Self-Making: Acts of Performance in the Victorian Novel

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ABSTRACT

"Self-Making" combines an examination of the self-conscious, theatrical construction of identity with attention to the malleability of character attributed to socio-economic changes. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries—the latter stages of the industrial revolution in Britain—an unprecedented number of people migrated from their ancestral rural homes to ever-expanding urban centres. While some saw this urbanization as a mark of the destabilization of the country and longed for a return to the relative stability of the not-too-distant, pre-industrial past, many others used the opportunity to recreate their personal identities outside of the previously restrictive ties of family and home. Critics considered such self-creation dangerous, as it allowed for the blurring of historical boundaries of class and status. Supporters, however, saw the hypothetical ability of all men (and it was a predominantly masculine opportunity) to form a self separate from an inherited identity as a great democratic advancement. This perspective gave rise to a series of self-help narratives in the Victorian period, both fictional and factual, which take their name from Samuel Smiles's 1859 text, *Self-Help*. Smiles's work documents a string of men whose respective talents and devotion to hard work allowed them to rise from lower-class beginnings to become leaders in the fields of industry, politics, and the military.

The concept of "self-help" was primarily directed at men making their way in the world through a combination of hard work, temperance, and frugality. But many characters in novels of the period, both actors and non-actors, use explicitly theatrical techniques of self-invention. This is especially true of female characters, excluded as they are from most professional paths. Using the language of the stage and methods of characterization employed by nineteenth-century actresses, "Self-Making" applies the self-help narrative beyond the expected area of the economically self-made man. "Self-Making" posits theatrical technique as a female alternative to

self-help, a method by which women in the nineteenth century could create viable social identities.

I bookend and underscore my discussion of the fiction of the period by reading the parallel self-making evident in the autobiographical writings of nineteenth-century actresses, distilling from published writings and associated archival sources the performance theory practiced by each actress. The memoirs of Fanny Kemble, Marie Bancroft, Stella Campbell, and Elizabeth Robins chronicle the actresses' respective stage careers, reflect on the development of the English stage, and illuminate their own theories of performance. Each of the actresses creates a written character by way of the same techniques she shows herself using on the stage. In their theatrical novels, Geraldine Jewsbury and Florence Marryat address the same anti-theatrical rhetoric which underlies Bancroft's constructed self. Both novelists subvert an anti-theatrical hierarchy by identifying the stage as the sphere of innate authenticity, and society as dependent on deception. Wilkie Collins and Charlotte Brontë use the actress figure in their novels to comment on the performative nature of identity. They emphasize the necessity of adapting these characterizations to the requirements of diverse off-stage situations, anticipating Campbell's theorization of performance as a collaboration between actor and audience. Elsewhere, Collins imbues his villainous female characters with the duality Kemble cites as necessary to any performance, as does Charles Dickens. Both novelists write characters generally treated as femme fatale figures; I argue that their villainy is instead a self-conscious act, performed to protect a private self. Throughout the nineteenth century, actresses and fictional characters alike self-consciously separate performing and performed selves, allowing for the creation of a sustained public identity while preserving the privacy of the self. In doing so, these women generate a form of self-help that looks beyond the expected masculine, economic practice.

RÉSUMÉ

« Self-Making » examine la construction identitaire théâtrale consciente en relation avec la malléabilité du personnage attribuée aux changements socio-économiques. À la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe siècle—durant les étapes ultimes de la révolution industrielle en Grande-Bretagne—un nombre sans précédent d'individus ont quitté leurs demeures rurales ancestrales afin d'émigrer vers des centres urbains en expansion. Alors que certains associaient à cette urbanisation la déstabilisation du pays et désiraient un retour à la stabilité relative d'un récent passé préindustriel, de nombreux autres ont profité de l'occasion pour recréer leurs identités personnelles en dehors des domaines restrictifs de la famille et du domicile. Les critiques considéraient cette création de soi comme dangereuse, dans la mesure où elle permettait la dissolution des bornes historiques de classe et de statut. Les partisans, cependant, reconnaissaient un progrès démocratique important dans la possibilité pour tous les hommes de se distinguer de leur identité héritée (ce fut une opportunité à prédominance masculine). Cette perspective a donné lieu à une série de récits « self-help »[1] durant l'époque victorienne, à la fois fictionnels et factuels, qui prennent leur nom du texte de Samuel Smiles publié en 1859, *Self-Help*. Le texte de Smiles documente un nombre d'individus pour qui les talents respectifs ainsi qu'un dévouement au travail acharné leur ont permis de surmonter les échelons sociaux afin de devenir des succès dans les domaines de l'industrie, de la politique et de l'armée.

Le concept de « self-help » s'adressait principalement aux hommes qui se frayaient un chemin dans le monde en combinant travail acharné, tempérance et frugalité. Mais de nombreux personnages dans les romans de cette période, acteurs et non-acteurs, emploient explicitement des techniques théâtrales d'invention personnelle. Ceci est particulièrement le cas pour les

[1] « Self-help » désigne l'action ou le processus de s'aider soi-même, de s'améliorer ou de surmonter ses problèmes sans l'assistance des autres.

personnages féminins exclus de la plupart des voies professionnelles. En utilisant le langage de la scène et les méthodes de caractérisation employées par les actrices du XIXe siècle, la dissertation « Self-Making » applique le récit de « self-help » au-delà du domaine typique de l'homme économiquement autonome. « Self-Making » propose la technique théâtrale comme alternative féminine de « self-help », méthode par laquelle les femmes du XIXe siècle pourraient créer des identités sociales viables.

Je souligne ma discussion sur la fiction de cette période en lisant dans les écrits autobiographiques d'actrices du XIXe siècle une construction de soi parallèle, tout en tirant de mémoires publiées et de sources archivistiques associées une théorie de performance pratiquée par chaque actrice. Les mémoires de Fanny Kemble, de Marie Bancroft, de Stella Campbell et d'Elizabeth Robins relatent la carrière de chacune des actrices, reflètent le développement du théâtre anglais et éclairent leurs propres théories de performance. Chacune des actrices crée un personnage écrit à l'aide des mêmes techniques qu'elle utilise sur la scène. Dans leurs romans théâtraux, Geraldine Jewishbury et Florence Marryat considèrent la même rhétorique anti-théâtrale qui sous-tend le soi construit de Bancroft. Les deux romanciers subvertissent une hiérarchie anti-théâtrale en identifiant la scène comme la sphère de l'authenticité et la société celle des artifices. Wilkie Collins et Charlotte Brontë utilisent la figure de l'actrice dans leurs romans afin de commenter sur le caractère performatif de l'identité. Ils soulignent la nécessité d'adapter ces caractérisations aux exigences de diverses situations hors-scène, en anticipant la théorie de performance de Campbell en tant que collaboration entre acteur et public. Ailleurs, Collins anime ses personnages féminins crapuleux de la dualité indispensable à toute performance, tel que citée par Kemble et Charles Dickens. Les deux romanciers écrivent des personnages généralement traités comme des figures de femme fatale; je suggère que leur

méchanceté est plutôt un acte conscient, accompli afin de protéger un soi privé. Tout au long du XIXe siècle, les actrices et les personnages de fiction séparent délibérément leurs sois performants et performés, ce qui leur permet de créer une identité publique durable tout en préservant leur soi-même privé. Ce faisant, ces femmes engendrent une forme de « self-help » qui va au-delà de la pratique masculine et économique typique.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Middlemarch* (1871-72), George Eliot briefly digresses from her chronicle of English provincial society to introduce an anecdote about Lydgate's first love, Laure. While studying in Paris, the young doctor had fallen in love with an actress. One night, watching her on stage as usual, he witnesses her murder of her husband. Laure disappears; Lydgate tracks her down and declares his undying devotion. Laure rejects his suit, however, stating emphatically that she "[does] not like husbands" and "will never have another" (153). The anecdote concludes with Laure confessing that the murder had, after all, been her intention: "It came to me in the play – *I meant to do it*" (153; original emphasis). Eliot confines Laure to this single anecdote, but the character is symptomatic of a larger pattern at work in the appearance of the actress in the Victorian novel. Laure creates space for herself—perhaps inadvertently, perhaps on purpose—in society by mistaking (or taking advantage of) the intersection of stage and life. She uses the conventions of her art—here, the on-stage murder of her on-stage husband—to secure a modicum of freedom off the stage. The actresses I examine in this dissertation, like Laure, merge the worlds of stage and life by using stage techniques to generate productive social, off-stage identities. "Self-Making: Acts of Performance in the Victorian Novel" argues that throughout the nineteenth century actresses and fictional characters alike self-consciously separate performing and performed selves, allowing for the creation of a sustained public identity while preserving the privacy of the self when it might conflict with the public persona. I examine female figures in both canonical and non-canonical works of nineteenth-century fiction who create a female version of the self-help narrative so prevalent throughout the nineteenth century.

