidson, 151-54, also sees Elinor's self-command as conscious deceit.

visual aspect of Elinor's behaviour and a focus on external signs, introducing the notion of acting. 'Self-command' is the unmistakable tool she wields to disguise her inner state. As Jenny Davidson suggests, Elinor and Lucy are more similar than is usually acknowledged, for concealment of authentic feeling implies acting.[124]

Elinor also 'acts' with her relatives. The Berkeley Street chapter centres on Elinor's disclosure to Marianne of the real state of her feelings, 'undeceiving her' (*SS*, 295) in the process, a term Elinor herself uses (*SS*, 197). This repetition throws into relief Elinor's earlier behaviour, clearly identified as acting. That it remains undetected throughout indicates how successful she is. 'Acting' in Austen therefore occurs not only in polite social situations but also amongst loved ones.

Elinor's 'acting' becomes more visible when she is confronted with other 'actors'. In these scenes, characters alternate between the positions of actor and spectator, inscribing them in the 'network of vigilance and visibility' Litvak identifies as theatrical. In this, Austen achieves a complex combination of dramatic and novelistic techniques, for characters in the drama cannot double these functions. It also shows a more refined integration of dramatic techniques than in the juvenilia.

Austen constructs two set-pieces in which she models Elinor's confrontation with Lucy on the popular contemporary topos of rival female protagonists, both on and off stage. Felicity Nussbaum astutely demonstrates that rivalries between leading actresses animated the world of eighteenth-century theatre, entertaining the public off-stage through newspaper and other media coverage, and inspiring managers and playwrights to financially exploit these tensions.[125]

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[124] Ibid., 151.
[125] Nussbaum, 58-59, 61-62. '"Real, Beautiful Women": Rival Queens', 61-91, explores the implications of this dynamic.

Actresses' performances were constantly compared to each other. When Mrs Wells ventured on stage for the first time in Thomas Southerne's *Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage* in April 1784, the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* reported 'her talents for tragedy wanted nothing but cultivation and practice to render her in a very short time inferior only to Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Siddons as a tragic actress.'[126] Both actresses were indeed hailed as the standard for tragic acting. Working for different playhouses, they were in competition with each other. In 1782, the print 'The Rival Queens of Covent Garden and Drury lane, at a Gymnastic Rehearsal!' was issued, a mock-boxing contest between the two actresses, showing Crawford at a distinct advantage over Siddons: Crawford is modestly clothed whereas Siddons's breast is bare, her hair dishevelled, implying a loss of self-control (Figure 4). Austen's heroines engage in a similar confrontation, only verbally, and therefore within the bounds of decorum.



Figure 4: 'The Rival Queens of Covent Garden and Drury lane, at a Gymnastic Rehearsal!' (1782), anonymous print, British Museum

[126] *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 4 May, 1784.

Inserted at the close of the first volume and at the opening of the second, the face-to-face confrontations between Elinor and Lucy appear truly modelled on the rivalry between on-stage female characters and off-stage successful actresses. Dialogue predominates these scenes, approximating the condition of drama for characters expose themselves directly. There are regular authorial intrusions fulfilling the function of dramatic stage directions, providing the reader with the necessary information to mentally imagine the characters' gestures and tones. Close attention is also paid to the cadence of the scene: indications such as 'they walked on for a few minutes' (*SS*, 147) or '[s]he paused' (*SS*, 149) give an approximation of the duration of the conversation, allowing the reader to share the same temporality as the characters, like a theatrical audience would experience the different pauses in a delivery on stage.

Austen masterfully orchestrates these confrontations, which echo one another, the balance of power shifting between the two episodes. Lucy instigates the first encounter, which is truly dramatic: the revelation of her engagement to Edward closes the first volume. Elinor then initiates their second meeting, thus restoring the balance of power. Both sequences are constructed like theatrical scenes: physical gestures are described, bodies becoming the visual texts of internal feelings. These external manifestations oscillate between authentic and feigned feelings, which illustrates the complexity of the question of acting in Austen's mature fiction: unlike in the juvenilia, the acting of Austen's characters is not always easily identifiable. The construction of theatrical sequences frames characters' actions as always potentially simulated and acted. Lucy and Elinor are also engaged in a complex game of spectating: each woman observes the other, which places their interaction in a theatrical framework. This mutual examination also betrays their acting. Both women are seen acting and concealing their performance at the same time.

Walking side by side from Barton Park to Barton Cottage, Lucy seizes this rare moment alone with Elinor to reveal her engagement to Edward. Lucy performs the role of the young woman oppressed by the burden of secrecy, a familiar trope in eighteenth-century theatre. She casts herself in the line of heroines in comedies such as Fanny Sterling in *The Clandestine Marriage*, or Isabella in Susanna Centlivre's tragi-comedy *The Wonder! A Woman keeps a Secret*, performed at Steventon in 1787. By sharing her secret with her, Lucy confines Elinor to the role of confidante, a secondary part. While female friends could be confidantes in plays, such as Julia Melville in *The Rivals*, the role would often be assigned to servants or older companions such as Tag, the servant in whom Biddy confides in Garrick's *Miss in her Teens* (1747), or Betty, the maid who protects Fanny Sterling's secret, unflattering associations for Elinor. Lucy reduces Elinor's importance in terms of narrative by confiding in her. The position of confidante usually implies trust and friendship, but this secret is part of Lucy's 'acting' of intimacy, for the content of the confidence places Elinor in a subservient position. Her engagement to Edward also confers upon her the title of heroine as the conventions of comedy dictate that the female protagonist is rewarded with marriage. Lucy endeavours to maintain this superior position throughout their conversation, with the help of different dramatic techniques, which also expose her acting.

Unlike Mrs Jennings, Lucy is skilful at managing dramatic tension for she secures Elinor's attention by indirectly introducing her actual topic through a tangential link, Elinor's acquaintance with Mrs Ferrars:

> "You will think my question an odd one, I dare say," said Lucy. […] Elinor *did* think the question a very odd one, and her countenance expressed it, as she answered that she had never seen Mrs. Ferrars. (*SS*, 147)

The narration invites the reader to consider the scene as theatrical as it highlights elements central to the period's experience of acting: Elinor's body, her 'countenance',

acquires the power of expression speech-lines. Her body becomes a 'semiotic score' like that of an actress on stage. Lucy's first strike hits the right note as her words become realised in Elinor's countenance. Her usual self-command fails her. Elinor is nonetheless 'cautious of giving her real opinion of Edward's mother' (*SS*, 147) in her response, a tentativeness that shows she perceives Lucy is at 'treacherous play' (*MP*, 159) with her. This concealment of 'real opinion' implies acting.

Lucy remains undeterred and carries on her attack: '"I am sure you think me very strange, for inquiring about [Mrs. Ferrars] in such a way;" said Lucy, eyeing Elinor attentively as she spoke' (*SS*, 147). Lucy again asserts her ascendancy as she proclaims to know Elinor's thoughts. She continues to toy with Elinor's nerves as she delays her clarification, her words designed to elicit a response in her rival. They are therefore an act. The theatricality of the exchange is carried in Lucy's gaze, inscribing the sequence in the network of visibility which Litvak identifies as the characteristic of theatricality. Lucy scrutinises Elinor's face to detect further physical manifestations of her inner feelings, which shows she operates in a framework of theatricality. By looking at Elinor to see the effect of her words, Lucy momentarily steps out of her character, betraying her acting in the process. This was also considered a fault in many performers. In his *Memoirs* Boaden admired Siddons's ability to constantly stay in character:

> Never did I see her eye wander from the business of the scene—no recognizance of the most noble of her friends exchanged her character for the individual.[127]

Lucy's gaze, which signals a consciousness of the theatrical nature of the situation, therefore indicates the embarrassment she portrays is an act.

Lucy betrays herself a second time:

> "[T]he time *may* come—how soon it will come must depend upon herself—when we may be very intimately connected."

[127] Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons*, 2 vols. (London, 1827), ii, 289.

> She looked down as she said this, amiably bashful, with only one side glance at her companion to observe its effect on her.
>
> "Good heavens!" cried Elinor. (*SS*, 148)

The stage direction that details Lucy's look indicates she 'performs' modesty. Contemporary acting manuals stipulated that looking down was a characteristic of the feeling: the actor 'levels the eyes to the breast, if not the feet, of the superior character'.[128] Lucy's side-glance, however brief, like her previous look, betrays her acting. Her speech is a scheme to unsettle Elinor. She is successful, as the latter's cry conveys surprise, but Austen ironically frustrates Lucy's desire to have Elinor guess the identity of her *fiancé*, as Elinor imagines she is referring to an engagement to Robert Ferrars, Edward's younger brother. Lucy's full-blown theatrical effect falls flat.

After this, the narrative focuses on Elinor's reaction. Known only by the reader, acting again characterises her response:

> Elinor for a few moments remained silent. Her astonishment at what she heard was at first too great for words; but at length forcing herself to speak, and to speak cautiously, she said with a calmness of manner, which tolerably well concealed her surprise and solicitude. (*SS*, 149)

'Concealed' indicates Elinor is acting as the feelings she projects are not authentic: she clearly exerts control over her demeanour and tone, frustrating Lucy's desire to provoke an 'effect on her'. The description allows the reader to identify Elinor's behaviour as acting, but it remains imperceptible to Lucy. John Hill observes 'the consummate art of the performer is to conceal the art by which he is assisted'.[129] As such, Elinor is a better actress than Lucy. Austen repeats this construction later on in the chapter: despite Lucy's ferocious attacks to agitate her, Elinor succeeds in confounding her, 'with a composure of voice, under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond any thing she had ever felt before.' (*SS*, 155) Concealment clearly indicates Elinor is acting.

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[128] *Theatrical Speaker*, 11; *Thespian Preceptor*, 38.
[129] John Hill, 6.

Elinor and Lucy in fact mirror each other throughout the exchange. As she regains control over the display of her emotions through a renewal of 'self-command' (*SS*, 151), she too scrutinises Lucy's facial expressions:

> As she said this, she looked earnestly at Lucy, hoping to discover something in her countenance; perhaps the falsehood of the greatest part of what she had been saying; but Lucy's countenance suffered no change. (*SS*, 152)

Like Lucy, Elinor tries to identify any physical signs of internal feelings and therefore participates in the theatrical nature of the scene. Both women are engaged in a sophisticated game of acting and spectating.

Every subsequent comment Elinor makes during their conversation is accompanied by an indication of the emotion that overrides it; in this Austen imbues her prose with theatrical elements as it allows the reader to imagine precisely how each word should be pronounced, in the same way that each line in a play was understood to carry a specific feeling. Elinor's 'painful perplexity' (*SS*, 150), for instance, not only informs the reader of her mental state, it guides a performance of the scene: the reader of Elinor's part would know how to interpret those lines. They operate as stage directions, providing the 'semiotic score' of drama.

Lucy's performance does not come into full force until she has used all her acting tricks to perform the part of the distressed young woman. First, 'she took out her handkerchief but Elinor did not feel very compassionate' (*SS*, 153), and then proceeds to 'wip[e] her eyes' (*SS*, 153). Lucy uses her handkerchief as a prop, a metonymy for grief. She literally acts out the internal feeling of sadness when she wipes her eyes, in a manner not unlike James Austen's tragic actress in the prologue to *Matilda*. The handkerchief was commonly used to signal grief, which Garrick satirised in his play *Bon Ton; or, High Life Above Stairs* (1775), performed at Steventon in 1787-88. When Lord Minikin surprises his wife at home, her ladyship must distract his attention so he

does not discover her lover, Colonel Tivy. The couple fight, and she 'pretends to weep'. Lord Minikin is not fooled and sarcastically declares: 'my dear Lady Minikin, if you are resolved to play tragedy, I shall roar away too, and pull out my cambric handkerchief.'[130] This shows that the handkerchief was a conventional sign for grief and an unsubstantiated display of misery.

Lucy again casts herself in the role of tragic actress when she confides in Elinor her anxiety at meeting Mrs Ferrars in Harley Street. Her '"Pity me, dear Miss Dashwood!"' (*SS*, 264) asks Elinor to consider her as a tragic figure. As discussed in Chapter 1, 'pity' was an important element of the eighteenth-century experience of tragedy. Lucy is also feigning distress, playing the part of the young woman afraid to meet her mother-in-law for the first time. The situation is in fact more complex, Lucy both acting and sincere: she is 'really uncomfortable', yet also 'hope[s] at least to be an object of irrepressible envy to Elinor' (*SS*, 264). There is a paradoxical truth behind Lucy's performance as she 'really' feels the discomfort she projects, which introduces the ambiguity of the truth of acting that animates Austen's fiction.

Elinor manages to re-establish the balance of power in the opening of the second volume, in the Middletons' living room. The exchange is briefer but the dynamic is the same.[131] Austen constructs a second dramatic set-piece, where dialogue dominates and authorial intrusions function as stage directions. The movements of the eyes are also detailed, highlighting the theatrical dimension of the exchange. Lucy's 'little sharp eyes full of meaning' (*SS*, 167) are a clear indication that there is more to the dialogue than the surface words of their conversation. Elinor begins 'in a firm though cautious tone' and is 'careful in guarding her countenance from every expression that could give her

[130] David Garrick, *Bon Ton; or, High Life Above Stairs* (London, 1775).
[131] Byrne, 116-23, analyses this scene in detail.

words a suspicious tendency' (*SS*, 167, 168), which confirms her deliberate effort to control the emotions she projects. She is in this sense 'acting' as her outward display of feelings does not match her internal experience.

This second confrontation also introduces another important element in Austen's exploration of the question of acting, that of female performance. Elinor and Lucy present to the company a picture of female companionship as they work together on Annamaria Middleton's basket:

> Lucy made room for her with ready attention, and the two fair rivals were thus seated side by side at the same table, and with the utmost harmony engaged in forwarding the same work. (*SS*, 166)

This domestic activity is merely the pretext for their exchange. The 'harmony' is clearly an illusion, a situation Austen revisits in *Mansfield Park*. The performance of female accomplishments serves to hide their rivalry from the other characters.

In both cases, unlike contemporary plays staging female confrontations, Austen's heroines must disguise their rivalry as female friendship. Because Austen operates within the realm of realist fiction, she cannot dramatise conversations in which her characters would flare at each other as Polly Peachum and Lucy Lockit can in the dramatic tradition, for Lucy and Elinor would then violate the boundaries of female propriety. They must therefore fight while giving the appearance of harmony, which allows for a more sophisticated piece of acting than is possible on stage. Elinor also surprisingly transpires as the more successful actress as her performance remains undetected by Lucy. Elinor is in fact at the heart of the novel's problematisation of acting. Austen addresses through Elinor's experiences the ambiguities of acting, where authenticity and disingenuousness paradoxically intersect. The novel's male characters also illustrate this paradox.

Confronted with Willoughby's seemingly inexplicable disappearance and the revelation of Edward Ferrars's engagement to Lucy Steele, which conflicts with his behaviour towards Elinor, Austen's heroines are faced with the discrepancy between their suitors' words and actions at Barton and the realities that surface as the plot progresses, forcing them to question the nature of the men's actions. Mrs Dashwood is the first to introduce the idea that Willoughby's behaviour to Marianne is duplicitous: '"Has he been acting a part in his behaviour to your sister all this time? Do you suppose him really indifferent to her?"' (*SS*, 93) 'Acting a part' implies Willoughby's actions towards Marianne did not mirror his internal feelings and he was therefore merely performing the role of suitor without any real affection for her during his visit at Barton. Mrs Dashwood's emphasis on Willoughby's 'behaviour' highlights the physical and external dimension of his interaction with her daughter, as opposed to his words, which introduces a framework of theatricality: Mrs Dashwood wonders if he has really been performing unsubstantiated theatrical gestures.

Because late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century-propriety prevented men and women from verbally expressing their feelings for each other, Austen's characters can only rely on external, physical signs of affection, which place them in a theatrical framework of spectating and decoding. As explained in the introduction, Barthes' understanding of theatricality is very close to the eighteenth-century conception of acting: both highlight the centrality of 'the density of signs and sensations built up on the stage from the written argument'.[132] In both conceptions, the external signs of the actor's body are at the heart of theatricality. Because Austen's characters depend entirely on their interlocutors' outward display, they are positioned in a dynamic of theatricality. Conversely, a character's conscious modification of his or her body

[132] Barthes, 26.

indicates acting. The Dashwoods are therefore the audience of Willoughby's role-playing.

Willoughby comes with complicated ties to acting: his name associates him with the feigning figure of Sir Clement Willoughby in Burney's *Evelina*, a character who repeatedly dupes the heroine. Burney's character is also an impersonator, as he writes to Evelina pretending to be Lord Orville. I believe Austen reworks this episode with her characteristic ironic twist when Willoughby writes to Marianne a letter dictated by his wife: Willoughby is 'acting a part' as his speech has been assigned to him.

Another work significant for the characterisation of Willoughby is *Hamlet*. The novel references the play when Mrs Dashwood stumbles on a volume of Shakespeare, and remembers her family and Willoughby were reading it together. His puzzling departure left it unfinished. As will be discussed in relation to *Mansfield Park*, Austen weaves the play into the fabric of her novel to complicate the reading of her character. Gay, Harris, Tanner, and Copeland interpret the play's inclusion as an ominous sign of Willoughby's sudden and mysterious rejection of Marianne, and see in her subsequent illness an echo of Ophelia's madness as it affects her mental health.[133] There is another unexplored important significance to *Hamlet*, which I believe is relevant to *Sense and Sensibility*: *Hamlet* is a play deeply concerned with the truth of feelings. In Act I, Scene ii, Hamlet discusses at length the opposition between 'seems' and 'is', and objects to all externalisation of emotion as illusion.[134] Both clothing and facial expressions are 'actions that a man might play' (I.ii.84) and therefore counterfeit. As this chapter discusses, *Sense and Sensibility* is also concerned with the opposition between the performance of feelings and their authenticity, as well as with the difficulty of

[133] Gay, 37; Harris, 59; Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 93-94; Copeland, 457, 497.
[134] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Neil Taylor and Ann Thompson (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), I.ii.76.

distinguishing them. Hamlet is also paradoxically a great lover of the theatre. He is Shakespeare's great actor, who decides to 'put an antic disposition on' (I.v.191) to feign madness in order to fool the court of Denmark. Willoughby presumably read the part of Hamlet and was successful. As Tanner argues, this 'prowess at reading parts in plays', like Henry Crawford's admired reading of *Henry VIII*, indicates he too can act.[135] A convincing performance of Hamlet suggests further that Willoughby too can 'put a disposition on', if not an antic one. Yet not all the instances in which he acts are so easily identifiable.

As with the other 'professional actors on the social stage' in Austen's mature fiction,[136] such as Henry Crawford or Frank Churchill, the distinction between acting and sincerity is often hard to ascertain. Deceitful and sincere actions can be performed simultaneously, as Willoughby's behaviour towards Marianne illustrates. *Sense and Sensibility* explores this ambiguity through Willoughby's reappearance in the narrative, itself a moment of heightened drama, which is constructed like a stage piece, alerting the reader to the possibility of 'acting'. Jocelyn Harris notes that the episode is a 'virtual word-by-word' reworking of the ball-scene in Richardson's *Clarissa* when Anne Howe meets Lovelace, adding that 'Jane Austen pays tribute to Richardson's dramatic art' in this episode.[137] The association with Lovelace signals the likelihood of acting on Willoughby's part.

Late at night, a noise announces the arrival of a carriage. Expecting Colonel Brandon and her mother, 'Elinor rushed towards the drawing-room,—she entered it,—and saw only Willoughby.' (*SS*, 358) The absence of conjunctions between the clauses heightens the tension. Elinor's entrance is noted, mirroring stage entrances. As the

[135] Tanner, 93.
[136] Harris, 95.
[137] Ibid., 64-71, 64, 71.

chapter closes on his name, Willoughby's entrance is a *coup de théâtre*. As in a play, the curtain falls at the moment of surprise, a technique Austen repeats to greater effect in *Mansfield Park* when Julia announces the unexpected return of Sir Thomas.

The conversation that follows this surprising arrival is another 'miniperformance in prose' in which Austen adapts theatrical techniques. The chapter consists mostly of dialogue, with authorial intrusions to specify characters' movements, facial reactions, and tone, transcribing the exchange with the 'language' of acting. References to acting serve to constantly put Willoughby's sincerity into question, leaving both the reader and Elinor 'in a contrariety of emotions that critics have often puzzled over'.[138] They make it impossible to answer Mrs Dashwood's question of whether Willoughby 'has been acting a part'. After briefly setting the scene, the narrative moves swiftly to the dialogue:

> Elinor, starting back with a look of horror at the sight of him, obeyed the first impulse of her heart in turning instantly to quit the room, and her hand was already on the lock, when its action was suspended by his hastily advancing, and saying in a voice rather of command than supplication,
>
> "Miss Dashwood, for half an hour—for ten minutes—I entreat you to stay."
>
> "No, sir," she replied with firmness. (*SS*, 359)

Austen provides the stage directions, tone, and gestures necessary for a performance of the passage. As discussed in Chapter 1, the practice of reading aloud, and of doing so while approximating a theatrical performance, was prevalent in the period. By paying close attention to her characters' looks, gestures, and tone, Austen allowed her contemporary readers to perform certain episodes in her novel. An actress performing the role of Elinor would know she is to portray 'horror'.

Willoughby justifies his behaviour towards Marianne in a highly theatrical manner, making it impossible to ascertain his sincerity. His whole being sits on the

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[138] Ibid., 69.

boundary between acting and sincerity as the evolution of his feelings for Marianne, blurring the neat distinction between authenticity and hypocritical acting, illustrates:

> "I endeavoured, by every means in my power, to make myself pleasing to her, without any design of returning her affection. […] I was acting in this manner, trying to engage her regard, without a thought of returning it. […] I found myself by insensible degrees, sincerely fond of her; and the happiest hours of my life were what I spent with her when I felt my intentions were strictly honourable, and my feelings blameless." (*SS*, 362, 363-64)

Austen plays on the double-meaning of 'acting', signifying both role-playing and the execution of a task, disrupting the neat dichotomy between the two. Underlining his complete self-command throughout their courtship, Willoughby admits he was at first 'acting' deceptively, performing the part of suitor in full awareness of Marianne's feelings for him.

Captivated by Marianne's charm however, Willoughby's initial feigned display of affection becomes sincere. Willoughby is caught by his own acting, an issue Austen develops in *Mansfield Park* through the change of Henry Crawford's feelings towards Fanny Price from an emotionally detached performance of affection to a felt regard.[139] What were unsubstantiated external signs become the manifestation of true feelings. The Dashwoods' inability to distinguish between the two shows not only that Willoughby is a fine actor, but that acting is also an inherently difficult activity to identify off the stage. Like Elinor, Willoughby knows the actor's art of concealing his own art.

Austen here dramatizes the much-debated question in the period of actors' emotional identification with their parts, playing with her contemporaries' disagreement over whether or not actors felt the passions they represented on stage. Actors' natural dispositions were usually considered to determine the genre and range

[139] See Chapter 3.

of their roles, which implies the actor's self transpires in his/her on-stage character. The *Thespian Preceptor*, a popular acting manual, argued for the correlation between actor and character: 'a performer can personate a hero truly unless, did events favour him, he be capable of actually becoming a hero', which implies that, to act any role well, a performer must naturally possess some of the qualities that constitute that role.[140] Willoughby then must experience some of the lover's feelings to be so convincing.