Numerous scholars have recognized the theatre's centrality to nineteenth-century culture, fiction, and ideology, especially as a point of moral contrast. Eliot Vanskike notes that "theater

was the warp and woof of the Victorian era" (471). Nina Auerbach refers to the theatre as the "spirit of Victorian culture" (*Private* 12), and goes on to note that society "alternately ostracized and adored" it (*Private* 17). Although the theatre was recognizably an intrinsic part of nineteenth-century society, that society still often viewed the stage and its adherents as exemplars of immorality, as I discuss below. Women involved in the theatre were met with particular suspicion. Over the last forty years, modern critics have rehabilitated the nineteenth-century theatre as a viable object of academic study. Much recent scholarship on nineteenth-century performance, however, has focused on this act of rehabilitation itself. Scholarship by Michael Booth (1991), Allardyce Nicoll (1952), and Richard Schoch (2004), for instance, works to fill in the perceived gaps between Restoration drama and late-nineteenth-century Naturalism.

One of the most overt markers of the theatre's importance to Victorian English society, as the anecdote in *Middlemarch* confirms, appears in recognizing the vast number of novels which turn to the theatre for subject, theme, or characterization. The novel and the stage, as numerous critics have noted, were necessarily intertwined throughout the century. Jessica Cox (2005) and Andrew Maunder (2013), for example, both note the widespread adaptation of popular novels to the stage. Elaine Hadley (1995) parses the appearance of theatrical structures—particularly those of melodrama—in some of the most well-known novels of the period, while Peter Brooks (1976) argues that melodrama, as a literary mode rather than as a theatrical genre, permeates the era's fiction. Gillian Beer suggests that Victorian novelists turn to the theatre precisely because of its perceived easy access to human emotion: "some of the finest Victorian novelists draw upon the ideal of performance to give them access to areas of human needs and behaviour which will not yield themselves to the more meditative processes of narration" ("Wonders" 185). As the novel increasingly focused on its characters' interiority and emotional development, the melodramatic

stage provided an easy point of access to such affective potential. The theatre novel itself—broadly defined as a novel which takes as its protagonist someone associated with the stage, usually an actor—has recently received more in-depth study. Sarah Bilston (2004), for instance, incorporates theatre novels in her study of the coming of age plot in the mid-century novel. She contrasts the theatrical debuts of her actress characters with the more customary ritual of a young girl's debut into society, emphasizing in each pairing the moral superiority of the actress characters. Renata Kobbetts Miller (2019) analyzes the influence that historical actresses had on the depiction of fictional actresses, and how those depictions, in turn, influenced how society imagined the lives of these actresses. More frequently, modern critics have traced the less overt influence of the stage on the novels and writers of the period. David Kurnick addresses what he terms the "theatrical failures" of authors such as William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, and Henry James, and notes how the novels of these eminent writers "ruefully refer to the plays they might have been" (5). Emily Allen analyzes the existence of theatrical tropes within the novel, arguing that throughout the nineteenth century "the novel works by theatrical means to stage its own domestic effects" (6).

My own research on the interaction between the nineteenth-century stage and novel builds particularly on Martin Meisel's work in *Realizations* (1983) on the interconnections between the stage, the pictorial arts, and nineteenth-century society, and on Joseph Litvak's contention that the theatre in the Victorian age was a much-maligned but omnipresent force "diffus[ed] throughout the culture that would appear to have repudiated it" (x). The primary contribution this project makes to current scholarship is the fusion of the theatrical production of character and the self-help narrative. These subjects separately form significant and growing

centres of Victorian research, and taken together suggest new angles by which we might consider both the nineteenth-century stage and the self-help movement.

Self-Help

This dissertation combines an examination of the self-conscious, theatrical construction of identity with attention to the malleability of character attributed to socio-economic changes. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the latter stages of the industrial revolution in Britain, an unprecedented number of people migrated from their ancestral rural homes to ever-expanding urban centres. While some saw this urbanization as a mark of the destabilization of the country and longed for a return to the relative stability of the not-too-distant, pre-industrial past, many others used the opportunity to recreate their personal identities outside of the previously restrictive ties of family and home. Britta Zangen notes that over the course of the century "rising to the ranks of a 'gentleman' became the aim of men not gentle by birth" (30). The term "gentleman" came to imply the kind of land ownership or other income "that would enable the gentleman's family to enjoy leisure," rather than the specific birthright on which social hierarchies had previously been based (Zangen 30). Critics considered such self-creation dangerous, as it allowed for the blurring of historical boundaries of class and status. Rebecca Stern suggests that "employers, shopkeepers, and creditors rarely knew very much about the people to whom they entrusted their property or their confidence," and so "the rise of cities and technologies of transportation made it exponentially easier to commit and to get away with both small- and large-scale swindles" (65). Nineteenth-century critics cited such well-known instances of attempted impersonation—what we might think of as criminal self-making—as the Tichborne case in the 1860s and 70s. Here, a butcher working in the Australian outback town of

Wagga Wagga attempted to prove that he was Roger Tichborne, the heir to estates and vast wealth who had been presumed dead in an 1854 shipwreck. The prosecuting lawyer drew heavily on fears of impersonation and infiltration, referring to the Claimant throughout the trials as "a conspirator, a perjurer, a forger, an imposter – [and] a villain" (qtd. in McWilliam, *Tichborne* 51). While the Claimant was eventually proved to be an imposter, and was imprisoned for perjury, the fear remained that others might not be caught. Throughout the century, the line between self-help and false personation was blurry and contentious. One of the enduring results of the trial was the passing of a False Personation Bill in 1874 (37 & 38 Victoria, c. 36), which stipulated that "false personation in order to obtain property was a felony, punishable by life imprisonment" (McWilliam, *Tichborne* 109).

Supporters, however, saw the hypothetical ability of all men (and it was a predominantly masculine opportunity) to form a self separate from an inherited identity as a great democratic advancement, and the peaceful English answer to the French Revolution. This perspective gave rise to a series of self-help narratives in the Victorian period, both fictional and factual, which take their name from Samuel Smiles's 1859 text, *Self-Help*. Smiles's work documents a string of men whose respective talents and devotion to hard work allowed them to rise from lower-class beginnings to become leaders in industry, politics, and the military. Each biographical account emphasizes the qualities innate to these men which allowed them to rise in their respective fields. In the text's introductory summary, for instance, Smiles notes that Mr. Lindsay, shipowner and MP for Sunderland, had risen to his current position "by close industry, by constant work, and by ever keeping in view the great principle of doing to others as you would be done by" (27). The author Edward Bulwer Lytton, similarly, excelled in his field through his "pluck and perseverance […]. He was incessantly industrious, read prodigiously, and from failure went

courageously onwards to success" (Smiles 34). Gary Day points out that the popularity of Smiles's theory came in part because these necessary qualities also "define the Protestant work ethic" (15), and so were readily recognizable to a wide range of mid-nineteenth-century adherents. The implied aims of Smiles's theory also contributed to its widespread acceptability, even in the face of the fear of potentially subversive social mobility: Smiles advocates for the development of personal characteristics, rather than a rise in station.

The text itself, published in 1859, developed out of a series of lectures given by Smiles in the 1840s, to working-class organizations such as the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society. The early lectures aimed specifically to "offer concrete advice for workingmen looking to move up in society" (Heady 344). In developing his theory into the published version, however, Smiles adds a more universalizing element. As Emily Heady notes, "by the 1850s, self-help had become a universal duty of all English men," and is regularly cited today as "a key facet of Victorian identity" (344). While the broader movement took its name from Smiles's text, *Self-Help* itself followed on from such texts as Daniel Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727). Defoe's text, like Smiles's original lectures, is directed at working-class men: "it is at once a handbook for trade and a conduct book for tradesmen" (Young 19). Unlike Smiles in his later text, though, Defoe aims to assure his working-class reader of his perfect fitness for the place he currently holds in the social hierarchy, rather than suggesting examples of methods by which he might raise his station. Arlene Young notes that the text fails "to collapse the distance between the man of trade and the gentleman, because the precepts of trade as formulated by Defoe are incompatible with the ethos of the gentleman" (19). Smiles's original lectures build on such earlier examples of behavioural guides, while his published text begins to expand their applicability beyond the working classes.

Smiles himself sets up the intersection of self-help and the theatre which forms the basis of this dissertation. In the first chapter of *Self-Help* he emphasizes that "it is life rather than literature, action rather than study, and character rather than biography, which tend perpetually to renovate mankind" (20). In Smiles's theory, self-improvement can only—or can best—be achieved through action, through actively changing one's habits and outlook, rather than through merely reading about such things. In making this distinction, Smiles specifically locates self-help as the province of the working man: the man who spends his life in active motion, doing rather than reading, relying on his physical training rather than on the kind of literature-based education which was the privilege of the wealthier classes. Smiles goes on, however, to take Shakespeare as his prime example of the efficacy of action over education:

> Shakespeare was certainly an actor, and in the course of his life 'played many parts,' gathering his wonderful stores of knowledge from a wide field of experience and observation. In any event, he must have been a close student and a hard worker; and to this day his writings continue to exercise a powerful influence on the formation of English character. (23)

In using Shakespeare as the epitome of the theory underlying self-help, Smiles deliberately emphasizes the Englishness of his own model. "The spirit of self-help," Smiles argues, "has in all times been a marked feature in the English character, and furnishes the true measure of our power as a nation" (18). But Smiles's use of Shakespeare's work as an actor to exemplify how experience shapes the self also suggests the stage as the ultimate arena of self-help. Shakespeare's "influence on the formation of English character" comes specifically from the actor's skill in "experience and observation," tying together self-help, the English character, and the theatre.

At a time when traditional methods of self-identification had become increasingly tenuous, the ability to create one's own identity through the techniques laid out in narratives of self-help became both attractive and necessary. As a result, Victorians simultaneously celebrated an individual's freedom to create his own identity, and exploited the subversive possibilities of self-making. Mid-nineteenth-century authors such as Dinah Mulock Craik fictionalized the self-help narrative in such novels as *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856). The story follows the rising fortunes of the eponymous John Halifax from his childhood as a tanner's apprentice. Halifax, from the novel's opening, stands as "the embodiment of those qualities most revered by the bourgeoisie: industry, piety, integrity, and business acumen" (Young 14), and so his rise, like the respective careers of the eminent men chronicled in Smiles's text, seems inevitable. The narrator, Phineas Fletcher, the invalid son of Halifax's employer, notes repeatedly the innate nobility of Halifax's character (Craik 42, 56, 110). When Abel Fletcher agrees to take Halifax on, however, the tanner's initial assessment concludes, "it isn't often I take a lad without a character of some sort—I suppose thee hast none," to which John replies, "None" (Craik 25). Halifax's lack of a "character," in the opening pages of the novel titled with his name, has a double meaning in a self-help context. On the one hand, he has no recommendation from a previous employer, the usual employment-related connotation of "character." On the other hand, however, this statement marks Halifax as a man as yet unformed. His character—his self—has not yet been created. The narrator's initial reaction to this exchange—"the straightforward, steady gaze which accompanied [Halifax's answer] unconsciously contradicted the statement; his own honest face was the lad's best witness" (25)—suggests that the basis of this character is certainly there. Halifax already possesses, the narrator intuits, the necessary self-help mentality required to build a character over the course of the novel: to progress both into a more influential status in society

and into a fully-rounded character worthy of his place as eponymous figure of the self-help novel. As Day points out, "the aim of self help is not the creation of wealth so much as the creation of character, though the two do not exclude each other" (13). The novel focuses primarily on the creation of Halifax's character as worthy of the status of gentleman, and only secondly on his economic success.

Both Smiles's theory and the novels built upon it focus primarily on men of the lower and working classes crafting their respective selves so as to fit into respectable upper or upper-middle class society. Even the building of character central to *John Halifax, Gentleman* rests on Halifax's eventual equation with the gentlemanly class, rather than on the various respectable qualities of which he is already possessed at the beginning of the novel. This focus on self-help as a means of achieving a position as part of the ruling classes, however, also excludes women. Elizabeth Steere notes that "the goals of rank, legislative power, and national renown that Smiles sees as markers of success for men do not apply in the same way for women" (122). Smiles's case studies are all men, and they are exemplary not because of their original working class status, but instead because they have escaped this background. Women, as we will see throughout this dissertation, were expected to rise in the ranks of society not through a similar creation of character, but through marriage. In many of the self-help novels, as in Smiles's text, "the role allotted to women […] is that of patient Griseldas awaiting the conquest of trials and difficulties by their inventor-husbands" (Rance 94). In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Ursula March's patience, perseverance, and selflessness—the characteristics which make her a suitable counterpart to Halifax as representative self-help hero—fit her only for the roles of wife and mother. The characteristics which comprise the self-help mentality, when attributed to women, merely mark these women as suitable companions rather than as self-help heroines. In the

nineteenth century, the theatre was one of the few professions open to women and one of few areas through which women could advance, though often advancement here—as off the stage—came through marriage. Many working actresses married up in the company ranks, for instance, and many more took advantage of the opportunity of interacting with audience members to make often quite brilliant marriages and to retire from the stage into domesticity, mimicking the upward mobility of the male self-help hero.

The Theatre

As Smiles recognized in introducing Shakespeare as an ideal illustration of self-help, the theatre is intrinsically tied to the kind of character formation at the root of self-help. Over the course of the nineteenth century, actors, playwrights, managers, and critics developed new methods of on-stage characterization. Formal declamation encountered melodramatic gesture, which in turn gave way by the final decades of the century to the rise of theatrical Naturalism.[1] Each method recognizes in various and often overlapping ways the essential duality that underlies all acts of performance: every on-stage characterization is necessarily an amalgam of "self" and "character," of inner and outer motivations, and of intellect and emotion. This dissertation encompasses the myriad changing theatrical styles over the course of the nineteenth century, beginning in the 1830s with Fanny Kemble's experiences in the legitimate drama at Covent Garden, and ending in the early twentieth century, with Elizabeth Robins' recollections of Ibsen and the non-commercial London stage.

Throughout the century, as Jim Davis suggests, "the actor rather than the playwright dominated the Victorian stage" ("Collins" 169). Each of the theatrical styles of the century can

[1] For a general account of the history of the nineteenth-century stage see, for instance, Bratton, *West End*, Michael Booth, *Victorian*, Nicoll, Schoch, and Watson.

be associated with a particular actor or collection of actors: I have drawn from a large number of possible examples to focus on Kemble, Marie Bancroft, Stella Campbell, and Robins. Kemble, as the youngest representative of the eighteenth-century Kemble/Siddons dynasty, begins her career at the tail end of "the formal grandeur" of the performance methodologies associated with her family (Bratton, "Celebrity" 90). Bancroft bridges the transition between the popular theatre of the mid century—melodrama, travesty, and burlesque—and the increasing attention to realistic detail of the second half of the era. Her managerial stint and collaboration with the playwright T. W. Robertson is often credited with turning the London stage away, at least in part, from melodrama's "exaggeration of character, movement and action" (Jeffrey Cox 169), towards what was perceived as a more faithful representation of reality. This "cup and saucer" realism, as it came to be known, in turn faced criticism for its slavish devotion to a certain kind of high society: Richard Huggett notes the derision met with by "a public whose idea of an entertaining evening in the theatre was a tailor's advertisement making love to a milliner's advertisement in the middle of a designer's and upholsterer's advertisement" (8). As Campbell and Robins rose to prominence in the last decades of the century, the London stage saw an influx of Naturalism from the Continent and from literary circles. Simultaneously, non-commercial theatres such as the Independent Theatre Society and the New Century Theatre produced matinee performances of "various types of play commonly bracketed under the heading of the 'New Drama'" (J. McDonald 121).