For others however, an actor's passions on stage were unequivocally feigned.[141] Boswell records Samuel Johnson's exasperation at audiences' belief that Garrick really experienced the feelings he portrayed on stage:

> Talking of it one day to Mr. Kemble, he said, "Are you, Sir, one of those enthusiasts who believe yourself transformed into the very character you represent?" Upon Mr. Kemble's answering that he had never felt so strong a persuasion himself; "To be sure not, Sir, (said Johnson;) the thing is impossible. And if Garrick believed himself to be that monster, Richard the Third, he deserved to be hanged every time he performed it."[142]

For Johnson, there can be no equation between an actor's and his character's feelings. By choosing one of drama's most seductively evil protagonists, Shakespeare's Richard III, Johnson shows the absurdity of believing an actor truly experiences his character's emotions, as this means the actor shares in the virtues, but also in the guilt and failings of the character he portrays. As such, Willoughby can easily feign the feelings of a lover. An awareness of the contemporary debate about actors' emotional identification complicates the clear recognition of duplicitous acting.

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[140] *Thespian Preceptor*, 25.

[141] While the French Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (1773) is most often cited as the seminal investigation of the issue in the period, it was not published until 1830 in France and only translated into English in 1883, which introduces a methodological problem, as Diderot's ideas would have been unknown to Austen.

[142] James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. and enlarged by L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-50), iv, 243-44.

Even though Willoughby is by all accounts genuine in his confession, the construction of the conversation as a theatrical piece casts a shadow over his sincerity. Slow to speak, Elinor hurries him:

> "Pray be quick, sir"—said Elinor impatiently—"I have no time to spare."
>
> He was sitting in an attitude of deep meditation, and seemed not to hear her. (*SS*, 360)

Austen again supplies information regarding Elinor's delivery. The description of Willoughby's behaviour as 'an attitude' brings suspicion to his sincerity. Penny Gay is the only critic who discusses 'attitude' in Austen's fiction as a theatrical term, even though the word was clearly associated with performance in the period. The *OED* shows that 'attitude' referred first to 'the "disposition" of figure in a statuary or painting'; Willoughby therefore aestheticises his body. The *OED* records the appearance in the eighteenth century of the word's association with theatrical practices: '1.a. to strike an attitude: to assume it theatrically, and not as in the unstudied expression of passion or action'.[143] 'Attitude' did have associations with acting in the eighteenth century, marking Willoughby's posture as studied and potentially misleading.

Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), where the word appears multiple times with this specific meaning, proves that the theatrical connotations of 'attitude' were current in the early nineteenth century is evidenced. The first instance is linked to Clarence Hervey's arrival at Lady Delacour's and his entrance in the novel:

> "Oh! I have passed a miserable night," replied Clarence, throwing himself into an actor's attitude, and speaking in a fine tone of stage declamation,
>
> 'What was your dream, my lord, I pray you tell me?'"[144]

'Attitude' is here clearly associated with the actor's art. Hervey, like a professional actor, controls both his body through his attitude and his voice through his tone, giving

[143] See also Ranger, 90-105, for a discussion of theatrical attitudes.
[144] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. Siobhàn Kilfeather (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 14.

a small-scale performance of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Austen's earliest readers would surely have recognised a play on words and identified Willoughby's behaviour as potentially affected. The reference to 'attitude' therefore further challenges his sincerity in this scene. The presentation of his behaviour makes it impossible to identify acting or sincerity with any certainty. Austen revisits this issue with the discussion of Edward's behaviour towards Elinor.

At the close of Elinor's earlier revelation to Marianne in Berkeley Street, the latter reflects that 'Edward seemed a second Willoughby' (*SS*, 296). This refers to the parallels in their situations but also to their duplicity: by characterising Edward as Willoughby, already linked to acting, Elinor's suitor becomes associated with acting. This taints with deep irony Mrs Jennings's exclamation that, by opposing his family by honouring his engagement to Lucy, 'he has acted like an honest man' (*SS*, 303): Edward is indeed 'acting' towards Lucy as his affection for her has disappeared by this point in the narrative. The irony is further deepened by the fact that Edward has not 'acted like an honest man' towards Elinor.

Elinor faces Edward's 'acting' when Lucy reveals her secret engagement to Edward. She too has to reconsider whether or not her suitor's behaviour was sincere or duplicitous:

> What Lucy had asserted to be true, Elinor could not, dared not longer doubt. […] Her resentment of such behaviour, her indignation of having been its dupe, for a short time made her feel only for herself; but other ideas, other considerations soon arose. Had Edward intentionally been deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? […] No; whatever it might once have been, she could not believe it such at present. His affection was all her own. She could not be deceived in that. (*SS*, 159-60)

As 'dupe' implies, Elinor reflects on the possibility that Edward tricked her, misleading into believing he has affection for her. The passage is saturated with the language of duplicity and acting, as 'deceiving' and 'feigned' convey. The use of verb rather than

noun form indicates in both cases an emphasis on agency, highlighting Edward's conscious and active deception.

Even though Edward is rarely associated with acting, he too has to address the implications of his 'acts'.[145] Gay notes his affinity with Oliver Goldsmith's Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer* as both men struggle in the company of 'gentility' and are more at ease with 'low company' (*SS*, 109). The parallel with Marlow further ties Edward to acting: Goldsmith's character reveals different personae as he changes his identity according to his interlocutor's social position. This fluidity of character associates Marlow with the chameleon nature of the actor, and by extension associates Edward with acting as well.[146]

Elinor confronts him after the revelation of Lucy's marriage to his elder brother Robert:

> "Your behaviour was certainly very wrong," said she, "because—to say nothing of my own conviction, our relations were all led away by it to fancy and expect *what*, as you were *then* situated, could never be."
>
> He could only plead an ignorance of his own heart, and a mistaken confidence in the force of his engagement. […] "I felt that I admired you, but I told myself it was only friendship." (*SS*, 417)

Edward sidesteps the issue of his own acting by overlooking Elinor's stress on his behaviour, on the external display of feelings. When Elinor points out that their acquaintance were 'led away by it', the figurative meaning is implied, but its reference to movement and agency underlines the powerful effect of acting on people. How convincing Edward's explanation that he was himself unaware of his affection for Elinor is debatable as Elinor only 'smiled and shook her head' (*SS*, 417), and expresses no further opinion on the matter. The narrator remains equally non-committal.

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[145] Gay, 27-28.

[146] Chapter 3 discusses the fluidity of the actor's self in greater detail.

Through the construction of 'miniperformances in prose', Austen alerts her reader in *Sense and Sensibility* to the possibility of her characters' acting. The novel also illustrates the inevitability of a theatrical framework to assess feelings. Willoughby and Edward's behaviour also troubles the boundary between acting and sincerity, showing that they can coincide. Austen revisits these questions in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Pride and Prejudice

With *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen continues the problematization of 'acting a part' she had begun in *Sense and Sensibility*. 'Acting' still involves a concealment of real thoughts and feelings, but *Pride and Prejudice* develops the idea of conscious, positive projection of a specific identity or 'part'. Austen introduces the idea of the truth of acting: her characters discuss and practise the need to 'act'.

Byrne argues that '[o]f all the novels, *Pride and Prejudice* most naturally lends itself to dramatic representation, mainly because of its reliance on dramatic speech.'[147] Austen's nineteenth-century reviewers noted the novel's dramatic qualities, identifying in particular its protagonist's affinities with Shakespearean comic heroines. An unsigned article in the *Critical Review* of March 1813 declared that Elizabeth Bennet 'is in fact the *Beatrice* of the tale; and falls in love on much the same principles of contrariety', referring to the latter's contentious relationship with Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, which concludes on a happy union, mirrored in Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship.[148] More recent critics have uncovered the influence of eighteenth-century drama on Austen's novel: Gay identifies Roxalana in Isaac Bickerstaff's *The Sultan* as a model for Elizabeth's wit, irreverence, and independence, performed at

[147] Byrne, 132.
[148] *Critical Heritage*, i, 44. Harris, 109-10, Gay, 79-80, 90, develop the parallels between the works.

Steventon in 1789, and Byrne sees Lady Bell Bloomer in Cowley's *Which is the Man?* as another 'linguistically sophisticated and fearlessly outspoken' prototype.[149]

Because of Elizabeth's similarities with Shakespearean and eighteenth-century comic heroines, it is tempting to look for comparisons with contemporary actresses. Harris argues that Austen specifically refers to Dorothy Jordan, the most famous comedienne of the period.[150] With her spontaneous laughter and energetic spirits, Elizabeth can indeed resemble the comic actress, praised for the same attributes.[151] There are however several objections to singling Jordan out as a model for Elizabeth. The actress was famous for her affair with the Duke of Clarence, the future King William IV, with whom she had ten children.[152] Born in 1761, Jordan was in her late thirties when Austen began writing *Pride and Prejudice*, and had had a total of thirteen pregnancies by 1811, making her an unlikely template for a heroine not 'one and twenty' (*PP*, 187).[153]

A further problem is the criticism Jordan faced when playing 'genteel roles'. As Elizabeth boldly reminds Lady Catherine, she is 'a gentleman's daughter' (*PP*, 395). Hunt on the other hand explains that:

> [Jordan] is all deficient in the *lady*; the principal secret of gentility is a certain graceful orderliness, an habitual subjugation, more or less, of impulse to manner: and Mrs. Jordan is deficient in this respect, […] she seems never to have been in the habit of controlling her impressions externally.[154]

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[149] Gay, 74; Byrne, 132.
[150] Harris, 'Jane Austen and Celebrity Culture: Shakespeare, Dorothy Jordan, and Elizabeth Bennet', *Shakespeare*, 6:4 (December 2010), 410-30; Gay, 91, notes the possible echoes but does not develop the comparison.
[151] Harris, 'Jane Austen', 415-16, presents contemporary reviews' discussion of Jordan's laughter and high spirits on stage.
[152] For a thoughtful biography of Jordan see Claire Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession: The Story of a Great Actress and a Future King* (London: Viking, 1994).
[153] Austen drafted 'First Impressions' between October 1796 and August 1797. She finished revising *Pride and Prejudice* in 1812, Southam, *Manuscripts*, 58.
[154] Leigh Hunt, *Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism, 1808-1831*, ed. Lawrence H. Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 87.

The definition of gentility as the 'subjugation' of natural, and therefore authentic impulses, is a concept reminiscent of acting. As discussed with Elinor Dashwood, the idea of 'controlling [one's] impressions externally', which is akin to 'self-command', is important to propriety in Austen's fiction. The concealment of authentic thoughts and feelings it entails also associates 'genteel' behaviour with acting. Elizabeth Bennet easily 'control[s] her impressions externally': Austen indeed contrasts her 'lively spirits' and spontaneity with Lydia's 'animal spirits' and reckless behaviour, unable to check her behaviour when the occasion requires.[155] Elizabeth in this light bears little resemblance to Dora Jordan. Yet, like Elinor, this control of impulse aligns her with Austen's other 'actresses'.

The figure of Elizabeth as an actress is a complicated issue. Like Elinor, she occasionally practises deceit to conceal truths from her family. To keep Darcy's second proposal secret, she must participate in her father's mirth at the idea: 'Elizabeth had never been more at a loss to make her feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when she would rather have cried.' (*PP*, 404) By presenting feelings different from those she experiences, Elizabeth is clearly acting. The sharp contrast between laughing and crying underlines the discrepancy between her external appearance and her inner experience, unambiguously characterising her behaviour as an act. Elizabeth is however not a performer like Laura in 'Love and Freindship' or Lucy Steele. Unlike Elinor, she does not practise 'the whole task of telling lies when politeness require[s]' (*SS*, 141). As Byrne observes, the novel is preoccupied with the question of right social conduct.[156] Elizabeth, in her attempt to 'unite civility with truth' (*PP*, 239), shows a desire to be authentic while staying within the bounds of politeness,

[155] Jill Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 75; Byrne, 144-45.
[156] Byrne, 144.

negotiating its close proximity to acting. Elizabeth is central to Austen's exploration of acting in *Pride and Prejudice* because of this very sensitivity to 'civility' and social behaviour. The novel addresses the issue through its discussion of 'performance', in scenes often filtered through its heroine's consciousness, as the audience to the social drama unfolding before her eyes. The vocabulary of the theatre dominates those scenes, alerting the reader to the possibility of acting. As Gay suggests, 'the author's choice of word establish[es] a metatheatrical conspiracy with the reading audience'.[157]

Austen puns on the different meanings of 'perform(ance)', extending her examination of 'acting' in her novels. 'Perform' carries the same ambiguity as 'act', meaning both 'to carry out in action, execute, fulfil' (*OED*, I.1.a.) and 'to present (a play, ballet, opera, etc.) on stage or to an audience', or 'to act or play; […] to represent (a character) on stage or to an audience' (*OED*, I.4.c.), senses the *OED* shows were current in the eighteenth century. The word clearly denotes a theatrical situation as it implies a presentation on stage, to an audience. Johnson does not record these meanings in his definitions of the verb and noun but adds to the entry for 'performer' that 'it is generally applied to one that makes a publick exhibition of his skill', which attests that the word conveyed the notion of a public and theatrical display in the late eighteenth century. This inscribes sequences in *Pride and Prejudice* that discuss 'performance' in a theatrical frame of reference, where a deliberate execution is presented to an audience. It implies externalisation and spectating, two dimensions crucial to acting. The idea of 'performance' runs through *Pride and Prejudice*, where women 'perform' musical entertainments and characters such as Elizabeth and Darcy discuss their social

[157] Gay, 81.

behaviour as a 'performance'.[158] It is an integral part of the novel's discussion of 'acting'.

Scenes of 'performance' in *Pride and Prejudice*, such as Elizabeth's piano-playing at Rosings or Mr Collins's discussion of the clergyman's duties, are often accompanied by the verbs 'expose' and 'exhibit', inscribing those scenes further in a dynamic of theatricality, as they convey the idea in 'perform' of showing something to a public. The *OED* defines 'expose' as 'to exhibit openly; to display to the public gaze' (II.6.a.), and 'exhibit' as 'to submit or expose to view; to show, display' (II.4.) and 'to show publicly for the purpose of amusement' (II.10.a.). This indicates actions that anticipate an audience, thereby carrying a theatrical dimension. Johnson's *Dictionary* confirms the currency of these senses in the eighteenth century, defining 'expose' as '5. To lay open to examination', which clearly indicates scrutiny is anticipated, and 'exhibit' as '1. To offer to view or use; to offer or propose in a formal or public manner' and '2. To show; to display'. Both verbs entail a public dimension and the implication of a conscious desire to attract attention. The idea of externalisation, an important feature of 'acting', is embedded in the Latin prefix 'ex' ('out'). 'Exhibit' also carries a connection to the world of the theatre: in 'Love and Freindship', Philander and Gustavus 'Exhibit under the assumed names of *Lewis* and *Quick*' (*Juv*, 141), as quoted above. The use of 'expose' and 'exhibit' in *Pride and Prejudice* suggests the characters either construct themselves or are perceived as performers as the verbs introduce a theatrical dimension.

The Netherfield ball epitomises the novel's discussion of 'performance'. This highly comic episode is framed like a theatrical sequence, opening with 'Elizabeth

[158] See for instance Darcy's ambiguous claim '"We neither of us perform to strangers"' (*PP*, 197). Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1960), 125, also considers 'performance' central to the novel.

enter[ing] the drawing-room' and closing on the Bennets' prolonged exit from the scene (*PP*, 100, 115). There is a 'doubling of perspectives' throughout the sequence, as Elizabeth watches the company looking at her family, which inscribes it in 'the widespread social network of vigilance and visibility' that Joseph Litvak argues characterises the theatricality of nineteenth-century novels.[159] While critics often examine Elizabeth's verbal 'performance' as she dances with Darcy, the evening is also a series of scenes in which her family 'perform', with unfortunate flourish and determination.[160] They are the source of great social embarrassment, 'one of Austen's great themes in the novel', where each relative's 'performance' is a greater frustration to Elizabeth.[161] Austen puns on the double meaning of 'perform' and plays on the discrepancy between the characters' view of their own actions and their actual reception. Social behaviour is examined as the acting of a part, as James Austen argued in his prologue to the 1788 private theatrical.[162]

It is appropriate that the novel should address the issue of performance at this point in the narrative because dancing assemblies, even in private homes, were a social occasion that was a 'point of intersection' between the public and the private realms, where behaviour was assessed as a public performance.[163] As one of the few opportunities for men and women to interact and courtships advance, the conduct of both parties and their relatives was of paramount importance. Unfolding in a demarcated space, the drawing-room functions as a stage. As in other sequences in Austen's fiction, dialogue dominates the chapter, infusing her prose with dramatic

[159] Byrne, 140; Litvak, x.
[160] On Elizabeth's 'verbal performance' see Gay, 83-84.
[161] Byrne, 139.
[162] See Chapter 1.
[163] Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability, and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.

qualities. This allows her characters to truly 'perform' and construct themselves, as direct speech offers the mimesis of drama which third-person narration cancels.

The first to step on the stage is Mr Collins, who insists on introducing himself to Mr Darcy despite Elizabeth's recommendations; '[i]t vexed her to see him expose himself to such a man.' (*PP*, 110) Austen puns on the double meaning of 'expose' as offering to view and 'to lay open (to danger, censure, ridicule)' (*OED*, I.4.), for, as Mr Collins literally offers himself in a formal manner to Darcy, he also exposes himself to ridicule. Convinced he is showing deference to Lady Catherine's nephew, Mr Collins unwittingly performs his true character of vulgar obsequiousness, for propriety dictates that he wait for Darcy to initiate the introduction. As the evening progresses, the Bennets in turn expose themselves, a source of increasing aggravation to Elizabeth.

The vocabulary of acting and performing serves to draw the reader's attention to the characters' behaviour. It is used ironically and participates in the comedy of the scene, but it is also used as a tool for criticism as it highlights the shortcomings of their conduct. The next to 'perform' is Mrs Bennet. Elizabeth is desperate to check her mother's 'audible whisper' (*PP*, 111) during dinner when she boasts of Jane and Bingley's forthcoming match, showing a lack of discretion. Borrowed from the language of the stage, the 'audible whisper' also suggests that Mrs Bennet is performing a self-conscious display, her private conversation with her daughter thus marked as intended for the company. When Elizabeth reminds her of Darcy's presence, Mrs Bennet retorts: '"What is Mr. Darcy to me, pray, that I should be afraid of him? I am sure we owe him no such particular civility as to be obliged to say nothing *he* may not like to hear."' (*PP*, 111) Mrs Bennet implicitly refers to Darcy's 'disagreeable' nature (*PP*, 11), which she argues exempts her from following the rules of social conduct. However, in so doing, Mrs Bennet performs the 'want of propriety' (*PP*, 220) to which

Darcy later objects as she exposes her true character to the whole assembly. By speaking loudly, she makes her private opinion public, transforming her speech into a small-scale performance. She also draws attention to the idea of civility as a principle that requires the concealment of true feelings. Austen plays with the paradox that by foregoing the 'acting' civility entails, Mrs Bennet 'exposes' herself more. As the unfolding of the narrative demonstrates, this has disastrous consequences, as it causes Jane almost to lose Bingley.

Austen's characters indeed consider social gatherings as occasions where the internal being is externalised, placing them in the network of visibility Litvak identifies. Elizabeth's reaction confirms her understanding of this exchange as social display, for she then looks for Darcy's reaction. This doubling of perspectives highlights the theatrical nature of the scene and creates a scene within the scene:

> Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. She could not help frequently glancing her eye at Mr. Darcy, though every glance convinced her of what she dreaded. […] The expression of his face changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity. (*PP*, 112)

This incident echoes Mrs Bennet's visit to Netherfield during Jane's illness, where Elizabeth, also seen 'blushing for her mother' (*PP*, 47), is concerned that '[she] should be exposing herself again' by continuing to advertise Jane's popularity with men (*PP*, 49). Austen again puns on 'expose', Mrs Bennet subjecting herself to censure by publicly broadcasting her thoughts. Darcy's gaze confirms the idea that Mrs Bennet offers a 'spectacle'. Elizabeth witnesses two performances simultaneously: in the position of spectator, she observes the changes in Darcy's facial expression, identifying the passions of 'contempt' and 'gravity'. Darcy's body functions as the 'semiotic score' of his internal feelings.

These embarrassing performances continue with Mary's singing as '[s]uch an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to her' (*PP*, 112). 'Exhibiting' reveals Mary's

awareness that she is putting herself on display. This contrasts with the fact that Elizabeth only performs when she is solicited. As such, Elizabeth is not a 'performer', for she does not court opportunities to 'expose' herself. When Mr Bennet urges Mary to 'let the other young ladies have time to exhibit' (*PP*, 113), it is a cruel reminder that her performance is not one of musical talent but rather of want of appreciation of her abilities. It also establishes female musical performances as occasions of self-display. The projection of a certain image links this scene to acting, which comes into full being with Mr Collins, who truly treats his conduct as a part.

Austen plays on Mr Collins's 'consciousness of the need to perform one's social role' by making his actions appear as a performance: it suggests artifice and therefore implies that his true character is the opposite from the one he intends to project.[164] Mr Collins then seizes the opportunity to launch into a monologue on the duties of the clergyman, amounting to a grand finale: 'And with a bow to Mr. Darcy, he concluded his speech, which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room.' (*PP*, 113) The bow, a grand theatrical gesture, formally closes his speech and reveals it as a piece of acting.[165] The level of his voice, like Mrs Bennet's 'audible whisper', confirms it is intended as public. Addressing himself to Darcy, Mr Collins signals his social importance to the company by advertising his connection to Lady Catherine's nephew. This polite gesture becomes a metonymy for his social position. Austen also makes a gender joke at the expense of her character: because his speech is an 'exhibition', Mr Collins is unaware that he associates himself with the 'young ladies' and presents himself as effeminate by speaking immediately after Mr Bennet's reference to 'the other young ladies'. Mr Collins is also publicising his suitability as Lady Catherine's

[164] Gay, 93.
[165] Gay, 94, also identifies the bow as a theatrical gesture.

cleric and a potential husband for the Bennet girls. The performance he gives is however a far cry from the one he intends.

The theatrical dimension of these different acts and their implications are summarised in Elizabeth's response:

> To Elizabeth it appeared, that had her family made an agreement to *expose* themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to *play their parts with more spirit, or finer success*; and happy did she think it for Bingley and her sister that some of the *exhibition* had escaped his notice, and that his feelings were not of the sort to be much distressed by the folly which he must have witnessed. (*PP*, 114, emphasis added)

Austen deploys the vocabulary of acting with heavy irony as the Bennets perform themselves. She makes a complex joke as she introduces the paradox that their authentic behaviour is, in fact, a performance, and a regrettable one. While comic for the reader, it has very serious consequences for the future of the Bennet daughters.

The Bennets are however not the only ones guilty of unfortunate performances in *Pride and Prejudice*. Caroline Bingley, Elizabeth's 'fair rival', is a more sophisticated actress than Lucy Steele. Like Elizabeth she is sensitive to the rules of social conduct but openly comments on them, thus demonstrating a willingness to perform the role of polite young woman, thereby betraying acting. She furthermore shows the need to constantly 'act' and project a specific image of femininity. Caroline understands the importance of externalisation and is more successful than Mary in the display of her talents but she also, like Mr Collins and Mrs Bennet, reveals her true nature through her performances. Acting is paradoxically both a social 'concealer' and a revealing activity.