Consistent through all the changing theatrical trends of the nineteenth century, however, is an emphasis on the natural or realistic nature of the currently prevalent style. Often this judgment of a particular actor's 'naturalness' comes phrased as a comment on his 'realistic acting.' Gay Gibson Cima notes that "the Kembles' style was supposedly more realistic than

[David] Garrick's, [Edwin] Booth's than the Kembles'" and so forth (*Performing* 21). The judgment of naturalness, then, is necessarily of the historical moment, reflecting, as Rachel Fensham suggests, changing dramatic conventions, themselves "correspond[ing] to social changes" (40). Many nineteenth-century theorists based their own treatments of what appeared as 'natural' on stage on Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century text, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. Originally written from 1770 to 1778, *The Paradox of the Actor*, as it is commonly translated, was published in 1820 and translated into English in 1883. As such, Cary M. Mazer argues, the *Paradox* "is in many ways a Victorian document" and stands at the centre of nineteenth-century "debates about 'emotionalist' acting" (25). The paradox Diderot theorizes suggests that the most realistic expression of emotion, the emotion which appears most 'natural,' will come from the actor who has the best self-control. The best acting, that is, comes from being constantly aware of one's self, in very explicitly *not* entering into a character but instead creating the intended effect on the audience by way of a purely external expression of character and emotion. Naturalness on stage, for Diderot, comes from the illusion of feeling, rather than the expression of emotion.

Lynn Voskuil notes that critics such as George Henry Lewes, William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Charles Lamb drew on Diderot's paradox to comment on what they each identified, in their respective time periods, as a trend of "natural acting" (3). Hazlitt, for example, notes the audience's role in establishing what is deemed 'natural': nature, in Hazlitt's view, is identified "in part by means of its effects on viewers, effects that are felt rather than thought, rationally known, or conventionally constructed" (Voskuil 35). Lewes, in contrast, situates the 'natural' within the actor and his interpretation of the text, suggesting that "natural acting" comprises the way in which "the best players used artifice not to mask motivation and feeling but to see deep

within themselves" (Voskuil 11). He distinctly separates "natural acting" from a faithful imitation of everyday occurrence and "commonplace manner on the stage," specifying that the natural actor must instead focus on "truthful presentation of the character indicated by the author" (Lewes 155). This alteration in the meaning of the term "natural acting" emphasizes the necessity of historicizing what is taken as 'natural.'[2] Joseph Roach, in revisiting early critical attempts to posit performance theory as a straightforward progression from stylized to natural, notes that the historical circumstance of what is considered 'realistic' relates primarily to audience expectation ("Morality" 106). Any performance or style deemed 'natural,' Peter Holland similarly argues, "is merely another set of conventions, a different claim for a representation of reality in a differently formalized pattern" (44).

While the nineteenth century saw an ongoing redefinition of 'natural acting,' the stage of the period also increasingly strove to be recognized as a respectable profession. The theatre has always had to contend with anti-theatrical sentiment, particularly against actresses, but the nineteenth century saw a concerted push back against this rhetoric, and an associated push to establish the stage as a legitimate, respectable profession.[3] Critics have traced this anti-theatrical rhetoric in the West to Plato's reading of the dangers of mimesis in *The Republic* (c. 380 BCE). "In [Plato's] view, theatrical performance – acting – encouraged citizens to be something other than they actually were. For Plato, imitation, or mimesis, is formative and those who imitate others in the theatre will tend to become what they imitate," thus undermining a sense of

[2] Anne Varty summarizes the wide variety of trends in acting style—and thus what might be construed as 'natural'—from the eighteenth century into the twentieth: "The conventions of theatre history concerning acting style suggest broadly that the representation of feeling through codified gesture during the eighteenth century gave way to individually internalised demonstrations of emotion during the nineteenth century. George Taylor has shown how eighteenth-century conventions survived into the nineteenth century more prominently in certain genres such as melodrama or the sensation play. During the 1880s the debate between two schools of acting, the 'mechanical' and the 'emotional' as Diderot termed them, became focussed by competition between 'masks' and 'faces'" (13). See also Davis and Emeljanow, *Audience*.

[3] See, for example, Bratton, *West End*, Corbett, and Davis and Emeljanow, *Audience*.

individual identity (Ferris 165). In England, after the reopening of the professional theatres in 1660, much anti-theatrical rhetoric focused on the actresses newly-visible on the stage: the theatre "not only placed its women on public view but often put them in positions of physical and emotional intimacy with men not their fathers or husbands" (Gardner, "New Woman" 75). Felicity Nussbaum notes that many "misogynist anti-theatrical tracts charged that women, often taken to be metonyms for the theatre itself, were at once responsible for the theatre's corrupting influence and more susceptible to it" ("Actresses" 149).

One of these many tracts, Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), argues that the stage tempts all involved with it—practitioners and audience members alike—into a variety of immoral practices. Collier's particular objection was that women on the stage necessarily take part in an activity generally considered to rely on deception, and which inescapably positions them in the public eye. Sos Eltis emphasizes the shock with which anti-theatricalists such as Collier regarded women on the stage: "in an age when the private domestic life was the touchstone of a woman's integrity, and female virtue was commonly figured as open, artless and sincere, an actress's public assumption of emotions she did not feel was doubly suspect" ("Private" 171).[4] The public nature of the stage contributed to the ongoing equation of the actress with the prostitute. "Acting was the only living other than prostitution in which a woman's own labour could be so financially rewarding" (T. Davis, *Actresses* 19), but because of the actress's reliance on "her physical attributes to please an audience, [she] was still vulnerable to age-old assumptions of sexual looseness, to the common

[4] Tracy C. Davis makes a similar point: "Victorians were deeply suspicious of women whose livelihood depended on skills of deception and dissembling, and the circumstances of actresses' work belied any pretences to sexual *naïveté*, middle-class immobility, or feeble brain power" (*Actresses* 3).

association of actress and prostitute" (Eltis, "Private" 171).[5] While elements of this association remain in, for instance, the identification of certain Hollywood actresses as "sex symbols" and the casting couch culture, by the end of the nineteenth century the equation of the two professions had begun to lessen. In part, the growing number of professions open to women and women's increasing presence in the public sphere made the association of all working women with those working in the sex trade a nonsensical one. But more specifically, as Mary Jean Corbett notes, "the changing status of the actress [was] part of the overall embourgeoisement of the Victorian theater" (*Femininity* 108).

While Henry Irving's 1895 knighthood is often taken to be an early marker of the theatre's recognition as a respectable profession, the attempt to establish the respectability of the stage had been in evidence at least since the time of Sarah Siddons's height of fame. Shearer West argues that "Siddons is best remembered for rendering respectable a profession that had previously besmirched the name of any woman who joined it" ("Siddons" 193). West's study of Siddons analyzes the ways the actress carefully created her public image, emphasizing her off-stage roles of wife and mother through portraiture and her chosen characters, as well as through her performance choices. West suggests that Siddons played on "the unconscious perceptions of audiences who tended to see the performer and the role as two sides of the same coin […]. By extracting qualities of pathos, heroism, stoicism, determination and filial dedication from her characters, Siddons directed audience attention to their virtuous qualities" ("Siddons" 193). By the end of the nineteenth century, professionalization had become a marker of the new respectability of the stage. As we will see in Chapter One, in the second half of the century the stage was increasingly identified among the professions open to the middle classes. Women in

[5] Many scholars have addressed this historical association of actress and prostitute. In addition to those cited above, see also Elliot, E. Howe, Norwood, and Straub.

particular, increasingly visible in the workforce as the century progressed, took advantage of the growing respectability of the stage.

Self-Making

The rise of the self-help mentality and the increasing respectability and professionalization of the theatre both coincided with the growth in the nineteenth century of the popularity of life writing. While the practice of writing one's own life dates to antiquity,[6] Linda Peterson notes that the term itself is an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century creation: "By 1797 an anonymous literary critic in the *Monthly Repository* had coined the term *autobiography* for a 'new' genre, and by 1809 Robert Southey was using it confidently in an essay on the Portuguese poet Francisco Vieira in the *Quarterly Review*" (3). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson similarly suggest that "life writing flourished during this century-long period [1819-1919] as an enabling means of articulating and re-forming subjectivity, re-authoring a previously written self, or reflecting on the writer's professional roles" (10). Smiles, of course, bases much of his theorization of self-help in chronicling in great detail the lives of eminent men, and many nineteenth-century autobiographers clearly follow the format laid out in Smiles's work. As is the case with self-help more generally, when encountering the prospect of writing their lives, nineteenth-century women again face the lack of precedent.[7] In introducing Elizabeth Robins's autobiographical writings, Angela John suggests that even in the early twentieth century, when "more women were now writing autobiographies, the model remained that of the male achiever" (8). Given this gap, nineteenth-century women autobiographers "were driven into a variety of

[6] The origins of autobiography are most commonly linked to Augustine's *Confessions* (397-400) or Josephus's *Vita* (c. 99).
[7] On the gendered differences in life-writing see, for instance, Corbett, Heilbrun, and Smith and Watson.

rhetorical strategies which fulfilled their need to speak out, while preserving their aura of reserve and selflessness" (V. Sanders ix). These strategies range from overall format to such specifics as title choice. On the one end of the spectrum, Valerie Sanders notes, such an eminent woman as Jane Carlyle essentially wrote her autobiography into her letters (ix). At the other end, Sanders continues, arises the trend of female-authored texts with titles such as "Recollections" or "Reminiscences." Both, in Sanders' reading, "suggest […] something casual, easy, unstructured, resembling family stories at the fireside. Everybody has 'recollections', and even the humblest have their share of interest. Moreover, they are usually about other people" (6). This universalizing tendency and outward focus allow female autobiographers to avoid the stigma of apparent self-interest, a stigma not nearly as present in male life-writing. In addition, male-authored autobiography tends to locate its subject in relation to large-scale national or international events: by, for example, charting the subject's role in armed conflicts, political manoeuvrings, or business dealings. Most female-authored autobiographies, in contrast, locate the subject in a domestic setting, using personal life events such as marriage and childbirth, rather than public events like wars or parliamentary sessions, to create a framework for the text.

Memoirs tend to focus on the performance of a particular self-image. As we will see in the autobiographical texts addressed in the first chapter of this dissertation, each memoirist writes with the purpose of creating a self, or an image of the self, for posterity. Carol Hanbery MacKay notes that "the autobiography has tended to involve an epic effort at self-crystallization, a period distinctly separated in time, existing outside the autobiographer's present experience" (135). The writing of a memoir, then, involves an act of textual self-making. As Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner point out in their introduction to *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance*, "actresses […] have used, and use, autobiography and performance as both a

means of expression and 'control' of their public selves, of both the 'face and the mask'" (3). This use of autobiographical writing to create a specific self-image necessarily relies on a certain element of fictionality. Smith and Watson note, for instance, that "autobiographers sometimes take liberty with that most elementary fact, the date of birth" (4). Leigh Woods traces the tendency to "embroider" to those in the theatrical profession particularly, citing such actors as Edmund Kean and Marlon Brando as exemplifying the inclination "to alter, embroider, or invent details of his own early life for public consumption" (231).[8] As such, the act of autobiographical writing necessitates splitting the self, which results in "a complex interplay between the present self and the self as recalled at various stages of the recorded life-story" (V. Sanders 4). In James Olney's terms, "the autobiographer imagines into existence another person, another world" (241).[9]

This necessary splitting of the self into a public self—the self written or performed—and a private, protected self forms the basis of the central term of this dissertation. "Self-making" has been variously treated by critics. Chris Vanden Bossche, for example, locates the concept in the intersection of self-help and self-realization or -fulfilment: "Self-making is a complex concept comprising not only the principle of earning one's own way but also of developing qualities intrinsic to the self" (512). Laura Engel, in contrast, writes of self-making (using Stephen Greenblatt's term "self-fashioning") as the process by which eighteenth-century actresses "[shape] their public images" (4). Heidi Pennington (2018) uses a variety of terms—self-creation, self-shaping, self-making, and so forth—interchangeably, in defining the fictional methods of character-formation considered in her study of the Victorian fictional autobiography.

[8] Writing of theatrical autobiography specifically, Thomas Postlewait suggests that "it is often possible for theatre historians to identify factual errors and unreliable anecdotes" ("Autobiography" 253), but such identification is not always possible, and the correct information is not always readily accessible.
[9] On the split self necessary to autobiographical writing see also Benstock, J. Marcus, and Simons.

Judith Pascoe suggests that even non-actresses writing their lives in the early nineteenth century do so with an eye to creating "a staged self" (1). Self-making, in my definition, is the form of self-help that can be practiced by women: self-help has masculine and economic associations, but essentially connotes bettering oneself in the world by way of particular characteristics and particular behaviour. Self-making, similarly, rests on the creation of an idea of the self which is aspirational, but is open to any gender. Anyone can make an idea of the self, anyone can perform a character that either translates into this self or masks and protects the other, 'real' self.

The concept of self-help was primarily directed at men making their way in the world through a combination of hard work, temperance, and frugality. But, as I argue, many characters in the novels of the period, both actors and non-actors, use explicitly theatrical techniques of self-invention, especially the female characters, excluded as they are from most professional paths. I connect two prevailing tropes in the Victorian novel which, as discussed above, were equally dangerous and desirable: the self-help mentality and the actress. Because these figures are so pervasive, I consider canonical authors such as Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Charlotte Brontë alongside lesser-known authors like Florence Marryat and Geraldine Jewsbury, all of whom use the language of the stage and methods of characterization employed by contemporary actresses to apply the self-help narrative beyond the expected area of the economically self-made man. My analysis of these novels primarily addresses how female characters adapt the masculine concept of self-help by way of theatrical technique.

"Self-Making" centres on the concept of performance, and on merging the off-stage and on-stage definitions of this term. The OED defines "performance" as "an instance of performing a play […] in front of an audience," or "a public appearance by a performing artist," but also as "a pretence." An act of performance, then, might connote an on-stage adoption of a character for

the purposes of storytelling, but might also, under the same definition, entail something much more subversive. In this dissertation, I combine these two elements of the OED definition, using "performance" to refer to the putting on of an act, character, or persona, both on and off the stage. "Self-Making" charts the use of on-stage techniques off the stage: by actress-memoirists in their own writing, and by female characters in novels. The term "performance," therefore, bridges these two worlds. What can be performed onstage (or can be theorized as an onstage act of performance) can also be performed or theorized in an off-stage situation. This use of "performance" as a bridging term nods to—without explicitly making use of—Judith Butler's theory of performativity. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that an individual's gender (and, by extension, personal identity) is the result of repeated performances of actions associated with that gender. The actresses discussed in "Self-Making," similarly, create a sense of self by performing elements of that self, by acting out a preferred identity.