Caroline shows an inclination to both stage herself and conceive others' behaviour as instances of acting. Caroline's reflections on Elizabeth's spontaneous walk to Netherfield, which leads her to arrive glowing but with muddied garments, are

an early instance of her tendency to conceive social behaviour as a premeditated performance:

> "*You* observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure," said Miss Bingley; "and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see *your sister* make such an exhibition. […] [W]hat could she mean by it?" (*PP*, 39)

Caroline uses 'exhibition', 'a visible show or display' to cast Elizabeth's initiative as a conscious self-display. Her insinuation that there is a hidden, intended meaning behind Elizabeth's otherwise spontaneous action implies that Caroline wishes Darcy to interpret this walk as part of a premeditated plan, an acted gesture. It also demonstrates that female action is examined like a performance. In exposing Elizabeth's unladylike behaviour, Caroline is herself guilty of 'exhibiting' as she externalises her sense of female politeness. Like Mr Collins and Mrs Bennet before her, her performance fails, as her true spiteful character transpires, and Darcy and Bingley moreover contradict her assessment. Caroline 'acts' at the same time as she accuses Elizabeth of doing so.

While Gay observes that Caroline's praise of Georgiana Darcy's musical prowess offers 'a full-scale performance of Miss Bingley's attempts to fascinate Darcy', one of Caroline's finest acting moments occurs in Volume 1, Chapter 11, when the protagonists enjoy a quiet evening at Netherfield.[166] The narrator presents the scene like a theatrical set: assembled in the drawing-room, each character's position and occupation is detailed, allowing the reader to visualise the scene. It announces a 'miniperformance in prose'. All are quietly absorbed in their different activities but Caroline disrupts this picture of conventional evening entertainments, placing herself in the position of lead character. Her restlessness provides the action to a scene that otherwise does not call for any. Caroline's underlying scheme is to attract Darcy, a goal which identifies her behaviour as an act:

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[166] Gay, 81.

> Miss Bingley's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy's progress through *his* book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually making some inquiry, or looking at his page. […] At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his, she gave a great yawn and said, "How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!" […]
>
> No one made any reply. She then yawned again, threw aside her book, and cast her eyes around the room in quest of some amusement. (*PP*, 60)

Caroline's reading is clearly marked as an act for her attention is not directed at her book. She aims to externalise the refinement and taste she hopes Darcy will notice, as, to the long list of female accomplishments she had made in Chapter 8, Darcy added reading.[167] Her 'reading' is a performance, an unsubstantiated signifier whose true meaning is to attract Darcy. It would come as no surprise if she were to hold her book upside down, the fact that she is reading a second volume already an absurd situation. Caroline joins the long line of eighteenth-century comic heroines who use books to cover their real pursuits, such as Lydia Languish in *The Rivals* who hurriedly exchanges her improper sentimental novels for the works of the more suitable moralists James Fordyce and Hester Chapone when Mrs Malaprop and Sir Absolute approach.[168] Caroline's performance is moreover betrayed by her 'great yawn', akin to a grand dramatic gesture that calls for attention and also contradicts the interest in books she so vociferously proclaims. The scene is highly comic, an irony as Caroline endeavours to be seductive. Her 'performance' therefore amusingly differs from the one she intends, like Mr Collins or Mrs Bennet.

Her next attempt is to take control of the conversation and introduce a topic that will spark Darcy's interest. When she interrupts her brother and Jane's discussion of a

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[167] For a brief discussion of the importance of female accomplishments see Gary Kelly, 'Education and Accomplishments' in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 252-61.

[168] R. B. Sheridan, The Rivals, in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. Cecil J. L. Price, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), i, I, ii.

ball to declare that 'it would be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing made the order of the day [at balls]' (*PP*, 61), Caroline clearly believes she expresses an opinion that matches Darcy's as the gentleman was unwilling to dance at the Meryton assembly. She also parades a concern for topical intellectual matters as conversation was an important pursuit in the eighteenth century.[169] She in fact 'exposes' herself as her brother points out the absurdity of her comment: '"Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a ball.'" (*PP*, 61) Caroline delivers a line of what she believe will advertise her as an enlightened lady without fully understanding the part.

When intellectual considerations fail and conversation wanes, Caroline resorts to simply flaunting her physical attractiveness by walking about the room, a performance, as she presents her body for her audience to view:

> Her figure was elegant, and she walked well;—but Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious. In the desperation of her feelings she resolved on one effort; and, turning to Elizabeth, said,
>
> "Miss Eliza Bennet, let me persuade you to follow my example, and take a turn about the room.—I assure you it is very refreshing after sitting so long in one attitude."
>
> Mr. Darcy looked up. (*PP*, 61)

If Caroline is clearly acting, so is Darcy. The phrase 'inflexibly studious' suggests a form of conscious effort, a deliberate performance. His interest in his book is, if more genuine than Caroline's, not so steadfast, as Elizabeth's participation is enough to interrupt his otherwise apparently unwavering literary interest. By drawing attention to the physical space, Caroline also demonstrates confidence in using the room like a stage. While Caroline in all likelihood refers to her own previous immobility, 'sitting

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[169] For the significance of conversation in the period see Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); for the importance of conversation in Austen see *The Talk in Jane Austen*, ed. Bruce Stovel and Lynn Weinlos Gregg (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002); John A. Dussinger, *In the Pride of the Moment: Encounters in Jane Austen's World* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Bharat Tandon, *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem, 2003).

so long in one attitude', she also includes Elizabeth who, 'at work in the opposite corner' (*PP*, 59), has also been 'sitting so long in one attitude', separated from the main action of the drawing-room. Caroline implies that Elizabeth is in an 'attitude' as well, an affected pose, performing the role of the young woman intent on her needlework, to advertise to Darcy her commitment to female duties and therefore suitability as a wife. As discussed in relation to *Sense and Sensibility*, 'attitude' carries with it strong theatrical connotations. Caroline thus betrays her own acting.

The idea of theatrical attitudes was also the subject of much ridicule at the turn of the century. As discussed in Chapter 1, the *Attic Miscellany* satirised acting excesses with its series 'The Actor', a fictional correspondence from Theatricus Automaton, 'Professor of Attitudes'. 'Automaton' implies that attitudes are mechanical and lack the sensibility that is the mark of an actor's art. The engraving for 'attitude' shows the actor Lewis, mentioned in the juvenilia, in an affected foppish posture. (Figure 3.a.) In 1807 the *Theatrical Speaker* likewise complained that 'attitude is much abused on the stage'. [170] In the word 'attitude' therefore Austen's readers would surely have recognised the contemporary criticisms of excessive attitudes. Austen in this way uses references to theatre and acting to mock Caroline, who displays her affectation further.

'Attitude' would also have resonated for Austen's first readers with the sexual implications of performance. Originating in the 1790s and revised in 1811-12, the novel's inception and publication coincide with the heyday of Emma Hamilton's performances of Attitudes drawn from classical culture.[171] Now best known as Lord Nelson's mistress, Emma Hamilton was a celebrity and entertainment sensation in her own right between the late 1780s and the early 1800s, regaling high society with

[170] *Theatrical Speaker*, 2.
[171] For the composition of Pride and Prejudice see Southam, *Manuscripts*, 58-60.

successive postures of classical figures such as Medea and Niobe: 'the Attitudes worked as an elite parlour game or charades, in which the audience competed to guess the posture Emma adopted.'[172] Her attitudes borrowed theatrical gestures.[173] The high demand across Europe for the German artist Friedrich Rehberg's sketches of twelve of her poses attests to her tremendous popularity.[174] (Figure 5) Hamilton featured regularly in newspapers because of her liaison with Nelson, but her status as artist was also acknowledged, the *Morning Herald* in 1801 calling her the 'celebrated *female attitudinarian*'.[175] The article does not mention her by name, which illustrates her notoriety.

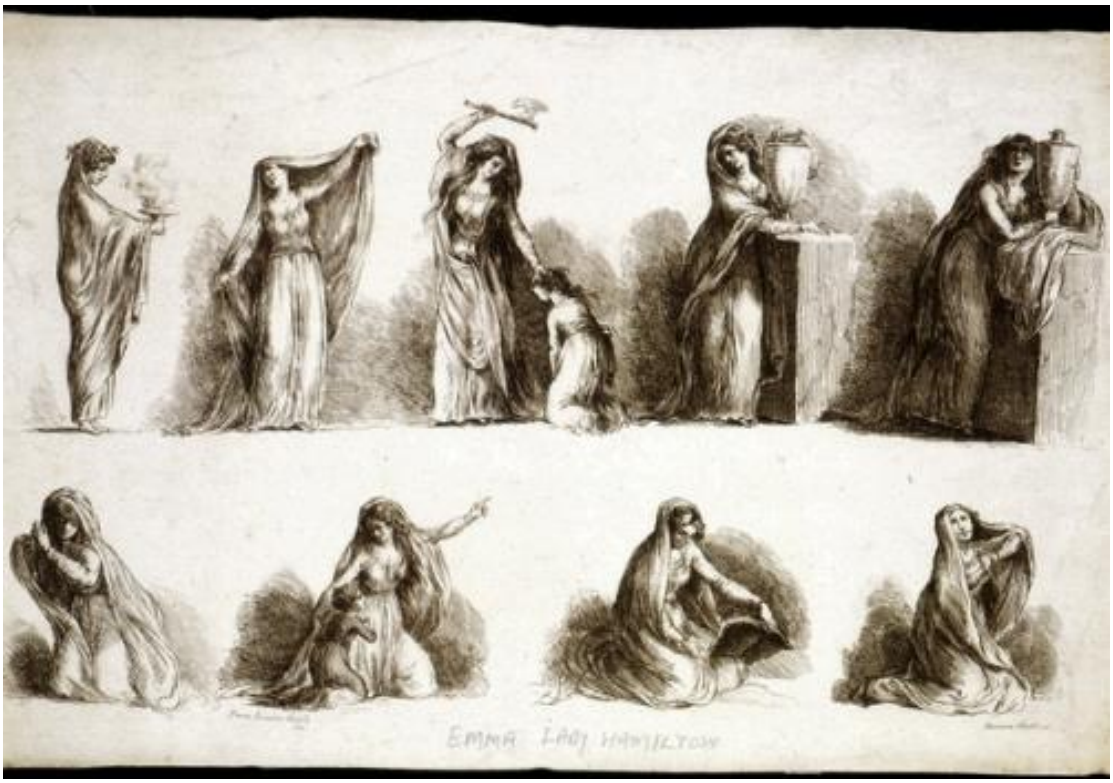


Figure 5: The Attitudes of Emma Hamilton, Francesco Novelli after Friedrich Rehberg (1791), Victoria & Albert Museum

[172] Kate Williams, *England's Mistress: The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton* (London: Hutchinson, 2006), 141. See also Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on some Trends of Theatrical Fashion 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 110-208.
[173] Holmström, 136, argues the theatre had no influence on Hamilton but both shared the same practice.
[174] Williams, 143-44.
[175] *Morning Herald*, 12 April 1801, quoted in Williams, 272.

While Hamilton's performances were applauded by fashionable society, many satirical prints lampooned her by satirising the sexually charged nature of her 'Attitudes'. Thomas Rowlandson in 1790 produced an engraving that satirised Hamilton's career as an artist's model. Her naked body, the men's looks and gestures, the satyr's mask, and the ancient statues' lascivious embraces all imply sexual freedom.[176] (Figure 6) In 1801, James Gillray issued 'Dido in Despair!', which depicts

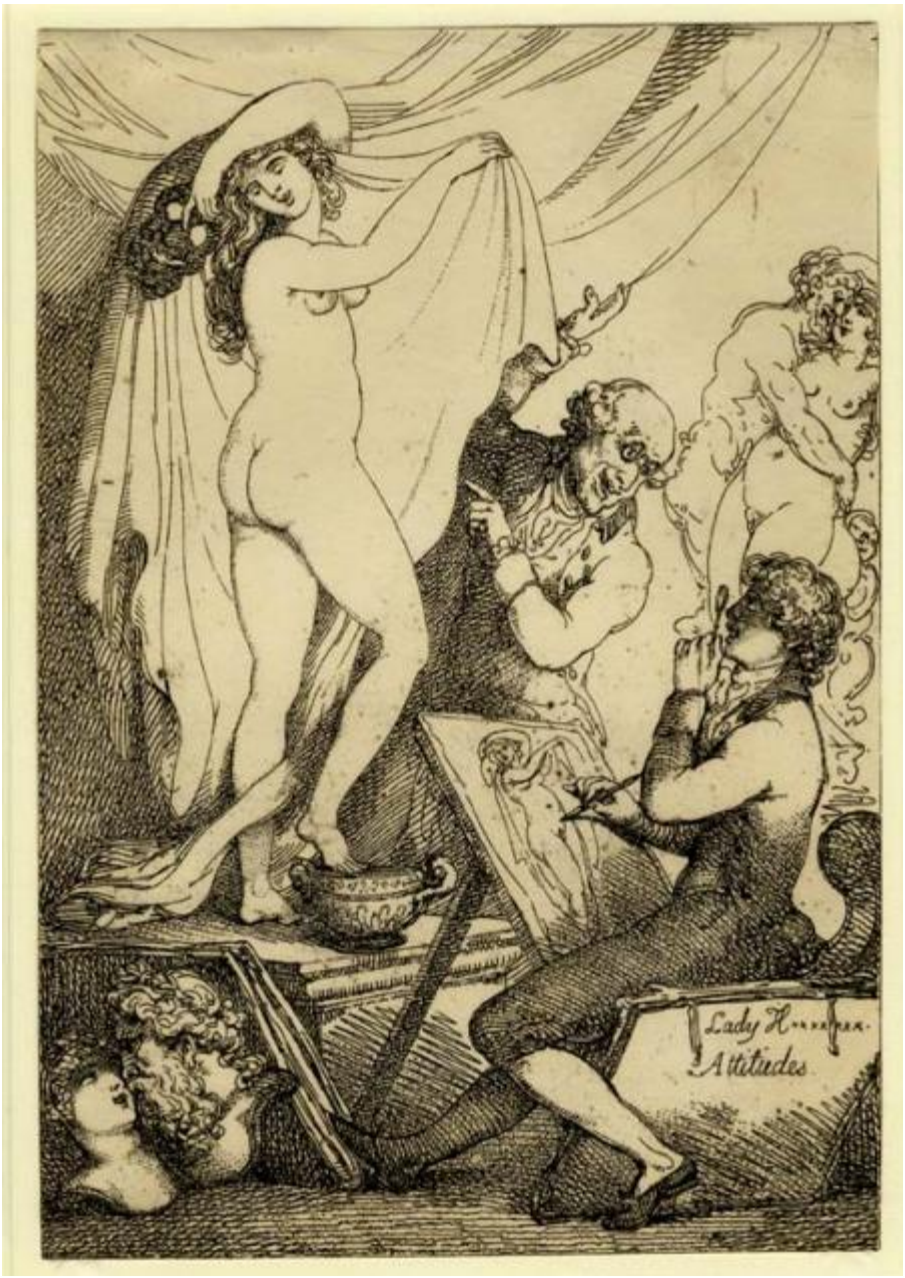


Figure 6: 'Lady H*******'s Attitudes' (1790), Thomas Rowlandson, British Museum

[176] Williams, 45-53, 52-53, Hamilton modelled for Romney and most likely for Sir Joshua Reynolds.

a pregnant and dishevelled Hamilton in a posture of despair, with, on the couch is a volume entitled 'Studies of Academic Attitudes Taken from the Life'. The phrase 'taken from the life', alongside the picture of a sprawled naked woman, refers to Hamilton's career as an artist's model and to her reputation for a dissolute past. (Figure 7) 'Attitudes' were thus the object of ridicule when Austen composed and revised *Pride and Prejudice*.



Figure 7: 'Dido in Despair!', James Gillray (1801), British Museum

Austen was surely alluding to Emma Hamilton in Caroline's 'attitude' for her turn about the room is an unambiguous solicitation of Darcy's gaze. The word 'attitude' therefore associates Caroline with self-conscious display and lascivious flirtation. Darcy's refusal to join the women firmly establishes him in the position of spectator and fixes the young women as performers. Darcy does not shy away from the sexual implications of Caroline's proposal as he draws attention to his condition of spectator

and voyeur when he comments: '"I can admire you much better as I sit by the fire"' (*PP*, 62). Positioning himself as a spectator, Darcy acknowledges the theatrical nature of the situation and the women's performance of their femininity. Caroline has therefore succeeded in attracting Darcy's gaze.

Any loss of attention leads Caroline to steer the focus of the scene back to her, giving herself the functions of actress and playwright. It is as if the narrative were playing with the character's desire to occupy the lead position by repeatedly frustrating its attempts to appropriate the narrative, and in so doing exposing Caroline's behaviour as an act to attract Darcy. She further displays her need to be the centre of attention when the discussion between Elizabeth and Darcy regarding each other's character occupies the action of the scene, as she interrupts them: '"Do let us have some music," cried Miss Bingley, tired of a conversation in which she had no share.' (*PP*, 64) Gay argues that 'Miss Bingley's resentment subtly reminds us that the conversation she feels excluded from is indeed a performance' but it is not so much a reflection on their conversation as a proof that she wishes to reclaim centre-stage.[177] Her request is rendered in direct speech, allowing her to move from the position of observer to that of actor. Music is also an opportunity for women to perform and 'exhibit', as Mary's singing has demonstrated, highlighting Caroline's desire to attract attention and therefore perform.[178] This forms a large part of the comedy of the scene as the performance she offers is rather different from the one intended. Like the Bennets at the close of the ball, 'it would have been impossible for [Caroline] to perform [her] part with more spirit'.

[177] Gay, 80.
[178] Ibid., 81.

Not all acting is however reprehensible or ridiculed in *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel addresses its necessity, an issue Austen further develops in *Mansfield Park*, introducing the paradox that even sincere feelings require acting. This question surfaces in the novel's discussion of women's agency in courtship, an issue Elizabeth and her friend Charlotte Lucas address in relation to Jane's restrained affection for Bingley. If Elizabeth 'consider[s] with pleasure it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general', Charlotte on the other hand argues such a discovery is strategic:

> "it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him. […] In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew *more* affection than she feels." (*PP*, 23-24)

Both women refer to the physical manifestation of internal feelings, which places courtship in a theatrical framework as both parties rely on the 'density of signs and sensations' that Barthes identifies as the characteristic of theatricality. Charlotte implicitly argues for the necessity for women to act: the idea of 'showing more' feeling than really experienced implies first of all an outward display of feelings, and secondly a projection of sentiments that do not completely mirror the individual's feelings, thus involving deception and 'acting', however honest its intent. This conversation moreover takes place at the Netherfield ball, a social event which, as already noted, bears a strong theatrical dimension, illustrating Charlotte's point. While Charlotte does not deny the sincerity of Jane's feelings, her observation argues that even the truth must be acted out. It is an instance of the Real-love politics she practises throughout the novel.

Events unfortunately for Jane prove Charlotte right, as Darcy later confesses that Jane's lack of emotional display convinced him of her indifference towards Bingley, which led Darcy to estrange him. While Darcy admits that his personal objections to the match coloured his interpretation of Jane's feelings, he underlines

twice in his confession-letter to Elizabeth that Jane's outward show of feeling had a greater influence:

> Your sister I also watched.—Her look and manner were open, cheerful and engaging as ever, but without any symptoms of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment. […] I shall not scruple to assert that the serenity of your sister's countenance and air was such, as might have given the most acute observer, a conviction that, however amiable her temper, her heart was not likely to be easily touched. (*PP*, 219-20)

Darcy presents his situation as that of detached spectator, underlining his active gaze, suggestive of the position of theatrical audiences, and illustrating 'the widespread social network of vigilance and visibility' Litvak identifies as characteristic of the theatrical in the novel.[179] Jane is the object of his observation, thereby inserting her in a theatrical framework. The opposition between 'received' and 'participation of sentiment' implies that courtship is a dynamic exchange and requires action: the externalisation and therefore 'acting' of feelings are necessary. 'Countenance' and 'air' emphasise the importance of the character's external appearance in determining his or her inner feelings, confirming Charlotte's point. Elizabeth is forced to recognise that 'Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed' (*PP*, 231). The necessity of externalising feelings infuses sincere feelings with acting, and vice versa, a paradox Austen develops in *Mansfield Park*.

With *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen refines the inclusion of dramatic techniques she developed in the juvenilia to create sophisticated 'miniperformances in prose', which place her characters in a theatrical framework, throwing doubts over the sincerity of their behaviour. It also illustrates the impossibility for characters of avoiding this framework in determining others' feelings. With

[179] Litvak, x.

Mansfield Park, Austen offers her most sustained exploration of the theatricality of social behaviour her novels address, arguing that the artificiality of acting can sometimes present a greater sincerity than everyday behaviour.

Chapter 3: *Mansfield Park* and the Truth of Acting

Following Austen's 'light & bright & sparkling' performance in *Pride and Prejudice*, readers are often struck by the strong difference in tone of *Mansfield Park*, often considered an anomaly in Austen's oeuvre.[180] Rather than discussing whether or not *Mansfield Park* does represent a departure in the novelist's writing, I would like to stress the continuities between the two novels and argue that Austen develops in her first novel fully composed during the Regency era the question of 'acting a part' she had examined in her previous published works. With its unique inclusion of private theatricals, acting permeates the world of Mansfield. As this chapter demonstrates, all of the novel's characters are caught in its theatrical network, however reluctant they may be. Austen again constructs scenes that borrow contemporary acting theories, highlighting the difficulty of distinguishing between sincere and deceitful behaviour. There is a long critical tradition of seeing *Mansfield Park* as treating the theatre with suspicion but this chapter argues that it in fact helps bring to light elements that the novel's characters would prefer remained hidden.[181] The novel argues for the truth of acting.

As in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen plays with the idea that her characters are never more entertaining nor more successful at performing than when they are themselves. Nowhere is this better illustrated than when Sir Thomas, the head of the Bertram family, returns from a taxing journey to Antigua, only to find his home overturned by his children's theatricals. Eager to see his library, he is struck by its

[180] *Letters*, 203.
[181] For the antitheatrical position of *Mansfield Park* see Introduction, n. 3.

'general air of confusion' and by the 'hallooing' behind the door to the billiard-room (*MP*, 213):

> He stepped to the door, rejoicing at that moment in having the means of immediate communication, and opening it, found himself on the stage of a theatre, and opposed to a ranting young man, who appeared likely to knock him down backwards. At the very moment of Yates perceiving Sir Thomas, and giving perhaps the very best start he had ever given in the whole course of the rehearsals, Tom Bertram entered at the other end of the room; and never had he found greater difficulty in keeping his countenance. His father's looks of solemnity and amazement on this his first appearance on any stage, and the gradual metamorphosis of the impassioned Baron Wildenhaim into the well-bred and easy Mr. Yates, making his bow and apology to Sir Thomas Bertram, was such an exhibition, such a piece of true acting as he would not have lost upon any account. […] The house would close with the greatest eclat. (*MP*, 213-14)

In an ironical twist typical of Austen, it is at the very moment that official acting ceases that the real performance takes place and her interest in the scene is sparked. Like the Bennets at the close of the Netherfield ball, Yates and Sir Thomas offer a highly entertaining spectacle. The comedy originates in its situation: the theatre's most vehement adversary, Sir Thomas, finds himself on an actual stage. Like a Regency spectator, Tom identifies the passions of 'solemnity and amazement' his father's looks express. Irony dominates the scene for even though the theatricals are instantly stopped, acting endures. Not only does acting persist, the quality improves as the performance is transferred to real life, as 'eclat' ironically indicates. Austen plays with the patriarch for he provides his eldest son with the entertainment he purports to eliminate.

As the negative presentation of 'ranting' shows, Austen was aware of the latest views on good acting practices.[182] While Arthur Murphy and Thomas Davies credited Garrick with banishing 'ranting' from the stage, the custom had clearly not been eradicated by the early nineteenth century.[183] In September 1810, the *Times*, reviewing

[182] See also Byrne, 201.
[183] Arthur Murphy, *The Life of David Garrick*, 2 vols. (London, 1801), i, 12-13; Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, 2 vols. (London, 1780), i, 43.

the performance of *The Jealous Wife* at the Lyceum, complained of 'that powerful attack on the passions for which we can find no gentler name than *ranting*', an objection that featured regularly in the newspapers of the period.[184] The contemporary reader would therefore recognise Yates as a poor actor. As Byrne and Gay note, Tom's friend is named ironically, for Richard Yates was a popular and talented comedian.[185] Austen plays with such references to contemporary actors throughout *Mansfield Park*, making her characterisation multi-layered and extremely sophisticated, as this chapter demonstrates.

The question of acting is further complicated by Austen's association of her characters with specific dramatic parts, which is crucial to understanding the novel's subtle absorption of the theatre.[186] It is significant that Sir Thomas should encounter Yates and not, for instance, Mr Rushworth rehearsing, for Yates impersonates Sir Thomas's direct counterpart in Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*, Baron Wildenhaim, the play's patriarch.[187] Austen dramatizes *Hamlet*'s claim that the end of acting is 'to hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (III. ii. 22-23), which Johnson revisited in his 'Preface to Shakespeare'.[188] Sir Thomas is literally brought face to face with his own 'character' in this scene. It is also a distorted, grotesque version of himself: Inchbald's patriarch is a cruel and selfish figurehead, moreover impersonated by Yates, a man of little sense whose presence the narrator conjectures Sir Thomas would consider 'by no means desirable' (*MP*, 142). The unfolding of the novel proves Sir Thomas wrong in

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[184] *The Times*, 29 September 1810.
[185] Byrne, 203-04; Gay, 183 n. 5; see also *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and other Stage Personnel in London 1660-1800*, ed. Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, Edward A. Langhans, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973-1993), xvi, 312-21.
[186] See Walton A. Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of her Artistic Development* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), 112-16., 123-24; Byrne, 154-76, also discusses the links between the characters and the thematic parallels between the two works.
[187] Byrne, 164-68, 171-75, offers a detailed analysis of the parallels between the two patriarchs.
[188] See Introduction.

burning all the copies of *Lovers' Vows*: the play holds many clues to his family's problems, who would benefit from the comparison.

Mansfield Park has the most virulent antitheatrical voices in Austen's fiction, yet is also paradoxically the novel that relies on a network of theatrical relations the most. In the above passage, Austen puns on 'house', a metonymy to designate both the 'Great House' of Mansfield (*MP*, 96) and the royal theatres, also referred to as 'houses'. This introduces parallels between the two, suggesting the estate functions like a theatre.[189] The novel is indeed Austen's work most deeply invested in the theatrical culture of her time. One of the most significant incidents in British theatre history since the Licensing Act of 1737, the O.P. (Old Price) riots, occurred a few years prior to the composition of the novel, during the season of 1809-10. A violent dispute between audiences and the management of Covent Garden theatre over the increase in ticket prices, these events dominated the newspapers and the satirical culture of the period.[190] Given the surname of Austen's heroine, Fanny Price, the obvious parallel between the 'house' that is a theatre and the 'Great House' of Mansfield, as well as the novel's preoccupation with management, the O.P. riots clearly inform *Mansfield Park*.[191] The novel is thus deeply steeped in the theatrical culture of the time.

These events, combined with the publication of seminal works on actors and acting manuals in the years prior to the composition of *Mansfield Park*, surely

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[189] Roger Sales notes 'house' is also a connection to contemporary politics, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 88-89.

[190] For an illuminating account of the O.P. riots see Marc Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

[191] Byrne, 184, sees in the surname an allusion to Garrick's Fanny Sterling in *A Clandestine Marriage*, and, 178-80, 184-86, discusses Austen's reworking of the play. Given Fanny Price's sexual innocence and overall submissiveness, compared to Miss Sterling's defiance of social decorum, it is difficult to associate the two figures. Gay, 98, argues the novel is modelled on medieval morality plays, with Henry Crawford as Vice and Fanny Virtue, whose surname echoes the Pearl of Great Price in Matthew 13.45-46. It is however more likely that Austen's character is named after Fanny Price in George Crabbe's *Parish Register*, first published in 1807, as Fanny possesses a copy of Crabbe's *Tales in Verse* (1812).

participate in the novel's sophisticated discussion of 'acting'. In 1807, Leigh Hunt published his *Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres*, which offered short assessments of the leading performers of the time, divided between comedians, tragedians, and comic-tragic actors, in line with the contemporary view that actors could rarely perform successfully in both genres.[192] This is important as it informs characterisation in *Mansfield Park* during the theatricals. Henry Siddons released his *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* in the same year.[193] The volume was widely advertised in the newspapers.[194] Although there is no evidence that Austen read Siddons's manual, given her and her family's interest in acting, it is extremely likely she would have known of it. *The Thespian Preceptor*, a volume specifically aimed at amateur performers, and the acting manual *The Theatrical Speaker*, were also published in 1807, with accompanying illustrative plates. Both works described 'dramatic passions' but expanded Aaron Hill's ten major passions, including minor passions such as modesty, shame, or gratitude. *The Thespian Preceptor*, 'perhaps the most widely used acting manual in the nineteenth century' was reissued in 1811 when Austen started working on *Mansfield Park*.[195]

1807 also saw the publication of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, which transposed the plays into third-person narration. Daniel Pollack-Pelzner persuasively argues that Austen in her Regency novels built on their techniques in her development of free indirect speech. A point crucial for this thesis is the argument that Austen was 'writing Shakespearean prose', that is a prose that can be understood as displaying theatrical qualities. Pollack-Pelzner recognises 'the actual stage practices

[192] Leigh Hunt, *Critical Essays on tbe London Performers* (London, 1807).
[193] See Introduction.
[194] See for instance *The Morning Chronicle*, 31 December 1806.
[195] Lisa Zunshine (ed.), *Acting Theory and the English Stage, 1700-1830*, 5 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), iv, 217.

that [Austen] incorporates in her narrative technique'. These, Pollack-Pelzner argues, are a form of closet drama and constitute 'miniperformances in prose'.[196] *Mansfield Park* thus participates in the contemporary novel's dialogue with drama and continues the adaptation of acting techniques Austen had developed in her earlier fiction. As this chapter demonstrates, *Mansfield Park* is Austen's most sustained examination of the ambiguities of 'acting': it is both inescapable as well as paradoxically an avenue for truth.

This chapter first discusses the *Lovers' Vows* sequence, which weaves the play into the fabric of the novel more than any other novel in the period, its traces felt long after the theatricals are over.[197] Acting permeates the novel in many other ways, through its allusions to famous contemporary actors, theatrical paintings, and the construction of dramatic scenes that adopt contemporary acting techniques. This richness of allusions distinguishes *Mansfield Park* from Austen's other published works. While Gay contends that for Austen all acting is 'the intoxicating world of make-believe', I believe that Austen challenges such a dogmatic view of acting.[198] The first part of this chapter examines the truth that lies behind acting in the performance of *Lovers' Vows*. The chapter then addresses the novel's general problematization of 'acting'. I agree with Byrne that, 'in the morally ambiguous world of *Mansfield Park*, Austen consistently puns on the words act and acting to blur the distinctions between role-playing and social conduct.'[199] Austen also puns on the word 'play', which conflates the notions of acting and amusement, introducing the idea that for some

[196] Pollack-Pelzner, 763-92, 765, 779, 774.
[197] Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814), Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), and Sydney Owenson's *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale* (1818) also include private theatricals but do not integrate the plays performed as fully as in *Mansfield Park*.
[198] Gay, 103.
[199] Byrne, 203.

characters social interaction is an indulgent game. These distinctions are however never so definite and Austen explores these ambiguities in her fiction.

Critical discussions of *Mansfield Park* frequently centre on the private theatricals, considered 'one of the thorniest problems in recent literature about Jane Austen.'[200] It is the longest sequence in the novel, spanning six chapters, with ripple effects in the rest of the narrative. Austen's positive pronouncements on Gisborne, who objected to home theatricals, and Evangelicalism, a movement which by 1814 had 'publicized the link between upper-class immorality and its rage for private theatricals', have led critics to align Austen with their position with the voices within the novel that object to theatricals.[201] *Mansfield Park* does stage contemporary anxieties about private theatricals. As Edmund points out:

> '"In a *general* light, private theatricals are open to some objections, but as *we* are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt any thing of the kind."' (*MP*, 147)

Yet Austen's family's enjoyment of theatricals, discussed in Chapter 1, and her possible performance as late as 1809 of Mrs Candour in Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777) indicate Austen's authorial intention is not to condemn theatricals.[202] The novel in fact criticises the Bertrams' personal circumstances that lead them to pursue this activity. The greater theatricality exists outside the stage in *Mansfield Park*.

When Lady Bertram announces '"We were all alive with acting"' (*MP*, 211), the implication is that the household had previously been lifeless and spiritless. Acting, an artificial and 'unreal' activity, paradoxically brings life to Mansfield.[203] This

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[200] Richard Handler and Daniel Segal, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture: An Essay on the Narration of Social Realities* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 100, quoted in Colin Pedley, '"Terrific and Unprincipled Compositions": The Reception of *Lovers' Vows* and *Mansfield Park*', *Philological Quarterly*, 74:3 (Summer, 1995), 297-316 (297).
[201] Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London, 1797), 161-75. Butler, 231-32 (231). See, *Letters*, 112, 280, for Austen's endorsement of Gisborne and Evangelicalism.
[202] For Austen's performance of Mrs Candour see Byrne, 27; Byrne follows Ellen Jordan, 'Mansfield Park', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 June 1972, 719.
[203] Henry verbally echoes this point when he reminisces '"we were all alive"' (*MP*, 282).

infusion of vitality suggests the problem lies with the source of the previous lethargy. Its origin is Sir Thomas, under whose authority the children suffer, as Maria's reason for marrying Rushworth illustrates: it is 'the restraint which her father imposed' (*MP*, 236) which prompts her to hasten her wedding. As discussed below, Sir Thomas in fact imposes the greatest acting. The stage then represents the only outlet for his children's real feelings.

The characters' true natures indeed transpire during the discussion of plays and the distribution of parts, demonstrating that it is only through role-playing and impersonation that authentic feelings can be expressed at Mansfield. Litz argues that 'impersonation leads to a negation of the self' but, as this thesis contends, Austen challenges such an idea: the 'self' in *Mansfield Park* is finally allowed to come into being on stage.[204] As Claudia Johnson observes, the characters' enactments of 'illicit or improper desire are actually among the least deceptive instances of acting in the novel, for every major character is acting all the time.'[205]

After many heated discussions, the Bertrams and their friends finally settle on Elizabeth Inchbald's 1798 adaptation of the controversial German dramatist August von Kotzebue *Lovers' Vows*, on whose politics critics then and now disagree.[206] First performed at Covent Garden on Thursday, 11 October 1798, Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* enjoyed an immediate success with audiences, running for forty-two nights during the 1798-99 season and performed throughout the nineteenth century, yet was deemed scandalous by many critics due to is Kotzebue connections.[207] The play

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[204] Litz, 126.
[205] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 100.
[206] For a comprehensive presentation of these diverging opinions see Pedley.
[207] For contemporary objections to *Lovers' Vows* and German sentimental drama see for instance Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols. (London, 1799), i, 39-47; Butler, 114-20, 233-35; Kirkham, 93-98; Pedley,

remained popular in the early nineteenth century and was transferred to provincial theatres and was performed at least seventeen times at the Theatre Royal in Bath while Austen lived there.[208] The play was also popular in print, first published in 1798, and included in Inchbald's ambitious twenty-five-volume collection *The British Theatre*, and 1808.[209] In 1811, the year Austen started drafting *Mansfield Park*, Benjamin Thompson reissued his popular *German Theatre*, also featuring *Lovers' Vows*. The play was therefore widely available from its first performance and still prevalent when Austen started composing *Mansfield Park*.

Deirdre Le Faye conjectures that Austen witnessed a private performance of *Lovers' Vows*. Austen's claim in a letter to Cassandra of 1814 that she will 'laugh at the sight of Frederick again', alluding to its performer Christopher Chowne, surely implies a first-hand performance.[210] It also illustrates the fact that, for Austen, a dramatic part and its performer overlap and inform each other, a possible clue as to why she in her fiction so seamlessly integrates her characters' on- and off-stage personae. This suggests that for Austen acting is a useful tool for uncovering true 'character'. This becomes apparent in the focus on the rehearsals in the novel, for it is there that dramatic part and personality simultaneously transpire.

The rehearsals are a liminal space where life and stage coincide and illuminate each other, the characters' behaviours offering a 'play' before the play of *Lovers' Vows*. As Byrne notes, 'the search for a suitable play is dramatised more fully than the play itself', revealing that Austen is more interested in the point of intersection between life and stage.[211] The play itself is highly significant: the novel's subtle allusions to and

[208] Byrne, 39, 150.
[209] Two other English translations appeared in 1798, Stephen Porter's *Lovers' Vows* and Anne Plumptre's *The Natural Son*.
[210] Le Faye, *Letters*, 435; Austen, *Letters*, 256, 256, 258, 262.
[211] Byrne, 187.

reworkings of the play escape modern readers unfamiliar with the text, for the play's cast illuminates Austen's characters as they are entangled. *Lovers' Vows* holds much of the sexual politics of the theatrical project.[212]

The Bertrams have an audience of one, Fanny, placed as 'the quiet auditor of the whole' (*MP*, 160), in the passive position of silent observer. As the group successively proposes and rejects 'the best plays' in the English language, 'Fanny looked on and listened, not unamused to observe the selfishness which, more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all, and wondering how it would end.' (*MP*, 154) Fanny experiences a similar situation to Elizabeth Bennet's during the Netherfield ball, but an enjoyable one. The others' deliberations are clearly marked as a form of spectacle. 'Disguise' alerts the reader that acting is already taking place even before the official acting of the play has begun. The characters try to conceal their authentic nature of 'selfishness'. Like a theatre spectator or novel-reader, Fanny wonders how it will end, a mental process that suggests fictionalisation, reinforcing the idea that she analyses her cousins' behaviour as if it were a play. This imaginative act means she understands the mechanisms of theatricality, a fact that contradicts her claim '"I cannot act"' (*MP*, 171), an issue discussed below.

While they each vie for 'first-rate' characters (*MP*, 154) that will allow them to shine, only Tom Bertram displays a genuine and unbiased interest in acting. Faced with the impossibility of finding a play to everybody's taste and ego, Tom is the only one to make constructive contributions and move the plot forward: '"We must not be so nice. A few characters, too many must not frighten us. We must *double* them. We must

[212] Byrne, 149-76, argues for a close reading of *Lovers' Vows*. R. W. Chapman was the first to comment on this, reproducing the text of Inchbald's play, with its preface and the front-page plate from the final tableau. Elaine Jordan nonetheless alerts us to the difficulty of fixing these identifications for Austen's characters as they combine traits from different characters in the play. Jordan argues the parallels are at the level of themes, in 'Pulpit, Stage, and the Novel: *Mansfield Park* and Mrs. Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 20:2 (Winter 1987), 138-48 (139-40).

descend a little. If a part is insignificant, the greater our credit in making any thing of it."' (*MP*, 154-55) The suggestion to 'descend' and therefore compromise their social position is Tom's most daring proposition, which Byrne reads as the sign of his ambivalence towards his own standing as heir to the Mansfield estate.[213] Yet Tom is, unlike the others, only guided by truly theatrical considerations: he does not question how a part will reflect on him but considers it his duty to do the role justice, which favourably alters the reader's understanding of his character. It can also be read as a sign of confidence in his own social position.

Tom's genuine motivations, which contrast with the others' selfish incentives, rather than indicating escapism as Byrne suggests, are moreover guided by a knowledge of contemporary stage practices, which reveals Austen's own keen interest in acting. This is most clearly illustrated when the Bertrams and the Crawfords discuss the attribution of parts and debate who should play the role of Agatha Friburg. Tom believes Maria would be the most successful:

> "Oh! yes, Maria must be Agatha. Maria will be the best Agatha. Though Julia fancies she prefers tragedy, I would not trust her in it. There is nothing of tragedy about her. She has not the look of it. Her features are not tragic features, and she walks too quick, and she speaks too quick, and would not keep her countenance. She had better do the old countrywoman." (*MP*, 157)

Not only does Tom prevent Julia from the opportunity of being embraced by Henry Crawford, he adds offence to injury by suggesting she play the role of an older woman. This nonetheless shows he does not consider fictional roles should reflect on their performers but rather focuses on suitability and talent alone, which again demonstrates a security in his own identity. Tom's reference to his sister's lack of tragic features testifies to his knowledge of contemporary acting theories, for actors' natural

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[213] Byrne, 186-95. Peter C. Giotta argues that Austen contrasts Tom with Henry Moreland in Colman's *The Heir at Law* (1797), the morally upright and dutiful hero of the play, to underline Tom's shortcomings as heir: 'Characterization in *Mansfield Park*: Tom Bertram and Colman's *The Heir at Law*', *Review of English Studies*, 49:196 (November 1988), 466-71 (469, 470-71).

dispositions determined the genre in which they performed. As Hunt's *Critical Essays* illustrate, actors were considered to be either suited for comedy or tragedy. Like Dorothy Jordan, '[n]ature hasn't formed [Julia] to be the sober-suited Queen.'[214] While critics tend to condemn Tom as frivolous and morally irresponsible, which he is for most of the novel, this surprising investment in the theatricals offers another, positive, view of his character.[215]

Julia nonetheless proves her brother wrong by showing she is capable of performing the majestic passions of tragedy. Austen again plays with the idea that 'it would have been impossible for [Julia] to play [her] par[t] with more spirit' (*PP*, 114). After the roles of Agatha and Amelia have been attributed to Maria Bertram and Mary Crawford, Julia struggles to contain her resentment:

> "Do not be afraid of *my* wanting the character," cried Julia, with angry quickness. […] [A]s to Amelia […] I quite detest her. An odious, little, pert, unnatural, impudent girl. I have always protested against comedy, and this is comedy in its worst form." And so saying, she walked hastily out of the room, leaving awkward feelings to more than one, but exciting small compassion in any except Fanny, who had been a quiet auditor of the whole, and who could not think of her as under the agitations of *jealousy* without great pity. (*MP*, 160)

This is an example of a double performance: the scene includes both Julia's intended action of indifference and the narrative's disclosure of her real sentiments. The narration underlines the discrepancy between Julia's words, which overstress her complete indifference to the part, and her overall countenance which betrays her true feelings. It is this gap that signals 'acting'.

As on stage, Julia's gestures are 'the means indicative of the interior operations of the soul.'[216] 'Jealousy' is italicised, drawing the reader's attention to it.[217] Her

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[214] Hunt, 126.
[215] For Tom as anarchic figure see Sales, 93-106.
[216] Siddons, 27.
[217] Whether these italics are Austen's or her editor's is impossible to ascertain but Austen would have at least accepted them at the proofing stage; for a discussion of authorial and editorial practices in

audience is once again Fanny, who perceives the scene's dominant emotion, exemplifying what Joanna Baillie identifies as 'the sympathetick [sic] curiosity of our nature', which conduces men to notice 'all that language of the agitated soul'. According to Baillie, '[t]here is, perhaps, no employment which the human mind will with so much avidity pursue as the discovery of concealed passion, as the tracing of the varieties and progress of a perturbed soul', which drama replicates.[218] This is precisely what Fanny does: she identifies the passion of jealousy and experiences pity, following the view that tragic scenes arouse pity in audiences.[219] Contemporary critics and reviewers complained about the lack of examples of female jealousy on the English stage and Austen appears here to be participating in and playing with this debate by presenting her readers with the expression of this passion in a female character.[220]

One of the ten passions outlined by Aaron Hill, jealousy was easily recognisable on stage. According to Henry Siddons, jealousy is difficult to represent as it combines different passions and manifests itself in different forms:

> Though we may be able to denote the general traits of hatred, grief, despair, ironical laughter, with all the other expressions, mixed or simple, which appertain to jealousy, yet it will be difficult to unite and bring them together, so as to occasion such a delineation as cannot be confounded with similar affections.[221] (Figure 8)

The Thespian Preceptor described jealousy in ways similar to Siddons and underlines the skill required to represent the divergent feelings that constitute jealousy:

> JEALOUSY, which is a mixture of passions, directly contrary to one another, can be only justly represented by one who is capable of delineating all those passions by turns. Jealousy shows itself by restlessness, peevishness,

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Mansfield Park see Kathryn Sutherland, 'Speaking Commas/Reading Commas: Punctuating *Mansfield Park*', *Text*, 12 (1999), 101-22.

[218] Baillie, 5, 10, 11.

[219] See Chapter 1. Fanny's sympathy for Julia can be explained by her own experience of these feelings: shortly after she too is 'full of jealousy and agitation' (*MP*, 187).

[220] Othello was most often cited as the archetype of jealousy; see for instance Siddons, 141-45. Boaden ii, 297-98, complained of this: 'I have often tried to conceive a *tragic* exhibition of female jealousy, that should produce a character for the actress equal in its effects to the *noble Moor*.'

[221] Siddons, 142.

> thoughtfulness, anxiety, absence of mind. […] Then the arms are folded upon the breast, the fists violently clenched, the rolling eyes darting fury.[222]



Figure 8: Henry Siddons, 'Jealous Rage', *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action; Adapted to the English Drama* (London, 1807, repr. 1822)

The *Theatrical Speaker* offers a two-page description of jealousy, with sections that are verbally identical to the *Thespian Preceptor*.[223] It also provides a concise description of the 'outward marks' of jealousy: 'by muscles intense, and the look pensive, or the look intense, and muscles languid, interchangeably.'[224] Jealousy was frequently illustrated with the features that characterised hatred. (Figure 9) The real spectacle is

[222] *Thespian Preceptor*, 35-36.
[223] *Theatrical Speaker*, 31-33.
[224] Ibid., 35, 36.