Because this dissertation aims to extend the rhetoric of self-help beyond its original masculine sphere, I deal throughout with actresses, both historical and fictional, whose performance theories provide examples of alternative self-making strategies. While I recognize the diminutive, dismissive, and derogatory nature of the gendered term, I have chosen throughout this dissertation to use the historically appropriate "actress" rather than the more neutral "actor," or the half-measure of "woman actor."[10] In doing so, I have chosen to use the word familiar to the actresses whose lives and writings I address here, the word Kemble, Bancroft, Campbell, and Robins used to describe their own professional selves. I have similarly tried to follow the actresses' respective choices in choosing which name to refer to each by. Throughout their

[10] In making this choice I follow Lizbeth Goodman, who notes in the introduction to *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* that "authors writing about women performers in the Restoration or Victorian eras will inevitably use the term which suits those historical periods: 'actress'" (6).

careers, each of the historical actresses discussed in this dissertation went through a variety of names. Fanny Kemble, for instance, was known by her formal first name, Frances, and by her married name, Mrs. Butler, but signed herself most often "Fanny," "Fanny Kemble," or "F.A.K." In referring to her throughout as Fanny Kemble, I follow her choice to continue performing under her maiden name. Elizabeth Robins similarly performed under her maiden name, and in the late 1890s began publishing under that name as well. While she refers to herself as "Mrs. Parks" in many of her diaries and other private writings, her various public personae exist under the name "Elizabeth Robins." Stella Campbell proves, in this as in many aspects of her life, most challenging. In referring to the actress as "Stella Campbell" I risk confusion with her daughter, who was also an actress and who performed under that name. Unlike Kemble and Robins, the elder Campbell chose to perform under her married name because she "detested" her maiden name (Huggett 12), and appearing as Mrs. Patrick Campbell carried with it an immediate suggestion of respectability. The informal "Mrs. Pat," however, brought other complications, as evidenced in, for instance, a letter from Ellen Terry which references "the lovely Patricia Campbell" (qtd. in Campbell 248). Campbell herself clarifies that her family addressed her as Beatrice (8); in choosing "Stella Campbell," then, I have chosen the combination of names which might connote Campbell's off-stage but private persona. Marie Bancroft performed under her maiden name, Marie Wilton, until 1877, when she began appearing as Mrs. Bancroft. She consistently published, however, under her married name, and later under her title, Lady Bancroft. I have chosen to refer to her by her married name throughout as many of the innovations I address when discussing her career tend to be positioned under the umbrella of the "Bancroft management," following her lead in characterizing her own actions as inextricable from those of her husband. In the case of Bancroft, however, I throughout use her surname, while

referring to her husband either by his first name or with the added prefix, "Mr." She is my focus, not he, and it seems appropriate in this context to reverse the unfortunate convention of referring to women by their first names or with the prefix "Mrs." while using only a surname to refer to men.

I bookend and underscore my discussion of the fiction of the period with the rhetoric of self-making evident in the writings of these nineteenth-century actresses, distilling from published writing and associated archival sources the performance theory practiced by each. Chapter One considers how the memoirs of Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell chronicle the actresses' respective stage careers, reflect on the development of the English stage, and illuminate their own theories of performance. Kemble analyzes the duality necessary to any act of performance: the need to separate one's performing self from the character being performed in order to create and project that character effectively. Bancroft's writing—like her career as an actress-manager—focuses on the changing reputation of the theatrical profession in the second half of the nineteenth century, and her own pursuit of respectability. Campbell, writing of the rapidly-changing theatrical culture of the *fin-de-siècle*, narrates her progressive recognition of the circular creative relationship between actor and audience. The three actresses construct through the act of writing the separate identity each wishes to project to her reading public, creating a written character by way of the same techniques she shows herself using on the stage.

The three actresses considered in Chapter One provide a framework for the three sections of the dissertation which address a range of theatrical novels. Chapter Two explores actresses who adapt stage techniques to the off-stage world in the theatrical novels of Geraldine Jewsbury and Florence Marryat. Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* positions the stage as a world of hard work, dedication, and perseverance, while the off-stage social sphere encourages destructive idleness.

The half sisters of the title embody this reversed hierarchy: Alice, the legitimate sister, contemplates leaving her husband and suffers the conventional fate of the fallen woman, while Bianca, the actress, is presented as a moral paragon. In three of Marryat's collection of theatrical novels—*My Sister the Actress*, *Facing the Footlights*, and *Peeress and Player*—the author similarly reverses the conventional anti-theatrical hierarchy of stage and society, arguing that deceit flourishes off stage, while the theatre, in contrast, thrives on authenticity and honesty. I focus on Betha Durant, the actress-heroine of *My Sister the Actress*, whom Marryat contrasts throughout the novel with a series of increasingly-improper society women. The novels addressed in this chapter, like Bancroft's memoirs, focus on the stage as a respectable profession and work to rehabilitate the reputation of the acting profession by positioning their actress-heroines in opposition to society. Bianca and Betha consistently illustrate the markers of Smiles's self-help mentality, while their society counterparts appear in contrast as self-focused, lazy, and immoral.

Chapters Three and Four look at the use of the actress figure as a thematic complement to off-stage acts of performance in novels by Wilkie Collins and Charlotte Brontë. In Collins's *No Name* and Brontë's *Villette* Magdalen Vanstone and Lucy Snowe both create a sense of social identity through their own performances. Chapter Three argues that Magdalen's training as an actress allows her to perform her way into a higher station in life. Like Stella Campbell, Magdalen relies on her audience's suspension of disbelief, creating a deliberate conflation of herself and the characters she portrays. In Chapter Four, I chart Lucy's constant reconfiguration of herself for specific audiences. Though she continually distances herself from the stage and from the possibility of her own abilities as an actor, her brief experience on the stage is central to her narrative self-presentation. Lucy, too, anticipates Campbell's use of her audience in forming

her various characters, creating throughout the novel a series of reflexive identities through her narration.

The final pair of chapters focuses on Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* and Collins's *Armadale*, both of which include characters who make use of acts of performance in the creation of their respective selves. Chapter Five argues that Edith Dombey's cold, unfeeling character is in fact an act performed for her own self-preservation. Like Fanny Kemble, Edith remains constantly aware both of her presented image and of the self underlying and protected by that image. The strength of her performance allows her to trick Mr. Dombey and Carker, and eventually to gain her freedom. Chapter Six similarly connects the split self of Lydia Gwilt to Kemble's dual consciousness. Collins presents two different versions of the character: the omniscient narrator positions Lydia as the villain of the novel, while the inclusion of her diary entries allows the reader to see Lydia's construction of that presented self and the intense control such a performance requires of her. Lydia Gwilt and Edith Dombey are often considered as examples of the femme fatale; their villainy is treated as inborn. I argue that their villainy is instead a self-conscious act: in both characters we see the layers of Kemble's dual conscious at work. In presenting themselves to the world in this way, both characters attempt to erase—at least to the outside view—their inner or 'real' selves, and to appear to the world only as the external selves they perform.

In a concluding epilogue, I turn to the vast archive of actress and novelist Elizabeth Robins, in which she echoes the techniques used by each of the actresses—fictional and factual—addressed in the preceding chapters. Robins adapts both to her memoirs and to her autobiographical fiction her own technique of the pause: the marker of introspection and interiority that ties her to the late-nineteenth-century psychological dramas for which she was

best known. In her published and unpublished writing, Robins self-consciously separates her creating and created selves through this speaking silence. She erases, fictionalizes, and hints at possible truths, taunting readers to uncover the hidden self behind the created character.

The texts, women, and characters under consideration in "Self-Making" comprise, and indeed rely on, a series of clear dualities. On stage, the actresses discussed in Chapter One and in the Epilogue rely heavily on the necessary dualities of live performance: the splits between self and character, between thought and expression, and between the worlds of performance and actuality. They build their characterizations in collaboration with an audience trained to suspend disbelief, to conflate the elements of these various locations of duality into a single, effective, performance experience. In their writings, these actresses similarly rely on the blurring of boundaries, here between past and present, narrating "I" and the "I" narrated. This last, a convention of all autobiographical writing, extends into the fictional characters addressed in Chapters Three through Six. These women similarly rely on the separation between true self and presented self, and function within their respective novels in the blurred boundaries between the two. The novels treated in Chapter Two embed this necessary duality in their respective commentaries on the centrality of performance to mid-nineteenth-century society. In each of the case studies presented here a woman builds her self—whether that woman be fictional or factual—on the basis of competing points of view. These innate dualities, "Self-Making" argues, illustrate the lengths to which these women must go to access the kind of self-making allowed for in the male-dominated self-help narrative. Like Patricia Johnson, writing of Lucy Snowe's dual self, "I am haunted by the image of a female Samuel Smiles peddling self-help to her followers" (621).