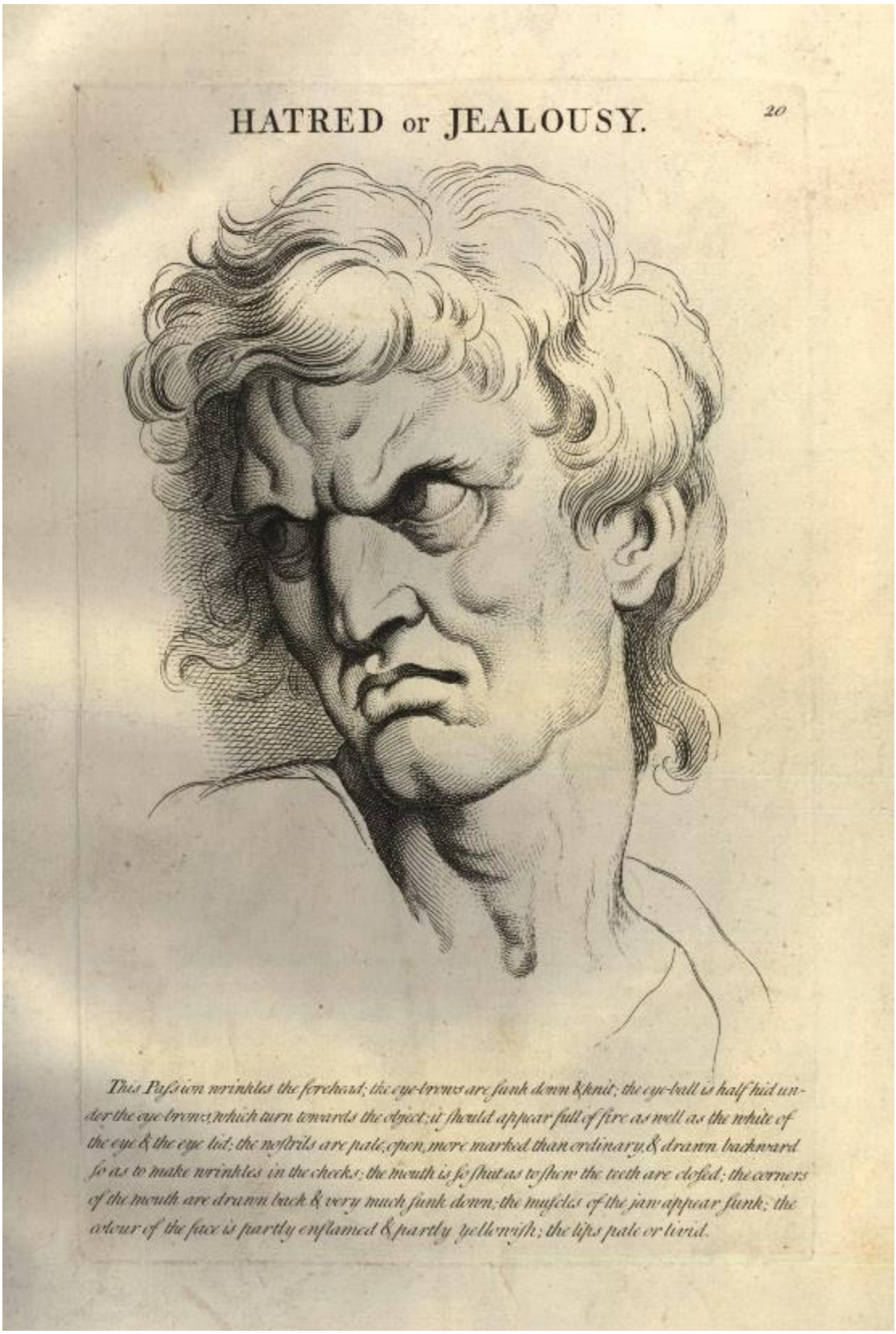


Figure 9: Hatred or Jealousy, after Charles Le Brun, in *Heads Representing the different Passions of the Soul; as they are Expressed in the Human Countenance: Drawn by that Great Master Monsr Le Brun, and finely Engraved on Twenty Quarto Copper Plates* (London?, c. 1805)

off the stage. Julia's investment in which female character she performs will only be

evident to readers familiar with *Lovers' Vows*: Agatha would allow her to share intimate scenes with Henry. *Mansfield Park* invites comparisons between Austen's protagonists and the roles they undertake in the play, illustrating the truth contained within the artifice of acting.

Much of the anxiety that surrounds *Lovers' Vows* in *Mansfield Park* is in fact not so much the play's politics as the fact that Austen's characters choose parts that allow them to express their real thoughts and feelings, thus infusing their fictional roles with authenticity. This blurs the conservative neat boundaries between stage-acting and social behaviour. As Fanny observes when Maria plays opposite Henry in the first act, she 'acted well—too well' (*MP*, 193). What Fanny identifies are not Maria's superior histrionic talents: her ability to perform the part so well is because it allows her to safely exteriorise her own feelings. In the first act, Agatha shares a physically intimate scene with Frederick: '*Frederick, with his eyes cast down, takes Agatha's hand, and puts it to his heart* […] *Frederick embraces Agatha*'.[225] Maria can therefore touch Henry, which Regency decorum would otherwise forbid. Her lines in Act I can moreover be seen as proleptic for Agatha remembers the Baron seduced her and she gave birth to an illegitimate child; Henry Crawford will also seduce Maria.

Dramatic parts illuminate Austen's characters, often at their expense. As Lynn Shepherd observes, 'the artificial roles of *Lovers' Vows* allow the younger male characters to assume costumes and "props" that form a revealing, if oblique, commentary on their real characters.' Shepherd reads Frederick's knapsack as the mirror of Henry's dislike of permanence of abode.[226] Frederick is also a soldier, fitting Henry's thirst for 'the glory of heroism' (*MP*, 275), which, as critics point out, remains

[225] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, I. i.
[226] Shepherd, *Clarissa's Painter: Portraiture, Illustration, and Representation in the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 286 n. 10.

unsubstantiated.[227] Mr Rushworth's pride in his 'two and forty' speeches is even more ironic given his otherwise poor verbal skills (*MP*, 164). His delight in numbers is all the more amusing when one considers his future occupation as a member of Parliament, a public office that relies strongly on the speaker's oratorical skills and where elocution is therefore key. In Cassel's florid speeches however, Rushworth can find the eloquence he lacks in life.

Austen was not alone in exploring the ambiguity between the artificiality of reality (within a novel) and the truth of acting (on stage). Frances Burney also dramatised the paradox of a self that can only appear under the protection of performance in *The Wanderer*, published the same year as *Mansfield Park*.[228] While their joint publication means neither can have influenced the other, it is striking that they both include private theatricals and address the paradox of the authenticity of acting. Her identity hidden for most of the novel, including from the reader, Burney's heroine Juliet Granville nonetheless offers a glimpse of her true social identity when she performs the part of Lady Townley in Vanburgh and Cibber's *The Provok'd Husband* (1728). Juliet's authentic self transpires through the costume of the aristocratic character, as 'the ease with which she wore her ornaments […] spoke her […] accustomed to such attire'.[229] Juliet's social status is therefore paradoxically revealed through artifice and performance.

Juliet is moreover able to perform Lady Townley successfully because, despite their differences in terms of moral rectitude, the stage-heroine's feelings echo Juliet's, thus blurring the distinction between histrionic and everyday action. Juliet

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[227] Gay, 102; Sales, 90-91.
[228] Edgeworth's *Patronage* also includes private theatricals. Like Austen's Fanny Price, her heroine Caroline Percy refuses to participate in the performance of Voltaire's *The Tragedy of Zara*.
[229] Frances Burney, *The Wanderer* (1814), ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert. L. Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 92.

paradoxically does not act when she is acting. The audience quarrels over the origin of her success:

> that which was regarded as the highest refinement of her acting, was a certain air of inquietude, which was discernible through the utmost gaiety of her exertions, and which, with the occasional absence and sadness, that had their source in her own disturbance, was attributed to deep research into the latent subjects of uneasiness belonging to the situation of Lady Townly [sic]. This, however, was nature, which would not be repressed; not art, that strove to be displayed.[230]

The audience rehearses contemporary debates about how much art is necessary to the performer but Juliet's success is unambiguously identified as the similarity between hers and Lady Townley's feelings. It is paradoxically through the artifice of acting that Juliet can safely express her personal feelings. The *Lovers' Vows* sequence in *Mansfield Park* functions in the same way.

Austen's characters themselves underline the parallels between their everyday identities and their chosen roles. Mary Crawford uses this argument, albeit sarcastically, to convince Edmund to participate in the play: '"If *any* part could tempt *you* to act, I suppose it would be Anhalt, […] for he is a clergyman you know"' (*MP*, 170). Soon to be ordained, Edmund is a natural candidate for the part. Yet, by suggesting Edmund should impersonate Anhalt because of their professional resemblance, Mary is also blurring the boundary between fiction and reality: is it really as Anhalt that Edmund will appear, or as himself? The novel then asks the question, is Edmund really acting in the sense of impersonating if his stage-role is identical to his off-stage identity? What does it mean to act if one performs oneself?

Mary has a further vested interest in the issue, which brings into focus the relevance of the characters' parts to their personal feelings: appearing as Amelia Wildenhaim, she is eager to secure Edmund as her partner for she will perform intimate

[230] Ibid., 95.

and sexually charged scenes with whoever plays Anhalt. Fanny perceives this ambiguity: 'she was inclined to believe their performance would, indeed, have such nature and feeling in it as must ensure their credit, and make it a very suffering exhibition to herself' (*MP*, 200). Since Amelia and Anhalt are lovers, Mary and Edmund can express their nascent feelings for each other under the pretence of performing, the source of Fanny's 'suffering', for she too is in love with Edmund. While 'nature and feeling' are qualities that were looked for in professional performances in the period, the implication here is that Mary and Edmund are *not* acting but displaying real personal sentiments. Acting becomes an avenue for sincerity.

Edmund responds to Mary by using the same argument, that of personal situation, arriving at the opposite conclusion:

> "*That* circumstance would by no means tempt me," he replied, "for I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be very difficult to keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer; and the man who chuses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage." (*MP*, 170)

Edmund intriguingly claims he would give a poor rendition of a clergyman, even though he is destined for the profession. The underlying uncomfortable implication is that his own pulpit-delivery will be formal and solemn. Edmund's final argument is that his profession prevents him from performing: he must not 'act' in *Lovers' Vows* to 'act' as the clergyman he is to be, which troubles the neat opposition between stage acting and social conduct.

Edmund's ambivalence towards acting is representative of antitheatrical arguments but is particularly significant in relation to his coming ordination. Trilling considers 'the elections of a profession is of course in a way the assumption of a role, but it is a permanent impersonation which […] fixes the nature of the self.'[231] To

[231] Trilling, 219.

challenge Mary's flippant assertion that 'a clergyman is nothing' (*MP*, 107), Edmund singles out the importance of the clergyman's 'general conduct' (*MP*, 108), thus foregrounding external behaviour and therefore performance. The clergyman leads by example rather than word alone, placing action and 'acting' at the heart of his duties.[232] It is what enables the clergyman to be 'something'. Even if the end of his action is sincere, it nonetheless needs to be performed. Once again Austen blurs the distinction between role-playing and social conduct, a point further complicated by the contemporary link between preaching and acting methods.

Works on oratory in the period frequently drew parallels between public speaking and acting, and the importance for those seeking public office at the bar, parliament, or the pulpit, to study the lessons of the theatre. Gilbert Austin published his popular *Chironomia* in 1806, which examined not only oral delivery but emphasised the importance of 'countenance' and 'gesture' in accompanying it, underlining the same elements that theatre practitioners stressed. While Austin considers 'the introduction of the gesture of the theatre to the pulpit is indecorous and offensive', he nonetheless argues the theatre provides 'living models of almost absolute perfection in the art of delivery. [The speaker] will learn from the theatre energy, variety, and precision of action.'[233] The theatre thus teaches the qualities that should accompany delivery. As Austin's careful distinction between oratory and acting shows, there were anxieties around the parallel. If the lawyer and the preacher are to model themselves on actors, the question of how to differentiate between the two types of performance still remains. Even if stage-acting is only held as a model, it inevitably infiltrates the pulpit, which

[232] This contrasts with Henry Crawford's enthusiasm for the profession which only contemplates preaching: Henry is only interested in the opportunity to shine in front of an audience the pulpit offers, without wanting to undertake the substantial responsibilities of the profession.
[233] Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia; or, A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (London, 1806), 5, 15, 462. Austin, 135, 461, reiterates this point.

has complex ramifications for *Mansfield Park*. Its antitheatrical characters should not be so hasty in dismissing its importance.

Acting manuals also advertised the benefits of acting for public speaking in general, which confirms the widespread currency in the period of the usefulness of drama. The *Thespian Preceptor*, for instance, which was ostensibly aimed at theatrical enthusiasts, targeted a wider audience by arguing for the pertinence of its lessons in all walks of life, 'particularly those whose vocations render oratorical abilities highly essential. The *Preacher*, the *Pleader*, and the *Lecturer*, should make Elocution as much their study as the Actor'.[234] The volume identifies the three public offices and, like Austin, stresses the value of the theatre for delivery. These ideas also circulated in newspapers, attesting to their prevalence in the period. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* in 1811, announcing the forthcoming review of Kemble's production of Addison's tragedy *Cato* (1712), advised that anyone interested in delivery should turn to the theatre:

> No one, whatever his profession, who is desirous of studying the graces of elocution, and of cultivating the excellencies of the higher branches of ORATORY, should omit seeing Mr Kemble's *Cato*.[235]

This implies clergymen, for whom oratory is extremely important, also benefit from the study of performed plays. The cleric is thus supposed to borrow the practice of a profession that is on all accounts its complete opposite. This problematizes the clear division between these different professional spheres.

Austen addressed the question of the theatricality of preaching in her unfinished novel *The Watsons*, which shows her continued investment in the issue. Indifferent to

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[234] *Thespian Preceptor*, 3-4.
[235] *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 27 January 1811. Austin, 461, also advocated tragedy in particular as a model.

her father's recounting of his day, Emma Watson's interest is sparked when he warmly praises Mr Howard's preaching, whom Austen destined Emma to marry:[236]

> "I do not know when I have heard a discourse more to my mind—" continued Mr. Watson—"or one better delivered.—He reads extremely well, with great propriety and in a very impressive manner; and at the same time without any theatrical grimace or violence.—I own, I do not like much action in the pulpit—I do not like the studied air and artificial inflexions of voice, which your very popular and most admired preachers generally have.—A simple delivery is much better calculated to inspire devotion, and shews a much better taste.—Mr. Howard read like a scholar and a gentleman.[237]

Mr Howard succeeds in achieving the difficult balance between warmth and gravity Blair outlines in his *Lectures* and avoids the 'theatrical' Blair disapproved.[238] This, alongside *Mansfield Park*'s discussion of preaching, reveals Austen's interest in the pulpit's connections with the theatre and her acknowledgement of the lessons of the stage. I agree with Elaine Jordan that Austen's inclusion of a discussion of the clergyman's role is a direct response to Inchbald's claim that 'as the pulpit has not had eloquence to eradicate the crime of seduction, the stage may be allowed a humble endeavour to prevent its most fatal effects.'[239]

This places Edmund in an ambiguous position towards acting. His walk at Sotherton with Fanny and Mary symbolises the complexity of the situation. In this episode, Austen alludes to one of the period's most famous theatrical painting, Sir Joshua Reynolds's *David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761).[240] Austen's sophisticated weaving of the painting into her novel shows how deeply the world of

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[236] Austen-Leigh, 364.
[237] Jane Austen, *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 113.
[238] Blair, ii, 107.
[239] Inchbald, 'Remarks' to *Lovers' Vows*, in *The British Theatre*, 25 vols. (London, 1808), xxiii, 7. Jordan, 142-43.
[240] Shepherd, 232-49, examines the novel's visual dimension, in light of eighteenth-century portraiture. While I agree that the metaphor of the 'spectator' and 'observer' introduces a pictorial framework, it also coincides with the discourse of theatricality, which runs through *Mansfield Park*. Acting in the period involved a strong visuality, as the actor's body physically translated the meaning of the lines.

acting pervades Mansfield. The subtle parallels between the two works complicate the reading of Austen's characters.

On May 24th 1813, Jane Austen visited the retrospective of Sir Joshua Reynolds's work at the Pall Mall galleries, which had opened earlier that month on the 10th of May, in the hope of finding Mrs Bingley and Mrs Darcy, as she told her sister Cassandra.[241] The painting *David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* featured in the first room alongside the famous representation of *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784).[242] (Figure 10) Widely available in the form of engravings, both paintings were part of the popular visual culture of the time.[243] Maria Edgeworth in *Belinda* references the work: Lady Delacour notices that, waiting for her mistress's instructions, '"poor Marriott is standing in distress, like Garrick between tragedy and comedy"'.[244] Austen would therefore have been familiar with the Garrick painting before the Royal Academy's exhibition.

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[241] *Letters*, 220-21.

[242] The Garrick portrait now belongs to the Waddesdon Collection but has been on loan since 1995. Their online catalogue provides the painting's exhibition history. It featured at the British Institute in 1813 as number 32. <http://collection.waddesdon.org.uk/search.do;jsessionid=20FB256858FEDBEF285157FB3BE496C9?id=39334&db=object&page=1&view=detail> [accessed Wednesday, 27 February 2013]. The Siddons portrait was number 2. Janine Barchas has attempted to reconstruct the arrangement of the paintings in the different rooms. <http://www.aphrabehn.org/ABO/?p=1245> [accessed Wednesday 27 February 2013]. As both paintings were in the first room, we can safely assume Austen saw them.

[243] The British Museum and the V&A hold many reproductions, of varying qualities, which support the idea of a widespread dissemination of the work.

[244] Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 18.



Figure 10: *David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, mezzotint by Henry Dawe, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1804-1848), British Museum

Reynolds's work is constructed around the opposition between tragedy and comedy, with Garrick in the centre. Garrick was indeed one of the few actors successful in both genres. Tragedy, on the right-hand side of the composition, is identified by a dagger at her belt, her left arm raised with an air of admonition. She looks directly at Garrick, her lips parted as if in mid-sentence. Behind her are dark woods. Comedy, signalled by a mask behind Garrick's right shoulder faces the viewer, smiling at him with a mixture of playfulness and innocence, her cheek leaning delicately on her bare shoulder. Her body is slightly bent, her head tilted in contrast with the rigidity of the figure of Tragedy. The differences in clothing suggest the scene can also be interpreted as a conflict between vice, or temptation, and virtue. Tragedy wears a loose blue dress that covers her whole body as well as most of her hair. The blue evokes the figure of

the Virgin Mary and therefore purity, while the covered hair suggests modesty. Comedy on the other hand wears a pink garment with a low neckline, her right shoulder bare, and her right arm partially concealing her breasts. The figure's sexuality is highlighted by the way the dress hangs, as the cloth clings to the model's thighs, drawing attention to the body underneath. Garrick's upturned hands and apologetic look towards Tragedy signal his pursuit of Comedy.

The period 1811 to 1813, during which Austen wrote *Mansfield Park*, coincides with her visit to the Pall Mall Galleries. It is highly probable that Austen had Reynolds's painting in mind when writing the episode of the Sotherton exhibition, as Edmund Bertram finds himself in a similar position to Garrick: with a young woman on each arm, Edmund is divided between Fanny Price and Mary Crawford, and like Garrick between tragedy and comedy, has to choose between the two. The parallel with the Reynolds portrait becomes all the more relevant when one considers that Fanny can stand for tragedy, and Mary Crawford for comedy. Unsurprisingly, Austen complicates these associations. What Edmund later identifies as Mary's 'saucy playful smile' (*MP*, 531) can be read as an echo of Comedy's smile. Incapable of 'a bon-mot, for there is not the least wit in [his] nature' (*MP*, 109), the young clergyman nonetheless falls under Miss Crawford's seductive spell and follows her through the haha, in a gesture similar to Garrick following Comedy and leaving Tragedy behind. Edmund's weak apologies to Fanny for neglecting her after favouring Mary echo Garrick's sheepish apologetic look to Tragedy. The conclusion of *Mansfield Park* nonetheless troubles the neat opposition between the genres, for Fanny is rewarded with the conventional comic ending of the happy marriage. Fanny and Mary are therefore also caught, like Reynolds's Garrick, between tragedy and comedy. Both young women are presented

as actresses in Austen's novel: while Fanny finds herself reluctantly caught in Mansfield's theatrical network, Mary is in her element on stage.

Mary has specific connections to the stage from her echoes to contemporary theatrical figures. Critics have speculated that Austen modelled Mary on her cousin Eliza De Feuillide, a driving force behind the Steventon theatricals, and the flirtation between Eliza and her brother Henry formed the basis for the sexual tensions in *Mansfield Park.*[245] Like Henry Siddons who appeared as Herman in *Integrity*, a Kotzebue adaptation, the Crawford siblings 'com[e] forward with an hereditary claim to theatrical talents'.[246] The actors Anne and Thomas Crawford enjoyed a successful career in tragic parts.[247] A regional actress during her first marriage to William Dancer, her career advanced to a national level with her second husband Spranger Barry, with whom she conquered the London stage first at Drury Lane then at Covent Garden, where they collaborated with David Garrick.[248] The leading tragedienne of her time, she returned from a tour in Ireland to find London had acquired a new tragic muse, Sarah Siddons. Crawford retired in 1783, returning for several performances in 1797, largely unsuccessful due to her advanced age, and died in 1801.[249]

Reviewers constantly compared Crawford's and Siddons's performances in popular tragic roles, such as Belvidera in Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* or Lady Randolph in Colman's *Douglas*, dividing into pro-Crawford and pro-Siddons camps. Reviewing Siddons's performance of Lady Douglas at Drury Lane in September 1785, the *Times* considered: 'we cannot think Mrs. SIDDONS, in this character, equal to Mrs.

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[245] Litz, 117-18; Le Faye, *Family Record*, 57-59; Gay, 168; Byrne, 12; Chapman rejected the idea that Mary Crawford was based on Eliza de Feuillide, see Southam, *Manuscripts*, 145-47, 149.
[246] *The Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 9 October 1801.
[247] Thomas Crawford was an Irish barrister turned actor. This union was in fact Anne's third marriage to an actor. Mary's sexual voraciousness is perhaps an echo of this multiplicity of partners.
[248] Barry was considered Garrick's strongest competitor; John Fyvie, *Tragedy Queens of the Georgian Era* (London: Methuen, 1909), 148.
[249] Ibid., 145-59; *Biographical Dictionary*, iv, 339-51. For comments on Crawford's age see *The Times*, *True Briton*, *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 24 October, 1797,

CRAWFORD.'[250] As discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary visual culture commented on actresses' rivalries. The print 'The Rival Queens of Covent Garden and Drury lane, at a Gymnastic Rehearsal!' (1782) satirises the rivalry between Crawford and Siddons, demonstrating audiences' familiarity with these actresses. Even though Austen's letters do not mention Crawford, she would have known the actress's reputation.[251]

Crawford continued to be held as a model for young actresses in the early nineteenth century, mostly in tragedy but also in comedy. The *Dramatic Censor* could still present her as one of the only actresses successful in the role of Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at Covent Garden on 19 March 1811:

> We do not mean to be injurious to any other professional lady, when we declare, that, with the exception of the late Mrs. CRAWFORD, and Mrs. JORDAN, we have not seen any representation of this scenic charmer so feelingly and so winningly supported as that assumption was, by Mrs. EDWIN, at the Lyceum Theatre.[252]

This is far from an isolated example. The reference to Rosalind as a 'scenic charmer' is strikingly similar to Mary Crawford's powers: Edmund compares his relationship to Mary to being cast under a spell: '"The charm is broken. My eyes are open."' (*MP*, 527) Edmund characterises his experience as an illusion, as if it were unreal. This casts reality as a fiction, characterising off-stage behaviour as acting. The boundary between the two is extremely porous in *Mansfield Park* and they are sometimes indistinguishable. Crawford was however particularly remembered for her tragic performances. Austen thus plays with Mary's association with comedy: one of comedy's advocates during the theatricals, she does not enjoy the happy ending of comic heroines.

The importance of gestures to acting in the period requires the actor to have a great awareness of and confidence with his/her physicality, a trait Mary displays, which

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[250] *The Times*, 23 September 1785.
[251] Byrne, 204, also argues for this connection. Gay, 183 n.5, only tentatively makes the link.
[252] *Dramatic Censor* (1812), 199.

contributes to her characterisation as an actress. Her physical energy is implied in her love of horse-riding, and more conspicuously in her tendency to suffer from restlessness: '"I must move," said she, "resting fatigues me."' (*MP*, 112)[253] The paradox is characteristic of Mary's delight in 'bon-mot' (*MP*, 109), but it also introduces a more subversive element, as she draws attention to her body and therefore sexuality. Alluding to her character Amelia's declaration of love to Anhalt in Act III, Scene ii, Mary jokes, '"What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?"' (*MP*, 167) This is one of the many sexual innuendoes Mary introduces under the pretence of the arrangements for *Lovers' Vows*. This foregrounding of her sexuality further attaches her to acting, for, as Kristina Straub demonstrates, there was great anxiety around actresses' sexuality.[254] Fanny's reluctance to act on the other hand seems mirrored in her initial delicate health. As she strengthens her constitution, Fanny's body becomes more visible to the other characters, as she too enters Mansfield's theatrical network. She however never displays the theatrical acumen the Crawford siblings do.

Mary reveals further her acting abilities in her command of space. Edmund visits her daily under the pretext of listening to her harp-playing, an opportunity for her to stage herself to her best advantage.[255] Edmund's daily visits also reveal the double-play involved in courtship for his real interest is in Mary and not her instrument. As such, he is guilty of acting. Like Caroline Bingley, Mary tries to seduce Austen's hero through conscious self-display, though more successfully:

> 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. The season, the scene, the air, were all favourable to tenderness and sentiment. Mrs. Grant and her tambour frame were not without their use; it was all in

[253] Heydt-Stevenson, 117-24, 140, explores the sexual undertones of horse-riding.
[254] Straub, esp. 89-108.
[255] Shepherd, 235, discusses the scene in pictorial terms.

> harmony; and as every thing will turn into account when love is once set going, even the sandwich tray, and Dr. Grant doing the honours of it, were worth looking at. (*MP*, 76)

The window frames Mary the way the stage surrounds an actress. The performance of music is the pretext for self-display: the polite accomplishment conceals Mary's seductive act. The reference to Mary by the indefinite 'a young woman' presents her as a type rather than as an individual, suggesting the whole scene is made of cultural 'signs' that can be decoded. This contributes to the impression of a performance. The scene is analysed like an aesthetic work, as if it were an artistic performance. 'Use' also implies a practical dimension, thereby suggesting there is a scheme behind Mary's position. Austen undercuts the potential sentimentality of the scene with the comic inclusion of the unromantic image of Dr. Grant devouring sandwiches. Under Miss Crawford's charm however, they appear as picturesque elements to Edmund. Unlike Caroline, Mary succeeds in capturing the object of her performance.

It is not the only occasion on which acting overshadows Mary's behaviour, as she also 'acts' with Fanny to mislead her. After her refusal of Henry's marriage proposal, Fanny is careful to avoid being alone in his or his sister's presence to prevent further coercion. Mary nonetheless contrives to secure a meeting with Fanny, in the east room. Fanny anticipates a theatrical dimension to their interview for she foresees 'a more distressing scene before her than ever that spot had yet witnessed' (*MP*, 413). Thinking in theatrical terms, Fanny conceives the east room as a stage. This fictionalisation of experience about to befall her reveals Fanny is able to distance herself from personal incidents and examine them like an outside observer, placing herself in a theatrical situation. Awaiting Mary's entrance, a marker of a drama, the reader anticipates a theatrical scene.

Mary recalls the rehearsal of *Lovers' Vows* as soon as she enters, betraying her association of this space with acting. This announces a 'performance' to come. Even though her reminiscences appear sincere, Mary's language is stylised and melodramatic, full of overly emphatic exclamations such as '"Ha! […] am I here again?"' or '"But alas!"' (*MP*, 413, 414). Her body language confirms suspicions of acting: 'she turned away for a moment to recover herself' (*MP*, 414) represents a blatant instance of self-conscious management; like an actress, Mary composes herself before launching into a theatrical address to Fanny. Like Lucy Steele conversing with Elinor at the close of Volume 1, the brief changes in body language signal a performance. 'A playful smile' (*MP*, 414) accompanies Mary's speech, which surely echoes the Garrick portrait and anticipates Edmund's final recognition of her 'saucy playful smile'. She then sets out to construct a sentimental tableau, an unusual occurrence in Austen's fiction: Mary 'embrac[es] [Fanny] very affectionately', who, 'affected' then begins to cry (*MP*, 414). This gesture is clearly initiated then maintained by Mary who 'hung about her with fondness' (*MP*, 415), which again raises doubts as to her real intentions. It is reminiscent of the highly wrought sentimental tableaux of Richardson's *Grandison* discussed in Chapter 1.

Even as Mary remembers the rehearsal with what seems genuine longing, it gradually transpires as acting as the sequence progresses. Mary underlines the topic of the scene rehearsed with Edmund, the discussion of matrimony in *Lovers' Vows* in Act III, Scene ii, which is appropriate, as her aim in this interview is to convince Fanny to accept Henry's proposal. What really casts a shadow over Mary's sincerity however is her recognition that her earlier behaviour towards Fanny had been an act. She confesses that the necklace she gave her to accompany William's amber cross, which caused Fanny so much distress, was in fact orchestrated by Henry, and Mary, 'delighted to act

on his proposal' (*MP*, 418), eagerly followed his script. Mary thus betrays that her behaviour had been role-playing. Austen again puns on the double-meaning of 'act', underlining the difficulty of distinguishing sincere from deceitful action. Mary is at 'treacherous play' even as she displays 'apparent affection' (*MP*, 421). She is both acting and sincere.

If the Crawfords have a natural connection to acting, they enter in Mansfield a world that already accommodates acting. It dominates the Bertram household long before they arrive or the 'infection' of acting Yates introduces (*MP*, 215), and continues long after.[256] The metaphor of disease clearly marks acting as an injurious activity, yet, as this thesis argues, Austen precisely challenges this demonising approach and demonstrates its inescapability and usefulness in *Mansfield Park*. While the authenticity of characters' feelings is always open to question in the novel, it also demonstrates that even the truth must be acted.

As David Marshall and Litz contend, *Mansfield Park* is preoccupied with the distinction between real and inauthentic feelings. This issue is at the heart of acting as it implies an outward projection of inauthentic feelings. Both critics consider it is nowhere better illustrated than in the different reactions to Tom's illness.[257] Starved of gossip to communicate to Fanny, it represents the ideal 'alarming intelligence' Lady Bertram needs to relieve her boredom (*MP*, 493). Her letter is at first a performance of anxiety:

> It was a sort of playing at being frightened. The sufferings which Lady Bertram did not see, had little power over her fancy; and she wrote very comfortably about agitation and anxiety, and poor invalids, till Tom was actually conveyed to Mansfield, and her own eyes had beheld his altered appearance. Then, a letter which she had been previously preparing for Fanny, was finished in a different style, in the language of real feeling and alarm; then, she wrote as she might have spoken. (*MP*, 495)

[256] Litvak, 3, 14, makes a similar point.
[257] David Marshall, 'True Acting and the Language of Real Feeling: *Mansfield Park*', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 3:1 (Autumn, 1989), 87-106 (87-88); Litz, 126-28.

'Playing' unambiguously refers to acting as role-playing. Austen also puns on the word's other meaning of amusement, representative of the foolishness and selfishness Lady Bertram displays throughout the novel, as she here derives entertainment from her son's worrying health. The narrator underlines the stark contrast between the highly stylised beginning of the letter which follows reported intelligence, in which the language acts out the family's agitation, and the sections written after seeing Tom. The reference to 'poor invalids', a hackneyed phrase whose plural distances and depersonalises the words and therefore denotes a lack of real sympathy, shows the letter is affected. As Litz notes, 'Lady Bertram's imagination can only produce the stock responses of sentimental drama.'[258] The repetition of the adjective 'real' twice in the space of two paragraphs further highlights the artificiality and emptiness of the beginning of the letter. The change in Lady Bertram's recounting illustrates the power of visuality, a characteristic of acting in the period as gestures were central to its art. It echoes Sophia's pronouncements on the different effects of 'recital' and 'beholding' in 'Love and Friendship'.[259]

If written words perform at Mansfield, so do spoken ones. This performance is detected in the contradictory messages between a character's words and his/her gestures. Like Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield*'s characters scrutinise each other's countenance in the hope of identifying a sign that speech does not reflect true feelings. This gap between words and external behaviour indicates insincerity and therefore acting. More than in any other Austen novel however, characters in *Mansfield Park* wilfully ignore this, strengthening the theatricality of the estate, to which Sir

[258] Litz, 128.
[259] See Chapter 1.

Thomas contributes. His assessment of Maria's behaviour towards Rushworth before their wedding illustrates this point:

> Little observation there was necessary to tell him that indifference was the most favourable state they [Maria's feelings] could be in. Her behaviour to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did not like him. Sir Thomas resolved to speak seriously to her. […] Maria had a moment's struggle as she listened, and only a moment's: when her father ceased, she was able to give her answer immediately, decidedly, and with no apparent agitation. (*MP*, 233-34)

'Observation', a visual activity that typifies the experience of a theatrical spectator, is infused with expressive powers, as 'tell' implies; as in the theatre, Maria's gestures supply the text of her feelings. They are 'expressive gestures', as Dene Barnett explains, 'an attitude or movement used to represent a passion of the character portrayed.'[260] The 'moment's struggle', inscribed on her body, indicates that Maria must artificially control her reaction and alter her behaviour. This piece of acting occurs after her realisation that her father examines her, revealing her awareness of the theatrical dimension of this incidence and its dynamic of spectating. Sir Thomas chooses to overlook the discrepancy between the external signs of his daughter's behaviour when she is unaware of his gaze, and her words, in favour of the latter. He therefore condones acting off the stage. The passage also shows the characters' recognition of the body as the site of the manifestation of feelings. Its management is crucial to convey a specific meaning, revealing Fanny's understanding of the mechanisms of acting.

In an ironic twist typical of Austen, Sir Thomas imposes the greatest theatricality despite his violent rejection of the theatricals. Claudia Johnson even goes so far as calling him 'the most assiduous of actors at Mansfield Park', but his position is more as enforcer of theatricality.[261] Upon their father's return from Antigua, the children must repress their real displeasure at his arrival since it brought their rehearsals

[260] Barnett, 36.
[261] Johnson, 101.

to a close. The narrator underlines the discrepancy between the Bertrams' outward demeanour and their true feelings:

> The evening passed with external smoothness, though almost every mind was ruffled; and the music which Sir Thomas called for from his daughters helped to conceal the want of real harmony. (*MP*, 224)

The 'external smoothness', the outward appearance of satisfaction, is opposed to the characters' inner frustration, which remains concealed. As the smoothness is purely exteriorised, it is performed in the sense artificially put on, without any substance. It is a piece of acting. This artificial dimension is highlighted by the performance of music: it does not merely entertain, it also serves the purpose of concealing the real state of relationships, and therefore becomes a performance in the sense of a deceptive act.[262] The novel is constructed on this opposition between 'external smoothness' and 'want of real harmony', of which the reader and Fanny Price alone are often aware, echoing the illusion of harmony between Elinor Dashwood and Lucy Steele as they work together on the basket.

The family scene that follows Yates's 'piece of true acting' illustrates this point and offers another opportunity for Austen to transpose dramatic techniques into a narrative form. Yates's recounting of the Mansfield theatricals to a bewildered Sir Thomas represents another 'miniperformance in prose' in which Sir Thomas features as one of the lead actors:[263]

> Mr. Yates took the subject from his friend as soon as possible, […] relating every thing with so blind an interest as […] prevented him even from seeing the expression of the face on which his own eyes were fixed—from seeing Sir Thomas's dark brow contract as he looked with inquiring earnestness at his daughters and Edmund, dwelling particularly on the latter, and speaking a language, a remonstrance, a reproof, which *he* felt at his heart. Not less acutely was it felt by Fanny, who had edged back her chair behind her aunt's end of the sofa, and, screened from notice herself, saw all that was passing before her. Such a look of reproach at Edmund from his father she could never have

[262] Austen develops the potential deceptiveness of domestic performances in *Emma* with Jane Fairfax's piano-playing; see Chapter 4.
[263] Pollack-Pelzner, 764.

> expected to witness; and to feel that it was in any degree deserved was an aggravation indeed. Sir Thomas's look implied, "On your judgment, Edmund, I depended; what have you been about?"—She knelt in spirit to her uncle, and her bosom swelled to utter, "Oh! not to *him*. Look so to all the others, but not to *him*!" (*MP*, 216)

Austen constructs a 'miniperformance in prose' where two scenes take place simultaneously: the first is Yates's account and Sir Thomas's reaction to it, a comic scene, and the second is the imaginary scene Fanny creates in her mind, a sentimental scene. In the first, Fanny isolates herself from the main action as she retreats behind the sofa, thus placing herself in the position of a spectator.[264] In the second she becomes an active participant, an actress, as she both speaks and kneels, a highly theatrical gesture. Fanny mentally creates a sentimental tableau. The insistence on the characters' feelings - Austen repeats 'felt' in two consecutive lines - and the stress on their physical rather than verbal communication support a reading of this scene in theatrical terms: the body visually expresses the characters' inner feelings.

By focusing first on Sir Thomas's brow, Austen follows contemporary acting theories: the brow becomes the 'semiotic score' of the character's inner experience. Body parts according to contemporary acting theories are imbued with linguistic powers. The speech lines Austen ascribes to Sir Thomas's 'look', to his eye, recall contemporary views on acting. According to the *Theatrical Speaker*, 'above all, the eye shows the very spirit in a visible form.'[265] This suggests the eye provides an exact visual representation of the mind. The *Thespian Preceptor*, reissued in 1811, echoed this idea.[266] When Kean stormed on the stage of Drury Lane in the role of Shylock on 26 January 1814, he transfixed the London public. Hazlitt witnessed his stage debut and wrote an enthusiastic review representative of Kean's critical reception: 'For voice, eye,

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[264] Austen in *Emma* also plays with the role of the unobserved observer when Mr Knightley suspects Frank Churchill of 'double-dealing' during the puzzle game.
[265] *Theatrical Speaker*, 7.
[266] See Introduction.

action, and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him. […] The eye is never silent.'[267] Although Hazlitt underlines the different qualities expected of a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century actor, Kean's 'speaking eye' is the most significant element. It takes on the function of verbal expression: it communicates meaning more clearly than the voice. This metaphor was applied to leading actors. In Burney's *Evelina* (1778), its eponymous heroine records the same impression at seeing Garrick perform:

> Such ease! such vivacity in his manner! such grace in his motions! such fire and meaning in his eyes! […] every look *speaks*![268]

As in Barthes' understanding of theatricality, the verbal script of the play is secondary to its physical manifestations. These become the text of Austen's 'play'.

Despite his protestations, Sir Thomas is inscribed in a theatrical framework. His anger is presented in the same way that theatre practitioners described the representation of feelings on stage: the internal passion is externally translated by the frown of the brow, which his children immediately interpret as a sign of reproach, following the period's understanding of theatrical gestures as that 'by which the interior modifications of the soul are manifested and made known'.[269] Austen underscores the eloquence of the body with the idea that the brow 'speak[s] a language', in complete adherence to the idea of eighteenth-century acting as a 'vocabulary'.[270] The characters' gestures supply the text of the scene. Anger was also one of the ten major passions Aaron Hill identified:

> It is a fierce and unrestrain'd effusion of Reproach and Insult; It must therefore be express'd, impatiently, by a firey [sic] propension in the eye, with a disturb'd

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[267] William Hazlitt, *The Morning Chronicle*, 27 January 1814.
[268] Frances Burney, *Evelina* (1778), ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27-28.
[269] Siddons, 27.
[270] Barnett, 18.

> and threat'ning air, and with a voice strong, swift, and often interrupted by high swells of choaking indignation.[271]

Austen echoes the 'firey propension' of the eye of an angered person when Sir Thomas 'burn[s] all that met his eye' (*MP*, 223). Austen's close-up on the contraction of the brow mirrors acting manuals' focus on the eyes and eyebrows in their descriptions of passions: the *Thespian Preceptor* explains that, for anger, 'the eyes are alternately staring and rolling, the eyebrows drawn down over them'.[272] The scene is therefore a 'miniperformance in prose', allowing the reader to visualise the scene. The silent, theatrical nature of the scene adds weight to Sir Thomas's reproach and highlights the complex web of feelings. It also alerts the reader to the fact that the truth cannot be expressed through words in Mansfield. Feelings are communicated visually, which inevitably places them in a dynamic of acting and spectating.

Fanny moreover vehicles the theatrical dimension of the scene. Austen initially emphasises her separateness, placing her as 'witness' in her usual passive role of 'quiet auditor' (*MP*, 160). Fanny then becomes spectator and actor simultaneously, as she constructs a theatrical scene through her consciousness, as 'in spirit' indicates. Yet the reader can hear and visualise the powerful sentimental tableau her imagination composes: Fanny kneels to her uncle, a dramatic gesture of supplication, reminiscent of the engravings that accompanied printed plays, or the sentimental tableaux in Richardson's *Grandison*.[273] The movement of her breast would have been imperceptible on a Regency stage but Austen draws her readers' attention to this bodily quiver as the sign of a burning desire to speak, highlighting the expressive powers of physicality. Austen moreover provides the words that accompany the gesture, enacting the idea that theatrical gestures are a language. The scene thus merges dramatic

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[271] Hill, iv, 368-69.
[272] *Thespian Preceptor*, 32.
[273] See Chapter 1 and Figure 2.

techniques with a novelistic framework. It also presents Fanny in a different light for, even though she disapproves of the theatricals, she here presents a theatrical approach, which complicates the conventional critical view of Fanny as hostile to acting.

Acting is inevitable at Mansfield, and even those characters whose behaviour is presented as authentic cannot escape this dimension. Fanny Price, Austen's least active heroine, who vehemently protests '"No, indeed, I cannot act"' (*MP*, 171), nonetheless participates in the theatricality of the estate, first as 'quiet auditor' (*MP*, 160). As David Marshall notes, '[her] insistence on being at once audience, auditor and spectator inscribes her in theatrical relations.'[274] While I agree with Marshall's assessment that Fanny is caught in the theatricality of Mansfield, she is also cast as an active participant and therefore actress, however reluctant she may be. Her entrance in the Bertram family is embedded in a theatrical framework. She is required to 'act' in the histrionic sense from her first connection to the estate, when 'the little girl performed her long journey in safety' (*MP*, 13). As in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen plays on the different meanings of 'perform', as both to 'execute' and 'to act or play […]; to represent (a character) on stage' (*OED*, I.1.a.; I..4.c.).[275] From the very beginning of *Mansfield Park* then, the language blurs the distinctions between genuine behaviour and a conscious self-presentation or impersonation. Austen exploits this linguistic particularity to trouble the question of an authentic self.

Mrs Norris initiates Fanny to the importance of acting at Mansfield even prior to her arrival. Having instructed her in 'the extraordinary degree of gratitude and good behaviour' (*MP*, 14) she ought to demonstrate, Mrs Norris is disappointed by Fanny's performance: '"I thought she would have behaved better; I told her how much might

[274] Marshall, 88.
[275] See Chapter 2.

depend upon her acquitting herself well at first."' (*MP*, 15) The idea of behaviour is highlighted, and with it a focus on physicality and external display. Fanny is scrutinised like an actress on stage from her first connection to the estate. She is taught that her actions will be regarded as the measure of her feelings, which can bring recompense, since 'acquit' fuses the idea of conduct and financial compensation.[276] Fanny, like a stage actress, is compensated according to the quality of her performance.

Fanny receives another education in the correct 'acting' to adopt at Mansfield from her cousin Edmund. Finding her crying on the attic stairs, Edmund enquires into the matter and tries to console her,

> and gave her especially a great deal of good advice as to playing with Maria and Julia, and being as merry as possible. […] [S]he began at least to know their ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them. (*MP*, 19)

This is an early suggestion of the importance of participating in the 'play' of the 'Great House', where even in simple children's entertainment the right performance can be adopted. 'Manner' underlines external behaviour, while 'conforming' suggests Fanny artificially adapts and transforms her actions. While not explicitly instructed to behave hypocritically, she is nonetheless advised to conceal her natural emotions and therefore 'act a part'.

A display of real feelings is paradoxically open to accusations of affectation in *Mansfield Park*, which Fanny experiences early on. Sir Thomas's judgment on her unpromising development before setting off for Antigua causes the little girl much anxiety yet her cousins misread this genuine feeling: 'She cried bitterly over this reflection when her uncle was gone; and her cousins, on seeing her with red eyes, set her down as a hypocrite.' (*MP*, 38) The Bertram sisters believe Fanny feigns sadness at their father's departure to ingratiate herself with her aunt. They implicitly accuse her

[276] *OED*, 2.a.: 'To pay off (a claim, debt, or liability)'; 2.b.: 'To perform a duty'.

of acting. They treat her red eyes as a sign of grief that has no authentic origin, like the tragic actress in James's prologue to *Matilda* rubbing her eyes with cambric or Lucy Steele brandishing her handkerchief. This idea is reinforced by the etymology of 'hypocrite', Greek for 'actor'.[277] While it is unlikely that the sisters are capable of such an allusion, it is highly plausible that Austen is, as Henry Fielding refers to the word's etymology in *Tom Jones*: 'Thus the hypocrite may be said to be a player; and indeed the Greeks called them both by one and the same name.'[278] The irony of the passage lies in the fact that Fanny's grief is genuine yet its object is misunderstood. The connection between the physical display of feelings and acting is also indebted to contemporary views of acting, which placed gestures at the heart of the actor's art. Display of feeling is presented as a site of contention at Mansfield and its sincerity always doubted. The sisters' assumption that Fanny controls her body and is feigning suggests they are themselves familiar with this practice.

As theatricality leaves the stage of *Lovers' Vows* with Sir Thomas's return to the Great House, Fanny's behaviour is once again the object of scrutiny and therefore assessed as a performance, inscribed in the 'network of vigilance and visibility' Litvak argues is the characteristic of the theatrical in the nineteenth-century novel. Austen constructs a theatrical scene to represent Fanny's experience of his return, echoing actresses' entrances on stage, which supports the idea that the patriarch imposes acting on his household:

> [S]he quitted the room herself to perform the dreadful duty of appearing before her uncle.
>
> Too soon did she find herself at the drawing-room door, and after pausing for a moment for what she knew would not come, for a courage which the outside of no door had ever supplied to her, she turned the lock in desperation, and the lights of the drawing-room and all the collected family

[277] *OED*: 'Etymology: Greek *ὑποκριτής* an actor on the stage, pretender, dissembler'.
[278] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1749), ed. John Bender and Simon Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 284. Austen, *Letters*, 2, mentions *Tom Jones* to Cassandra in 1796 in reference to the colour of Tom Lefroy's coat, which indicates a detailed knowledge of Fielding's novel.