CHAPTER ONE

Writing Performance: Self-Making and Performance Theory in the Nineteenth-Century Actress Memoir

Many actresses turn to writing memoir because of the general assumption that a text billed as non-fiction autobiography is *truth*: that the work contains no element of unacknowledged performance for effect and allows unfiltered access to the interior life of a public figure.[1] Readers of memoir are expected to trust that the author, speaking from a position of privileged insight, does not take advantage of that position to hide, omit, or otherwise reconfigure the facts of her life. In reality, however, while "both biography and autobiography lay claim to facticity, […] both are by nature artful enterprises which select, shape, and produce a very unnatural product" (Stanley 3-4). The manipulation of this assumption of honesty forms one of the conventions of memoir more broadly, and one which nineteenth-century actresses, looking to create a particular self-image for posterity, use to full advantage. "The autobiography thus becomes a series of omissions and denials—a process of marginalizing self in the very process of putting forward a surrogate self or protagonist in the autobiography" (Postlewait 264). These texts, which appear to grant the kind of privileged access expected of memoir, in fact do a very different kind of work, continuing the well-practiced public performance of the individual keen to keep some semblance of privacy while working in the public eye.

Discussing the development of women's autobiographical writing over the nineteenth century, Valerie Sanders states that "women faced with an inappropriate pattern of professional autobiography had to make new decisions about the form and direction of their memoirs" (100). The majority of (auto)biographical writing published in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth

[1] Laura Engel suggests that "for an actress, writing a memoir that *promises* to be the true story of her life *implies* that she is providing evidence of a coherent private identity" (15; emphasis added).

centuries had focused on male subjects. Actress-memoirists skirt this issue of precedent by adapting their techniques of performance—techniques already proven to be productive public modes of self-representation—into their respective writing styles. In this chapter I examine the theatrical memoirs of Fanny Kemble, Marie Bancroft, and Stella Campbell to consider how in creating their personal archives—defined broadly as published works and other collections of written material—these women who worked both as actress-mangers and as writers illustrate in another medium their own theories of effective performance. Each of the three actresses incorporates elements of her own performance theory in editing her memoir for publication, allowing each to create, perform, and sustain the character she wishes to be taken for an accurate representation of her off-stage life.

Fanny Kemble was one of the last great representatives of the illustrious Kemble theatrical dynasty. From her stage debut to her final Shakespeare reading, however, Kemble consistently expressed a dislike of the stage as a profession. In her preferred profession as a writer, she published poetry, a novel, and plays, but her eleven volumes of memoir encompass her most lasting achievement as an author. Marie Bancroft spent much of her professional life attempting to regain the position of respectable propriety her father had forfeited by embarking on a theatrical career. In submerging both her name and her career into those of her husband, Bancroft worked to perform the respectability she sought both on and off the stage. Stella Campbell married to avoid scandal and took to the stage to avoid destitution. Throughout her career, she encouraged audience members to identify her with the characters she played in order to mask the truths of her own life.

In discussing the parallels evident in nineteenth-century actresses' on- and off-stage methods of self-making, I follow Laura Engel's analysis of a similar relationship evident in the

written works, portraits, and theatrical roles of eighteenth-century actresses. In the eighteenth century, Engel argues, "actresses' strategies for self-representation in their autobiographical narratives are directly related to the impact of their […] theatrical roles" (3), a claim that I extend into the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Felicity Nussbaum similarly identifies the connections drawn in eighteenth-century actress memoirs between the public life of the stage and the private life of the actress: "memoirs explore the ways that women players' lives contradict or merge with their dramatic roles to offer scripts for private life as well as public performance" (150-151). Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell continue in their respective memoirs this use of dramatic roles to craft their own public images. Kemble spends a significant portion of her memoirs discussing her debut as Shakespeare's Juliet; Bancroft clearly associates her own development with the heroines of T. W. Robertson; Campbell quickly and enduringly becomes associated on and off the stage with Paula Tanqueray, the heroine of Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*.

In chronicling their lives, all three follow the fairly consistent set of conventions developed in theatrical memoir over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In each memoir, the actress takes as a starting point the duality necessary to any onstage performance, identifying at least two 'selves' for the purposes of their published memoirs: a writing self and a performing self.[2] Most theatrical memoirs follow a fairly linear organization, beginning with a childhood marked by the subject's particular gifts for performance or storytelling, even if the subject does not come from a theatrical family. Most of the memoirs end with the moment of retirement from the stage (as Kemble's and Bancroft's first memoirs both

[2] In the most overt instance of this separation, Sarah Bernhardt titles her 1907 memoir *Ma Double Vie*, and focuses throughout on her rigidly-separated identities as author and as performer. Similarly, Stella Campbell must isolate herself fully from the London stage and society in a Lancashire cottage in order even to consider starting work as a writer.

do); some, however, trickle off without any real sense of ending if the actress in question has never officially left the stage, even when (as in Campbell's case) offers of parts have dried up. Whether the subject of the memoir claims a connection to a theatrical family or not, the initial decision to go on stage conventionally comes from the outside: the actress-writer deliberately removes any sense of her own agency in entering the profession. In the case of the actress memoir, Thomas Postlewait points out, a "crucial meeting," perhaps with "a grand man of the theatre," is often positioned as a professional turning point. In recounting the event, the actresses limit the implications of their own active ambitions by recasting their entrance into a professional stage career as "fortuitous and unexpected," dependant on "the goodwill of others rather than their own determination" (260; 262).[3]

Theatrical memoir offers "a sustained performance" (Eltis 173) of a certain, acceptable narrative. Any fact or event, however formative, that does not clearly contribute to the formation of this self-made narrative tends to be removed, changed, or otherwise glossed over. Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell fulfil this convention of the actress memoir in part by following a recognizable pattern of editorial work: eliding or omitting names, dates, places, and events, and arranging verifiable facts in ways that best serve their self-making projects. The facts that get left out, or shifted, or re- or mis-attributed, are thus of particular importance. Engel states that each of the eighteenth-century actresses she studies deliberately sustains the illusion that her memoir "promises to be the true story of her life [and] implies that she is providing evidence of a coherent private identity" (15). Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell similarly create the self

[3] Helena Faucit's autobiographical *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (1885) provides the best example of this convention. She frames her first on-stage experience as a childhood game, merely undertaken to escape the heat of the afternoon: her Juliet is overheard by the lessee of the Richmond Theatre purely by accident (88-90). Faucit's tale of her fortuitous discovery "is carefully constructed so as to ensure connotations of the lack of theatrical self-consciousness, of the 'naturalness' for which Faucit would become celebrated" (Marshall 3), and to distance herself from any suggestion of the immodesty of having actively pursued a career on the stage.

revealed at the centre of their respective memoirs while sustaining the illusion that this character faithfully represents their private identities.

Dual Consciousness and the Natural Actress: Fanny Kemble

The exposition of performance theory runs as a thread through many of Fanny Kemble's writings—from her commentaries on Shakespeare to her extensive memoirs. Over the final decades of her life, Kemble published in total eleven volumes of memoir in six separate publications. These volumes cover most of her life, as actress, abolitionist, divorcee, and Shakespeare reader, and throughout pair her experiences in these public guises with her personal reactions to the various worlds she has inhabited. *Record of a Girlhood* (1878), which covers the earliest period of Kemble's life up to the date of her marriage and temporary retirement from the profession, deals at greatest length with Kemble's career as an actress, and delineates most thoroughly her own performance techniques. The centre of Kemble's performance theory, which she outlines in *Record of a Girlhood*, is the necessary separation of self on stage, what William Archer later calls "dual consciousness" (150). This term refers to "the sort of double process which the mind carries on at once, the combined operation of one's faculties […] in diametrically opposite directions" (Kemble 2.103). The actor's consciousness both of her own situation—physical and emotional—and that of her character are equally necessary to a successful performance.