> were before her. As she entered, her own name caught her ear. Sir Thomas was at that moment looking around him, and saying, "But where is Fanny?" (*MP*, 208)

Austen again plays on the double-meaning of 'perform', a reading corroborated by the subsequent minute description of Fanny's gestures and their timing. This episode echoes Elinor's pause at the door before confronting Willoughby, with a close-up on the lock. Austen creates a 'miniperformance in prose' with Fanny entering *in medias res*, the present participles indicating an ongoing action, coupled with Sir Thomas's speech-lines. The description of the physical setting participates in the construction of a theatrical scene about to begin, as it allows the reader to visualise the scene. The door functions as a threshold between two spaces of markedly different natures, the safe corridor (the wings) and the exposed drawing-room (the stage). Fanny experiences a sentiment similar to stage-fright. The detail of the 'lights' recalls the playhouses' recent technical developments. Lighting underwent significant transformations in the eighteenth century, changing the possibilities of the stage. Garrick introduced new ways of lighting the stage in the mid-eighteenth century, and around 1780, the Argand lamp, 'a revolutionary breakthrough' was developed.[279] This brought the actor's body under greater scrutiny. It is as if Fanny were dazzled by lights on stage as she enters the drawing-room. No theatre is complete without its audience, a role the Bertrams perform. The phrase 'the collected family' introduces the image of an undefined and anonymous group, like a theatrical audience, from which Fanny is separated. It is clear that she is the object of their attention, thereby transposed from the position of spectator to actor.[280] Fanny's powerlessness, which 'finds herself' conveys, emphasises the inescapability of acting. She is the reluctant actress of Mansfield.

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[279] Baugh, 51-52.

[280] Douglas Murray notes Fanny's extreme discomfort when enduring the gaze of others, 'Spectatorship in *Mansfield Park*: Looking and Overlooking', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 52:1 (June 1997), 1-26 (14-15).

Austen repeats this method of construction at the opening of the third volume, also carefully staged, this time offering a mirror-scene, as Sir Thomas enters a space Fanny already occupies. The construction of a dramatic scene highlights the intensity of Fanny's feelings:

> [S]uddenly the sound of a step in regular approach was heard—a heavy step, an unusual step in that part of the house; it was her uncle's. […] It was indeed Sir Thomas, who opened the door, and asked if she were there, and if he might come in. (*MP*, 360)

Throughout their conversation, the narrative combines dialogue with narrative passages, which only the novel can achieve. It allows for the construction of scenes that both approximate the condition of drama and allow the reader the psychological insight that third-person narration alone can effect. This interview has a strong theatrical dimension, detailing the characters' movements which function as stage directions, adding a visual dimension to a predominantly oral scene. While Sir Thomas moves freely around the room, alternately standing and sitting, Fanny remains seated, indicating submission even though this, the east room, the scene's setting, is her territory. The disparity in their lines (Sir Thomas submits long questions to Fanny who replies in little more than monosyllabic assents or denials) intensifies the inequality of the exchange. Her uncle frequently towers over her, a physical position that symbolises their relationship. Their tone is also conveyed, allowing the reader to visualise and hear the scene.

As in a scene on stage, gestures play an integral part to its meaning. Sir Thomas's physical presence affects Fanny's feelings as much and occasionally more than his words. When his body translates his internal thoughts, her distress increases, as when she identifies 'a frown, which Fanny could picture to herself, though she dared not lift up her eyes', (*MP*, 366). This frown echoes Sir Thomas's reproachful, silent look to his children. His body acts as semiotic score. Even though she has never been

to the theatre, Fanny shows an awareness of the conventions of theatrical gestures, for a frown was paramount to the representation of anger. According to Henry Siddons, 'if anger does not impress a deep frown on the forehead, […] the whole illusion is put to sudden flight, and the actor still lingers after the character has vanished out of sight.'[281] Fanny thus experiences the exchange through the dynamics of theatricality.

Fanny's body also visually translates her internal emotions. She is frequently presented 'with eyes cast down and colour rising' (*MP*, 362), an expression that recalls contemporary descriptions of shame:

> SHAME,
> Or a sense of appearing to a disadvantage before one's fellow-creatures, turns away the face from the beholders; covers it with blushes; hangs the head; casts down the eyes.[282]

The *Thespian Preceptor* describes shame in very similar words: 'SHAME turns away the face from the beholder; hangs the head; casts down the eyes, and draws down the eyebrows; the speech is delivered in faltering accents.'[283] The reader frequently sees Fanny with such facial expressions, blushing, with her eyes cast down. Unable to speak, Fanny is nonetheless extremely expressive through her body.

Sir Thomas also analyses his niece's behaviour in stage terms. Upon announcing Henry's presence in the next room, '[t]here was a look, a start, an exclamation on hearing, which astonished Sir Thomas' (*MP*, 363). Austen follows contemporary acting manuals that articulated the sequential representation of passions, starting with the eyes or 'look', followed by the management of the body, here the 'start', and then by the manner of the speech, Fanny's exclamation. Fanny is of course not acting in the sense of deceiving here. Yet the emphasis is not on Fanny's words but, as in Barthes' definition, on 'the density of signs and sensations built up on stage'. Her

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[281] Siddons, 194.
[282] *Theatrical Speaker*, 14.
[283] *Thespian Preceptor*, 39.

feelings are only judged by their physical manifestation. The reader experiences, like Lady Bertram at hearing Henry read *Henry VIII*, 'really like being at a play' (*MP*, 391). It illustrates what Lynch argues is the characteristic of sentiment: it 'calls attention to that externalising of meaning that accommodates what is personal to social scrutiny, that describes a private process as if it occurred in public.'[284]

Fanny's trial in the east-room is another lesson in the art of acting at Mansfield. After Sir Thomas leaves, she resolves to conform to his wishes 'reason[s] [her]self into a stronger frame of mind' (*MP*, 371). She achieves this instruction to alter her mental state, or at least give the appearance that she feels differently, by modifying her outward behaviour, thus demonstrating the correlation in the novel between external manifestation and internal feelings:

> She walked out directly as her uncle recommended, and followed his advice throughout, as far as she could; did check her tears, did earnestly try to compose her spirits, and strengthen her mind. […] Not to excite suspicion by her look or manner was now an object worth attaining. (*MP*, 372)

Fanny demonstrates an understanding of the expressive nature of 'look' and 'manner', which can have as important an effect as words. As the novel progresses, she reveals a growing consciousness of her body as the object of observation and a site of expression. It is through the management of the body that she is able to carry out her uncle's orders. She models her gestures to fit the particular script she wishes the others to read, and therefore 'acts' despite her unwillingness, displaying feelings that do not match her inner experience. During a pause in her uncle's tirade, Fanny 'tried to harden and prepare herself against farther questioning. She would rather die than own the truth, and she hoped by a little reflection to fortify herself beyond betraying it.' (*MP*, 365)

[284] Lynch, 44; see Introduction.

Like Elizabeth with Mr Bennet, Fanny must hide the truth of her feelings. This she repeatedly has to do when faced with *Mansfield*'s great actor, Henry Crawford.

Henry's love of acting and ease of impersonation are often seen as a sign of unambiguous duplicity, for his actions are understood as make-believe, yet, as this thesis demonstrates, Austen troubles the neat opposition between histrionic and everyday acting.[285] Henry indeed initially sets out to manipulate and deceive first the Bertram sisters, then Fanny Price. As the novel progresses however, Austen complicates the reading of his character as purely duplicitous.

When the Bertram sisters first meet Henry, they consider him 'absolutely plain' (*MP*, 51). By their third encounter however, 'he was no longer allowed to be called so by any body' (*MP*, 51). First plain, and therefore formless, and then not, Henry gradually acquires form and an identifiable self. He seems to fashion himself according to his interlocutors, like an actor performing different roles on stage. Henry's burst of enthusiasm for the 'untasted pleasure' (*MP*, 145) of acting, which betrays a desire to impersonate different identities, supports the view of his self as fluid:

> "I really believe," said he, "I could be fool enough at this moment to undertake any character that ever was written, from Shylock or Richard III down to the singing hero of a farce in his scarlet coat and cocked hat. I feel as if I could be any thing or every thing, as if I could rant and storm, or sigh, or cut capers in any tragedy or comedy in the English language." (*MP*, 145)

This wide variety of dramatic parts can be seen as the sign of an unstable identity, which implies his behaviour off-stage may follow this changeableness, his 'real' character never identifiable. This declaration is also the sign of a true acting talent, which makes Henry extremely attractive and such a dangerous figure. As Gay notes, Henry's 'undersized' stature (*MP*, 194) associates him with David Garrick, who was notoriously

[285] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 78; Gay, 99-103.

short, as do his choice of parts in both tragedy and comedy, Garrick one of the few performers considered successful in both genres.[286] The association is flattering. The roles Henry isolates illuminate his character in a more ambiguous way: both are Shakespearean manipulative villains and talented rhetoricians. Henry shares their gift for rhetoric, which he uses to disguise his initial trickery, as he practises during the theatricals.

Despite his lack of experience, Henry displays both a fine dramatic sensibility and strong natural acting abilities. While his skills during the rehearsals are undisputed, Henry presents his finest acting off the stage, in his interactions with the Bertram sisters. Having chosen Maria to play Agatha Friburg opposite his Frederick, Henry tries to appease Julia and attempts to convince her to undertake the role of Amelia, using objective theatrical arguments:

> "Her [Julia's] talents will be wanted in Amelia. Amelia is a character more difficult to be well represented than even Agatha. I consider Amelia as the most difficult character in the whole piece. It requires great powers, great nicety, to give her playfulness and simplicity without extravagance. I have seen good actresses fail in the part. Simplicity, indeed, is beyond the reach of almost every actress by profession. It requires a delicacy of feeling which they have not. It requires a gentlewoman—a Julia Bertram. You *will* undertake it, I hope?" turning to her with a look of anxious entreaty, which softened her a little. […] Tragedy may be your choice, but it will certainly appear that comedy chooses *you*. You will be to visit me in prison with a basket of provisions; you will not refuse to visit me in prison? I think I see you coming with your basket."
>
> The influence of his voice was felt. Julia wavered: but was he only trying to soothe and pacify her, and make her overlook the previous affront? She distrusted him. The slight had been most determined. He was, perhaps, at treacherous play with her. (*MP*, 158-59)

Henry is both acting and sincere for the arguments he uses are legitimate contemporary theatrical considerations. As discussed in Chapter 2, the idea that a performer could represent situations completely alien to his own experience was complicated by the

[286] See for instance Rowlandson's satirical print 'A Theatrical Candidate' (1797), in which an aspiring actor applies to Sheridan, then manager of Drury-Lane, and is told '"You are very short"', to which he replies '"So was Garrick"'.

view that actors' natural dispositions conditioned their acting abilities. Not only did inner temperament dictate genre, as Henry echoes in the idea that comedy 'chooses' Julia, social background also played a role in the assessment of actors' performances. According to the *Thespian Preceptor*, no actor can impersonate a role if he does not already possess some of the qualities necessary for that part.[287] Following this argument, a professional actress will struggle to perform Amelia, an aristocrat, which is why Julia, a gentleman's daughter, can undertake it. Henry flatters her by reminding her of her rank. The added focus on the 'delicacy of feeling' the role entails it implies he considers Julia possesses this quality. He also smoothes her bruised ego by reminding her of the scene they will share alone on stage (and during the rehearsals) if she plays Amelia. Yet as Julia herself observes, Henry's motives may not be so innocent. The phrase 'treacherous play' highlights the ambiguity in *Mansfield Park* that innocent entertainment may in fact be duplicitous. Like a professional actor, Henry knows his gestures must accompany his words, as his 'look of anxious entreaty' indicates. By using legitimate considerations, Henry is able to present his acting as a sincere behaviour.

Henry is also at 'treacherous play' with Fanny. His attentions to Austen's heroine are initially all an act as '[he] cannot be satisfied […] without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart.' (*MP*, 267) 'Making' implies a physical act, so his scheme to seduce Fanny satisfies his thirst for action in both senses.[288] It is initially a personal challenge and completely artificial. He, like Lady Bertram, plays at feeling. Austen is however also playing with her character. Henry at first demonstrates that an actor can impersonate a character without experiencing their feelings. Austen then teases her

[287] Chapter 2.
[288] Gay, 102; Sales, 90-91.

protagonist's self-assurance for he is gradually caught by his own acting, like Willoughby, and ends up falling in love with Fanny.

After Henry's unsuccessful marriage proposal, Sir Thomas invites him for dinner in the hope that closer intimacy will change Fanny's position. Throughout the evening, Edmund observes their interaction to determine her feelings, creating a series of scenes in which tone and gesture are read as signs of the mind, placing the sequence in a theatrical frame of reference. As the object of attention, Fanny is again powerlessly placed in the position of actress:

> When he [Edmund] and Crawford walked into the drawing-room, his mother and Fanny were sitting as intently and silently at work as if there were nothing else to care for. Edmund could not help noticing their apparently deep tranquillity. (*MP*, 389)

Entering the space which his mother and cousin occupy, like a stage, and yet scrutinising their behaviour, Edmund is both actor and spectator of this scene. Like contemporary audiences, he identifies a feeling, here 'tranquillity', which the *Thespian Preceptor* detailed as one of the minor passions:[289]

> TRANQUILLITY, or APATHY, appears by the composure of the countenance, and general repose of body and limbs, without the exertion of any one muscle; the countenance open, the forehead smooth, the eyebrows arched, the mouth not quite shut, and the eyes passing with easy motion from object to object, but not long dwelling on any.[290]

Austen's description is not as exhaustive as the acting manual's, yet Edmund's method of analysis is reminiscent of the contemporary understanding of acting as the visual representation of feelings on stage. The insistence on and the intensity of Fanny's demeanour, coupled with the adverb 'apparently', emphasising the visual nature of the scene, lead the reader and Edmund to believe it is affected, a suspicion confirmed by Lady Bertram's admission that the men's footsteps caused Fanny to interrupt her

[289] Austen uses the same device in *Emma* when her heroine arrives at the Bateses to find the sitting-room 'tranquillity itself' (*E*, 256). See Chapter 4.
[290] *Thespian Preceptor*, 32.

reading and therefore alter her countenance before their entrance. She acts 'tranquillity'.

What follows is a complex multi-layered scene where two 'plays' are performed in Austen's text: Fanny's efforts, scrutinised by both men, to remain indifferent to Henry's reading and conversation with Edmund on the one hand, and Henry's double performance of reading and conversation, officially aimed at the whole company but really intended to affect Fanny, on the other. The narrative is as much preoccupied with the excellence of Henry's reading of *Henry VIII* as with Fanny's response to it.[291] Edmund witnesses Fanny's attempts to remain impassive throughout the reading to protect herself from any suspicion that she might after all enjoy Henry's company and be open to marrying him: 'All her attention was for her work. She seemed determined to be interested by nothing else.' (*MP*, 389) Fanny 'acts' indifference for she uses her body to enact a state of mind and convey meaning. 'Seemed' throws further doubt on her absorption as it implies feigning.

Fanny unknowingly follows the rules for representing indifference on stage. Henry Siddons's *Practical Illustrations* presents a complete engagement in an activity as its indication:

> One of the most sensible expressions of contempt is to neglect the speaker and to treat with indifference his person, his feelings, and his actions, either by remaining in a perfect state of tranquillity, or by amusing ourselves with more trifling occupations, so as to make him imagine we have forgot his person and all that concerns him so entirely as not even to be sensible of his being present.[292]

[291] Even though it has attracted less critical attention than *Lovers' Vows*, the choice of *Henry VIII* is also significant. As Tanner, 169, points out, it is 'surely Austen's joke, for both Henries show a decided preference for a plurality of ladies'. For the significance of Shakespeare's play see Kirkham, 93-98, 110-12, 114-16; Elaine Bander, 'The Other Play in *Mansfield Park*: Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*', *Persuasions*, 17 (1995), 111-20.
[292] Siddons, 170.

This is exactly what Fanny aims to achieve. She intriguingly follows the principles for both tranquillity, as Edmund first notes, and indifference, for her complete dedication to her work can be seen as a version of Siddons's 'trifling occupations'. The conventional feminine activity of needle-work is in fact a prop for Fanny to signal indifference. Like Elinor Dashwood and Lucy Steele's use of needlework to conceal the real intent of their meeting, Fanny's sewing is a performance for it allows her to convey a particular message and hide her real feelings. She also reveals her awareness of the men's attention and therefore an understanding of the theatrical nature of Mansfield.

Fanny's acting occupies the centre-stage of the narrative during Henry's reading as the narrator follows the evolution of her response through Edmund's experience of the scene. Clearly placed in the position of spectator, Edmund focuses not on Henry's performance but on his younger cousin:

> Edmund watched the progress of her attention, and was amused and gratified by seeing how she gradually slackened in the needlework, which at the beginning seemed to occupy her totally: how it fell from her hand while she sat motionless over it—and at last, how the eyes which had appeared so studiously to avoid him throughout the day were turned and fixed on Crawford, fixed on him for minutes, fixed on him in short till the attraction drew Crawford's upon her, and the book was closed, and the charm was broken. Then, she was shrinking again into herself, and blushing and working as hard as ever; but it had been enough to give Edmund encouragement for his friend, and as he cordially thanked him, he hoped to be expressing Fanny's secret feelings too. (*MP*, 390)

The repetition of 'seemed' again alerts the reader to the artificiality of Fanny's behaviour. She physically betrays her real thoughts by slackening in her work, an external manifestation of her genuine enjoyment. Her failure to maintain her indifference throughout confirms it is an act, like Lucy Steele's or Mary Crawford's brief stepping out of character. Fanny's blush is a further externalisation of an inner

conflict, like Maria's momentary struggle. Edmund also follows the movements of her gaze, which, like actors' eyes on stage, supply a visual translation of her thoughts.

Fanny is not the only one acting: Henry is also performing in the hope of altering her feelings. If Henry is not exactly at 'treacherous play' here, as his feelings for Fanny are by this point genuine, his behaviour is not completely innocent for his conversational contributions are influenced by Fanny's presence, which the attention he gives her during their conversation corroborates. His first small double-dealing act occurs in his discussion with Lady Bertram, where his opinion echoes Fanny's earlier disapproval of private theatricals:

> "No theatre at Everingham! Oh! no."—And he looked at Fanny with an expressive smile, which evidently meant, "that lady will never allow a theatre at Everingham."
>
> Edmund saw it all, and saw Fanny so determined *not* to see it, as to make it clear that the voice was enough to convey the full meaning of the protestation. (*MP*, 392)

A verbal echo of the previous passage, the narrative again underlines Fanny's 'determined' attitude, which denotes a controlled behaviour and therefore suggests acting. While his words are addressed to Lady Bertram, Henry's look betrays his real object: Fanny. The authentic meaning of Henry's words is therefore located on his body, like feelings represented on stage. The 'expressive smile' immediately alludes to contemporary acting theory for 'expressive' gestures were a category of stage gestures.[293] These are 'an attitude or movement used to represent a passion of the character being portrayed.'[294] This inscribes Henry's body in a system of signs, echoing the contemporary view of the actor's gestures as a language. The phrase 'evidently meant', which indicates sense is here specifically ocular, participates in the understanding in the period of the visual elements of the stage having eloquence, like

[293] See Introduction.
[294] Barnett, 36.

Barthes' 'density of signs' outside the playtext. Because the reader cannot see the smile, Austen's narrator supplies the text, rendered in the form of direct speech, inscribing this scene further in a theatrical frame of reference. Because of Austen's particular use of free indirect speech, it is very difficult to identify the exact source of this perception. The question that remains is how are Henry's real feelings to be ascertained when his behaviour is understood as an act? Like his sister Mary, his action is both sincere and a scheme.

Another of Henry's performances takes place while debating with Edmund the topic of reading aloud, in which Austen again uses theatrical techniques. Henry's acting is highlighted by the narrator's focus on his tone and gestures, thus 'arrang[ing] a mise en scène'.[295] The dialogue is suspended with indications reminiscent of stage directions, such as '(here was a glance at Fanny)' or '"Did you speak?" stepping eagerly to Fanny, and addressing her in a softened voice' (*MP*, 393-94), presenting 'a miniperformance in prose'.[296] By interrupting himself and therefore momentarily stepping out of character, like Lucy Steele and Mary Crawford, Henry betrays his own performance.

That Henry's double-dealing happens in the context of a conversation on reading aloud is no coincidence. Reading in general in Austen is an index of a 'character's general powers of discrimination'.[297] If the choice of text is significant, the quality of the reading is equally important and a further sign of a character's taste and moral judgment. Austen herself placed great importance of reading aloud.[298] That Mr Collins never reads novels signals his conservative and unimaginative nature,

[295] Saggini, 4.
[296] Pollack-Pelzner, 764.
[297] Gary Kelly, 'Reading Aloud in *Mansfield Park*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (June, 1982), 29-49 (29).
[298] See Chapter 1.

confirmed by the 'very monotonous solemnity' (*PP*, 77) with which he reads Fordyce's *Sermons*. Elocutionists stressed the importance of reading well, for it not only reveals the reader's understanding of the text but also affects the audience's response.

Good reading followed the same rules as good public speaking. According to Hugh Blair, an orator must not convince but persuade, for the latter alone will influence conduct and lead to action, which is the aim of eloquence or public speaking.[299] Good reading is the result of a subtle combination of different skills:

> [Eloquence] requires both natural genius, and much improvement from Art. […] It requires, moreover, strong sensibility of mind, a warm and lively imagination with correctness of judgment, and an extensive command of the power of Language; to which must also be added, the Graces of pronunciation and Delivery.[300]

As this list makes clear, good public speaking is hard to achieve. While the improvement of art is within any orator's reach, 'natural genius', a 'strong sensibility of mind', and 'correctness of judgment' are features that cannot be artificially acquired or feigned as they refer to the individual's innate intellectual and mental fabric. Gay argues that Henry 'had turned his Garrick-like protean talents to the appearance of a gentleman's accomplishments', yet as Edmund remarks, Henry's brilliance when reading Shakespeare is 'no everyday talent' (*MP*, 391).[301] His performance is not mimicry but a real accomplishment, which denotes taste and judgement, thereby complicating the reader and Fanny's understanding of Henry's moral character.

One of the points Blair raises which makes it particularly difficult to assess Henry's character is the claim that 'one very material consequence follows, that the Preacher himself, in order to be successful, must be a good man. […] [O]n no subject can any man be truly eloquent, [...] who does not speak the language of his own

[299] Blair, ii, 3.
[300] Ibid., ii, 8.
[301] Gay, 102.

convictions, and his own feelings.'[302] While Blair specifically refers to preaching, his comment has wider applications. If Henry is thus able to convey the meaning of Shakespeare's plays so well, he must have some degree of the good judgment and taste that would allow such a rendition.

Henry's gradual change of behaviour also modifies the understanding of his character. When he takes his leave from Fanny, he claims 'My conduct shall speak for me' (*MP*, 397). Henry transfers the make-believe action of his words to the substantiated power of real action as the latter is given a voice. Yet this transference of linguistic power from words to actions also keeps his behaviour within a dynamic of acting: there is no escaping in the externalisation of internal feelings that is the basis of acting.

More than any other Austen novel, *Mansfield Park* blurs the neat association of real action with truth and make-believe acting with inauthenticity. Even the most sincere behaviour needs to be performed, which further complicates the identification of earnestness and deceit. In *Mansfield Park*, most duplicitous behaviour is also accompanied by true feelings. Acting is also inevitable and a protection, a question Austen develops in her next novel *Emma*. Like *Mansfield Park*'s attractive Henry Crawford, Frank Churchill is often guilty of double-dealing. Like Henry, the assessment of his behaviour as completely duplicitous is also open to question.

[302] Blair, ii, 106.

Chapter 4: *Emma* (1816): The Actor and the Playwright

In *Emma*, Austen's interest in acting takes a different turn. With such loaded words as 'sensation' and 'entrée', the vocabulary of the theatre continues to permeate the novel, yet includes fewer 'miniperformances in prose'. With its consummate actor Frank Churchill, *Emma* is still invested in the question of 'acting a part', but focuses with its 'imaginist', on another theatrical figure, the playwright (*E*, 362). The moral implications of acting are also addressed differently: *Emma* argues for the pleasure of acting.

To counteract the disappointment of Frank Churchill's delayed visit, Emma Woodhouse exercises her theatrical turn of mind. In so doing, she is 'acting a part', as in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, yet without any ambiguity for the reader that she is doing so. She also displays the talents of a playwright:

> She was the first to announce it to Mr. Knightley; and exclaimed rather quite as much as was necessary, (or, being acting a part, perhaps rather more,) at the conduct of the Churchills, in keeping him away. She then proceeded to say a good deal more than she felt, of the advantage of such an addition to their confined society in Surry; the pleasure of looking at some body new; the gala-day to Highbury entire, which the sight of him would have made […] and to her great amusement perceived that she was taking the other side of the question from her real opinion, and making use of Mrs. Weston's arguments against herself. […]
>
> "Cannot you imagine, Mr. Knightley, what a *sensation* his coming will produce?" (*E*, 156, 161)

Emma, in a great flurry of imagination, presents Frank's arrival as a public event. Displays here her mind's 'ground-work of anticipation' (*E*, 362), in the manner of a playwright or novelist, this mental performance seems to arise from the frustration that a real scene cannot take place. She invites Mr Knightley - and Austen the reader - to mentally visualise the occasion. The gradation of 'addition', 'looking', and 'gala-day', which moves from an egalitarian inclusion of Frank into the Highbury community, to

the more distancing effect of observation, and finally to the full-blown festivity of a gala-day, theatricalises Frank's appearance in the community. The reference to a 'gala-day' confirms Emma's conception of his appearance as a public event. Johnson defines a gala as 'a festival; splendid entertainment', which comically turns Frank's visit into a lavish public celebration and spectacle. The emphasis on the community's ogling also transforms Frank into a sort of freak-show. Unlike Mansfield, Highbury welcomes a little spectacle.

By conceiving Frank's arrival as a 'sensation', Emma reveals her imaginative powers. It also links Frank to the world of theatre for the word described the effect artists produced. In 1802, the *Morning Post and Gazetteer* reported on Dorothy Jordan's unexpected performance in *The Inconstant* at Drury Lane in those terms: 'Mrs. Jordan's appearance at so early a period of the season was an unusual treat, and the sensation that it excited was expressed in universal and repeated plaudits on her entrance.'[303] Emma's eagerness to see Frank mirrors Austen's anticipation of Edmund Kean's performance and contemporary audiences' reactions to actors' appearances. Emma unknowingly anticipates Frank's own love of display and attention.

Written between 21 January 1814 and 29 March 1815, the composition of *Emma* coincides with Kean's grand entrance into the history of British theatre, sweeping the nation with his interpretations of Shakespeare's tragic heroes.[304] Austen's letters record both her attendance of Kean's performances and the craze they generated. She explained to Cassandra in March 1814 that: 'Places are secured at Drury Lane for Saturday [for *The Merchant of Venice*, his first London role], but so great is the rage for seeing Keen [sic] that only a 3rd & 4th row could be got.'[305] Just as Austen's

[303] *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 17 September 1802.
[304] See Chapter 3 for Kean's debut.
[305] *Letters*, 266.

contemporaries longed to see Kean on stage, so is Frank Churchill's first arrival hotly anticipated in Highbury, as 'sensation' implies. Frank does not physically echo the famous stage actor the way Henry Crawford recalls David Garrick, yet the community's eagerness to see him evokes the sort of frenzy that accompanied the appearance of a new rising star on the London stage.

'Being acting a part', Frank's entrance onto the Highbury stage gives Emma an opportunity to perform. The phrase indicates Emma uses, to borrow James Austen's phrase, a 'language foreign to [her] hear[t]', thus inscribing her behaviour as an act as it does not exactly mirror her internal feelings.[306] Emma intentionally misleads Mr Knightley. The coda 'perhaps rather more' gives an additional indication of Austen's understanding of acting: with acting come exaggeration and hyperbole, mirrored in the climax of Emma's rhetoric. It recalls the instances of 'acting a part' in *Sense and Sensibility*, with the Dashwoods' confusion regarding Edward and Willoughby's duplicitous behaviour, and the spirited acting of their own parts the Bennets perform in *Pride and Prejudice*. Emma is however not caricatured as an excessive actress like Laura in 'Love and Freindship'.

The reader is free to assess Emma's success or failure in performing the role of Frank's publicist, for Austen transcribes her exchange with Mr Knightley in dialogue form, with few interruptions. As the conversation progresses, Emma becomes increasingly animated and loses herself in her character, like Mary Stanhope or Henry Crawford, as she defends Frank more fiercely. The usually perceptive Mr Knightley does not detect any inconsistency in her arguments, which suggests she succeeds in her performance. Emma's 'acting a part' is in fact so successful that by the end of the novel,

[306] James Austen, 'Prologue to a Private Theatrical exhibition', l. 7.

she realises that she has tricked herself.[307] The narrative also addresses the sensation 'acting a part' causes in Emma by underlining the pleasure she derives from it: she experiences 'great amusement' when she argues against her own beliefs. Acting is pleasurable and exciting.

Austen develops in *Emma* the issue of the raw enjoyment of acting, which she had introduced in *Mansfield Park* with the characters' enthusiasm for theatricals. It is different from *Mansfield Park* however, as acting does not represent for Emma the possibility of releasing forbidden truths. *Emma* no longer troubles the boundary between authenticity and acting. Like Elizabeth Bennet, Emma argues against herself simply for the pleasure of being contrary. A delight in acting resurfaces when Emma confronts Frank over his deceptive actions:

> "I do suspect that in the midst of your perplexities at that time, you had very great amusement in tricking us all. […] I am sure it was a source of high entertainment to you, to feel that you were taking us all in.—Perhaps I am readier to suspect, because, to tell you the truth, I think it might have been some amusement to myself in the same situation." (*E*, 522)

In an exact verbal echo of the previous passage, Emma addresses the fact that acting is a source of pleasure for performers and that its very trickery may controversially bring gratification to its practitioner. Emma is unusually honest about her own failings and, at the same time that she apologises for them, admits that they are a guilty pleasure. Her confession is bold for a Regency heroine, in light of acting's association with hypocrisy and deceit. Willoughby's 'acting a part' with Marianne leads to a near-fatal illness. The pleasure that Henry Crawford derives from his 'treacherous play' with the Bertram sisters and his initial courtship of Fanny is presented as perverse and sadistic, clearly reprehensible, as 'treacherous' implies. In *Emma* the issue is more nuanced.

[307] There is also a strong irony in the passage, for the other meaning of 'acting', in the sense of conduct, is at the heart of their conversation.

'Tricking' makes it clear that Emma sees Frank's behaviour as deliberately deceptive but her tone is one of friendly reproach, not accusation. *Emma* has a more relaxed attitude to acting than Austen's previous novels and makes fun of the different 'parts' its characters sometimes adopt.

While acting is a less central concern in *Emma*, it is still present on many occasions, from Mr Elton's feigned interest in Harriet to court Emma, to Highbury's display of grief at Mrs Churchill's death. Emma's interpretation of Mr Elton's behaviour towards Harriet implies an understanding that 'each one in his time plays many parts', as James Austen argues in his 1788 prologue.[308] As they discuss the possibility of Emma drawing Harriet's likeness, Emma notes Elton's 'sort of sighing animation which had a vast deal of the lover' and endures his incessant fidgeting during the sitting, considering that 'anything less would certainly have been too little in a lover' (*E*, 44, 48). The phrase 'the lover' suggests Emma has a type in mind and that she sees it as a role. She expects a specific outward display and therefore a performance of feelings, which also places her in the position of playwright. The novel plays with the fact that, although Emma is right in recognising the signs of a lover in Elton's behaviour, she misidentifies the object of his attention. The speed with which he marries Augusta Hawkins is a further indication that his actions were an act all along, as true feelings cannot be transferred so easily in Austen's fiction, an issue *Persuasion* develops. It illustrates the difficulty of communicating true feelings in Austen's fiction: she often side-steps scenes where the protagonists disclose their love for each other.

Even good-natured characters act in *Emma*. Mr Weston's behaviour illustrates the artifice that surrounds the official reaction to the news of Mrs Churchill's death, an

[308] See Chapter 1.

instance of the little acting that accompanies polite behaviour, as Elinor Dashwood exemplifies in *Sense and Sensibility*:

> Even Mr. Weston shook his head, and looked solemn, and said, "Ah! poor woman, who would have thought it!" and resolved, that his mourning should be as handsome as possible; and his wife sat sighing and moralizing over her broad hems with a commiseration and good sense, true and steady. (*E*, 422)

Mr Weston is acting a part, as the idea of resolve suggests a conscious, rational decision as opposed to spontaneous and natural feelings, which 'handsome', with its aesthetic and therefore external connotations, emphasises. He is more concerned with the image he projects than the truth of his feelings. The broad hems, like Mr Elton's black ribbon in *Persuasion*, are the external signs of grieving. *Emma* is however less concerned with this form of social acting than with the misleading projection of feelings, which Mr Weston's son practises.

Frank is, like Henry Crawford, a consummate actor. The Highbury community is blinded by his physical attractiveness: 'liberal allowances were made for the little excesses of such a handsome young man—one who smiled and bowed so well' (E, 222). Highbury focuses on external signs only, which are those that can be performed. Bows in particular can be highly stylised and theatrical, often associated in Austen's fiction with simpering and obsequious characters, as Mr Collins's bows to Darcy, or Yates's foolish bow to Sir Thomas. Like Henry Crawford, Frank sets out to deceive Emma and behaves in a way that implies he is courting her. Unlike Henry, Frank does not intend to 'make a small hole in [Miss Woodhouse's] heart'. In his letter of atonement to Mrs Weston, he defends his flirtation with Emma by his certainty of her complete 'indifference' (*E*, 477). Frank's motives for acting are moreover different from Henry's: it is not dictated by selfish gratification but by his need to preserve his secret engagement with Jane Fairfax. To protect authentic feelings, Frank must display misleading ones. Emma's overactive imagination moreover reads into Frank's

behaviour what suits her, for Mr Knightley on the other hand notices signs of a connection to Jane. If Frank's acting is less contemptible than Henry's, it nonetheless also causes collateral damage: it brings so much pain and anguish to Jane that her health suffers and she considers breaking off their engagement.

Like Henry, Frank's acting is not immediately detectable. When Harriet purchases some gown and ribbon at Ford's with Emma, Miss Bates crosses the street to invite them and ask Emma's opinion of the pianoforté Jane has recently received from a secret admirer. She has brought Mrs Weston in tow and launches into one of her characteristic interminable speeches, to which Emma pays only half attention. When the small gathering arrives at the Bateses', 'external smoothness' (*MP*, 224) dominates the scene:

> The appearance of the little sitting-room as they entered was tranquillity itself; Mrs. Bates, deprived of her usual employment, slumbering on one side of the fire, Frank Churchill, at a table near her, most deedily occupied about her spectacles, and Jane Fairfax, standing with her back to them, intent on her pianoforté.
>
> Busy as he was, however, the young man was yet able to shew a most happy countenance on seeing Emma again. (*E*, 259)

Austen does not frequently paint such descriptive scenes, where all of the characters' positions and attitudes are detailed. The reader should therefore suspect there is more than meets the eye. This scene echoes Edmund Bertram and Henry Crawford walking into the drawing-room at Mansfield to discover Fanny and Lady Bertram in 'apparently deep tranquillity' (*MP*, 389). As in *Mansfield Park*, by highlighting the external surface through the reference to 'appearance', the narration alerts the reader that a different reality might lie underneath. Stepping into the drawing-room, Emma in fact walks onto a stage where Jane and Frank conceal their real relationship. As Fanny Price before them, they are 'acting' tranquillity by projecting complete absorption in mundane tasks.

By the end of the novel, the young couple's acting is revealed, as they would have enjoyed a rare moment of intimacy before Emma's arrival. Jane presumably turns her back to conceal a blush or facial expression that would otherwise betray a suspicious agitation. The instrument allows her to project the image of young lady engaged in an appropriately polite feminine activity, which becomes a performance, the creation of an illusion, as it serves to mislead their visitors. Miss Bates's long narration on the street can also be seen as an act, a way of stalling their visitors and giving Jane and Frank more time together. Her unnecessary fuss over the steps to the drawing-room can be retroactively read as a way for her of warning the lovers of their arrival and giving them the opportunity to compose themselves and create this scene of tranquillity. The characterisation of the atmosphere as 'tranquillity *itself*' (emphasis added) suggests it is not natural. The superlative that accompanies Frank's handy work and the emphasis on complete absorption the reiteration of 'busy' introduces indicate his behaviour is forced, a fact confirmed when Mrs Weston wonders why he still has not finished repairing the glasses. The concessive conjunctions 'however' and 'yet' also imply Frank relinquishes something to greet Emma. The word 'countenance' here takes on a theatrical connotation because Frank's behaviour is affected. The inclusion of 'shew' reinforces the idea of illusion and acting – there is in fact no indication that Frank is feeling the happiness he displays.

No one but Mr Knightley suspects anything untoward in Frank's behaviour. While he displays an instinctive dislike for the young man throughout the novel, it is in Volume 3, Chapter 5, during the game of puzzle at Hartfield, that his doubts are crystallised.[309] Alerted by 'Frank Churchill's face, where he thought he saw confusion

[309] The words 'suspect' and 'suspicion' occur on seven occasions in the chapter, five of which come from Mr Knightley.

suppressed or laughed away' (*E*, 376), Mr Knightley sets out to locate emotions in the characters' facial expressions, like contemporary theatrical audiences. Mr Knightley deliberately places himself in the position of spectator, as Edmund had done whilst Henry read *Henry VIII* to observe Fanny: sat around the 'large modern circular table', he is 'so placed as to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation.' (*E*, 377) Mr Knightley is himself acting here as he attempts to conceal his activity of observation. His verdict is unequivocal:

> Disingenuousness and double-dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part. (*E*, 377)

As in *Mansfield Park*, the word 'play' moves from a literal to a figurative meaning. Like Henry Crawford, Frank is at 'treacherous play'.

'Double-dealing' in particular immediately associates Frank's behaviour with acting. Johnson defines it as 'artifice; dissimulation', and a 'double-dealer' as 'a deceitful, subtle, insidious fellow'. As 'double' implies, it allows for two actions to be conducted at the same time: Frank combines the public game of puzzle with the private communication with Jane, like Henry's dual performances to the Bertrams and to Fanny. 'Double-dealing' also possesses a specific theatrical association: it evokes William Congreve's Maskwell in *The Double Dealer* (1693). Frank's actions, as well as those of Austen's other 'actors', illustrate the principle Maskwell holds:

> I have the same face, the same words and accents when I speak what I do think, and when I speak what I do not think, the very same; and dear dissimulation is the only art not to be known from nature.[310]

[310] William Congreve, *The Double-Dealer*, in *The Works of William Congreve*, ed. D. F. Mackenzie and C. Y. Ferdinand, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), i, II. viii.

As Maskwell argues, dissimulation and sincerity have the same external appearance and are therefore indistinguishable. Austen explores this ambiguity in her novels, as this thesis demonstrates.

The reader can reasonably expect that, once Jane and Frank's engagement is revealed, all acting will cease, but Frank continues to operate within a framework of performance. Austen shows that old habits die hard and that characters who have a natural turn for acting cannot shake their predispositions so easily. Frank still demonstrates a tendency to aestheticise and stage his life and that of those around him even after secrecy and acting are no longer required. As he and Emma discuss their good fortune in their future partners, Frank invites Emma to observe Jane, placing both of them in the position of spectators. He presents her in an 'attitude', in a way reminiscent of descriptions of works of art, constructing a sentimental tableau:

> She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes as she is looking up at my father.—You will be glad to hear (inclining his head, and whispering seriously) that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair? (*E*, 522-23)

Austen provides here a brief parenthetical stage direction for the reader to visualise and imagine the aural quality of his speech, a trace of the dramatic quality of Austen's writing. Frank still conceives social matters through the lens of performance. Penny Gay comments that his 'gaze theatricalises, dehumanises, and commodifies Jane' and his position is one of a voyeur but this sort of aestheticisation can also be read as a sign of adoration.[311] Male lovers in Austen are often seen looking intently at the object of their affection, such as Mr Darcy captured by Elizabeth's 'dark eyes' at the Netherfield ball (*PP*, 26). The vocabulary of scrutiny overrides the passage as 'look' and 'observe'

[311] Gay, 145.

are repeated throughout, which indicates Frank focuses on the visual effects of the scene, like an artistic project. He moreover describes Jane's features and posture in an aestheticised manner as he points to her throat and her gaze as he might if viewing a painting. The word 'gesture' confirms that he is operating within a framework of performance as 'gestures' were central to acting. Frank treats Jane as an artistic project, an object of display, which is reinforced by his anticipation of her improved appearance with the newly set jewels: he stages Jane, betraying his theatrical turn of mind. The whisper suggests Jane can hear the first part of his speech, which is, if connected to performance, nonetheless flattering. Unlike Caroline's 'attitude', the novel does not mock Jane. Inserted involuntarily here in a theatrical framework, Jane is at other times an active participant in such sequences.

As in *Mansfield Park*, even those characters most averse to deception must 'act'. Jane herself retrospectively describes her actions as make-believe, when she has the opportunity to confide in Emma:

> "I know what my manners were to you.—So cold and artificial!—I had always a part to act.—It was a life of deceit.—I know I must have disgusted you." (*E*, 501)

Jane demonstrates great perceptiveness as she rightly guesses Emma's disgust. She reaches for the metaphor of acting to characterise her behaviour. Unlike Frank or Emma, 'acting a part' is a source of anguish for Jane. Like Austen's other 'actresses', she plays the part of the polite young woman to conceal her personal feelings.

Jane, with Frank at her side, exploits the performance of female accomplishments to hide the pursuit of personal affairs like Elinor Dashwood or Lucy Steele. The pianoforté, a source of much speculation in Highbury, in fact helps to conceal the real nature of her relationship with Frank. The musical interludes they perform together are an opportunity for them to share moments of intimacy while

operating within the realm of public decorum, such as when they sing in the Woodhouses' parlour during Isabella and John Knightley's Christmas visit. It allows Jane and Frank to be physically close to each other and share a private experience, while at the same time conforming to the framework of social activities permissible between members of the opposite sex without raising suspicions in their companions. They are therefore double performances in the sense of the execution of a task and a pretence, which can be seen as instances of 'double-dealing'. Their intent is clearly to hoodwink the Highbury community, as their engagement must remain secret at those points in the narrative, like the rivalry between Elinor and Lucy concealed by needlework.

Gay argues that Emma is concerned that her 'performance' is shown wanting next to Jane's but Emma is more a playwright and stage director than a performer.[312] She has a highly theatrical turn of mind, which she applies to stage others and not herself, unlike Mary Crawford playing the harp or Caroline Bingley taking a turn about the room. Emma is secure in her social position with respect to Jane. She receives more enjoyment from elaborating scenarios and directing people than she does from placing herself at the centre of those scripts. This is particularly apparent in her matchmaking attempt between Harriet and Mr Elton. Emma trains her young friend in acquiring the polish necessary to 'act' the polite young lady she believes Harriet is. This she unconsciously hits on when she admits to Mr Elton that '[she has] perhaps given her a little more decision of character, have taught her to think on points which had not fallen in her way before' (*E*, 44). Austen puns on the word 'character', which in the period refers both to 'the particular constitution of the mind' and 'a person portrayed in a work of fiction, or drama'.[313] While Emma refers to the intellectual improvements she

[312] Ibid., 128.
[313] Johnson, *Dictionary*; *OED*, 15.a. See Lynch for a thoughtful examination of the shifts in the understanding of the word in the eighteenth century.

instilled in Harriet, the double meaning allows Austen to introduce the idea that Emma is also carving out a specific fictional persona for her friend.

Emma's specifically theatrical turn of mind appears in her assessment of Harriet's behaviour as a performance. The Coles' dinner party represents such an opportunity. A private social engagement, the evening nonetheless bears the public nature of all Georgian social events, like the Netherfield ball.[314] Having missed the ball at the Westons, the dinner represents Harriet's first appearance in Highbury society as Emma's protégée: 'Emma watched the entrée of her own particular little friend' (*E*, 236-37). Emma clearly places herself in the position of spectator and critic. 'Entrée' was used both of girls' entrance into society and of actresses' appearance on stage, suggesting this instance is conceived as a performance and open to an assessment.[315]

Emma therefore examines less its heroine's 'acting' than her stage-directing, in line with the novel's discussion of the role of the imagination. Austen is still invested in the question of social acting and the possibility of determining a character's feelings from external signs, but does not develop this issue in such a systematic manner as in her previous published novels. With concluding notion that 'seldom, very seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken' (*E*, 470), Emma nonetheless recognises the inevitable acting that Austen's fiction dramatizes.

[314] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the theatrical nature of social gatherings in the period.
[315] The *OED* records the first instance of the sense of 'the coming of an actor upon the stage' (1.c.) in 1824 but contemporary writing shows this meaning was in use in the early nineteenth century: the *Morning Post*, January 23, 1804, recorded that 'on [Madame Bolla's] *entrée* she was much applauded'.

Conclusion

As this thesis demonstrates, Austen was not only familiar with the popular drama of her time, as Paula Byrne and Penny Gay argue, she also had an intimate knowledge of its practical aspects, and was particularly sensitive to acting. She was a severe critic of actors' performances, confessing to Anna Lefroy in 1814: 'Acting seldom satisfies me.'[316] Through the adaptation of contemporary acting techniques into third-person narrative, Austen created 'miniperformances in prose' which surely provided the 'better acting' she found the contemporary stage lacked.[317] We can also conjecture that in so doing, she could write 'dramatic narratives' while avoiding the criticisms women faced when attempting to enter the male-dominated world of the theatre. George Colman's unpublished play 'The Female Dramatist', which satirises the ambitions of a deluded female playwright, shows there were many obstacles to women's participation in the theatre.[318]

More importantly, the inclusion of dramatic techniques in her novels enabled Austen to achieve a more sophisticated problematization of social conduct and human communication, issues central to her fiction, than the stage allowed. By placing her characters in theatrical frameworks, relying on the external signs of internal feelings that formed the basis of acting in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Austen demonstrated the inescapability of theatricality. Her characters operate within the 'network of vigilance and visibility' characteristic of the theatrical in the nineteenth-century novel to determine thoughts and feelings. By playing on the literal and

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[316] *Letters*, 283.
[317] Ibid., 240.
[318] George Colman the Younger, *The Female Dramatist*, 1782, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, Larpent MS 598. For the obstacles women faced, see Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 1.

metaphorical meanings of ‘act’ and ‘perform’, in episodes framed like theatrical sequences, Austen blurred the neat opposition between acting and sincerity, showing that even the communication of the truth relies on the same mechanisms as acting.

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