In Kemble's memoir we see an exaggerated version of the duality she cultivated on stage in the multiplicity of characters identified by the name 'Fanny Kemble.' Kemble divides her narrative into past and present by incorporating verbatim passages from her early letters and journals, tied together by present-day commentary, explanation, and recollection. As such, the

memoir presents at least four distinct characters: the writer (in the 1870s); the actress as created from memory (in the 1830s, as discussed in hindsight); the correspondent (in the 1830s, writing letters and journal entries in immediate reaction to current events and experiences); and the working actress (in the 1830s, as discussed in the contemporary writings). Divided in this way, the memoirs enact Kemble's theory of duality as necessary to the creation of a character. While critics such as Mary Jean Corbett suggest that "Kemble herself characteristically refuses artificially to shape an autobiographical self for public representation" (114), I argue in contrast that Kemble constructs a very specific autobiographical self. The letters Corbett reads as contrary to this act of creation in fact form its basis: the appearance of spontaneity granted by the letters Kemble includes contributes to what she cultivates throughout her autobiographical corpus as an image of *natural*, untrained, and unfiltered reaction.

Kemble creates this image of herself as a natural (that is, non-theatrical) individual from the beginning of her memoirs by emphasizing her lack of training. Unlike many examples of the nineteenth-century theatrical memoir, Kemble's chronicle of her childhood works to distance herself from the possibility of her later stage career. Rather than, for instance, discussing her commitment to performance, or her early interest in the stage, Kemble describes her childhood interest as story-telling: "my head and heart are engrossed with the idea of exercising and developing the literary talent which I think I possess" (1.220-221). In choosing this focus for the narration of her childhood, Kemble sets herself up in the reader's eyes for the professional calling of writer, her preferred occupation, rather than actor.[4] Once she has narrated her stage

[4] The explicit denial of any interest in the theatre as a profession Kemble narrates in her memoirs contrasts with statements she made in those letters she chose to leave unpublished. For example, in a letter to Antonio Panizzi dated from Glasgow at some point prior to her divorce (the letter is signed "Frances Anne Butler"), Kemble refers to the stage as a "vocation," a word choice that suggests a certain level of attraction to, fitness for, and interest in her chosen career (Add MS 70846 f. 74 verso).

debut, Kemble focuses on the effect of this lack of training in her dismissive description of her own early performances. She notes that she was then "a very indifferent actress and had not begun to understand [her] work" (2.336), a lack of understanding she evidently does nothing to remedy, as it also characterizes her later return to the stage.[5]

Instead, Kemble stresses her immersion from early childhood in the traditions of the Kemble theatrical dynasty. In explaining her fitness for the profession in a letter to Harriet St. Leger, Kemble describes the influence of her family circle: "I have constantly heard refined and thoughtful criticism on our greatest dramatic works, and on every various way of rendering them effective on the stage" (1.222). Kemble implies that her constant access to and association with the ideals of her family provide better training for the profession than any more systematic method of instruction. Similarly, she attributes her earliest acting success—as Hermione in Jean Racine's *Andromaque*, at school—to "the questionable advantage of dramatic blood" (1.113), rather than to any kind of training or rehearsal. *The Times* review of her professional debut also recognizes this apparently innate talent, suggesting that her triumph can be in large part attributed to her "possess[ion]" of "qualifications which instruction could not create" (6 October 1829, 2). Kemble goes to great lengths in her memoir to emphasize her lack of training and to attribute any success she may have had on the stage to the inescapable inheritance of the Kemble family.

Despite this association with her theatrical family (or perhaps because of it), Kemble insists that she dislikes the stage as a profession. She goes so far as to state that the stage is in fact "the very reverse of [her] inclination. [She] adopted the career of an actress with as strong a

[5] Kemble cites William Charles Macready to support her dismissal of her own talents (2.9; 2.336). Macready records his condemnation of Kemble as an actress in his diary for 1848: the period of their first rehearsing together, after the break up of her marriage and her return to the London stage (2.385-387).

dislike to it as was compatible with [her] exercising it at all" (1.114). Kemble initially reasons that this violent dislike stems from her profession's general "uselessness" (2.179), the fact that the stage, in Kemble's assessment, provides no noticeable social or moral advantage to society. Corbett notes that Kemble's dislike can also be attributed to the element of public display necessary to the practice of acting: "We can explain Kemble's reticence in terms of her primary identification with middle-class values and standards as expressed in antitheatrical terms" (110). The necessity of making a public spectacle of oneself as an actress underlies much anti-theatrical rhetoric: the practice becomes intrinsically unfeminine and, by association, disreputable.

Kemble's disavowal of any desire to go on the stage in part fulfils the theatrical memoir convention of the actress's removal of her own agency in choosing her profession. In both her quoted letters and her reminiscences, Kemble asserts her passivity on the occasion of her debut and the preparations leading up to it. In a letter to St. Leger, lacking a year but evidently written before her debut was decided on, Kemble writes: "some step I am determined to take; the nature of it will, of course, remain with [my father] and my mother. I trust that whatever course they resolve upon I shall be enabled to pursue steadily" (1.292). Kemble does take credit for a desire to help her family out of their disastrous financial situation, but her initial suggestion, going out as a governess, has nothing to do with the stage at all; her eventual debut comes at her mother's suggestion and with her father's agreement. Kemble portrays herself as the dutiful daughter, both in her willingness to contribute to the family income, and in her unswerving obedience to her parents, however much against her inclination the particulars of that duty may be. Narrating in hindsight, Kemble continues to distance herself from any active hand in the preparations for or results of her debut: "I remained absolutely passive in the hands of others, taking no part and not

much interest in the matter" (2.9). Instead, she frames her choice of profession as purely an accident of duty and financial need.

In organizing her memoir to emphasize this dislike of the stage as a profession, Kemble recreates the split she relies on for her onstage characterizations. Each letter Kemble includes creates a clearer image of the actress as a young girl; each additional present-day commentary creates a very different image of the woman who is no longer an actress, but instead a writer and Shakespeare reader. The divide between her current writing self and her past acting self created by this emphasis works in support of her project to separate the image of her current self provided in her memoir from the painful fact of her early professional endeavours. Kemble the writer (her preferred public self) exists in the present-day commentary. Kemble the actress is relegated to those portions of her epistolary endeavours that her writing self deems worthy of inclusion. Her assorted private identities—Kemble the wronged wife, Kemble the divorcee, Kemble the unconventional woman—are hidden, secreted in the gap created between the letters of her youth and the carefully crafted reminiscences of the present.

Kemble's narration of her debut performance as Juliet (Covent Garden, 5 October 1829) shows most clearly her intended effect in separating her present-day, writing self from her younger, acting self. Midway through her memoir, Kemble includes a letter to St. Leger, written soon after her debut, in which she gives the most explicit statement of her performance theory. She begins by describing "a sort of vigilant presence of mind," which operates beneath her performance and "constantly looks after and avoids or removes the petty obstacles that are perpetually destroying the imaginary illusion, and reminding one in one's own despite that one is not really Juliet or Belvidera" (2.103). This constant awareness of any circumstance that might affect her performance or the audience's experience, and the actress's consequent separation

from the character she inhabits, ensures a successful performance. At the same time, in noting the basis of her performance on her own continued consciousness both of acted circumstance and acting reality, Kemble emphasizes her sustained separation from the character seen on the stage. Kemble's description of her consciousness—the element of her self that is constantly aware of the reality of the situation—allows her to narrate the process of acting as an almost out-of-body experience.

In describing her theory of dual consciousness, Kemble quotes from a letter dated 9 March 1830. Earlier in the same volume, however, Kemble has already extensively described her debut. Here, she notes that her most significant issue was not remembering her lines, or stage fright, but the train on her gown: one of the potential disasters meant to be controlled by the mechanical awareness of dual consciousness. She says:

> The mere appendage of a train—three yards of white satin—following me wherever I went, was to me a new, and would have been a difficult experience to most girls. As it was, I never knew, after the first scene of the play, what became of my train, and was greatly amused when Lady Dacre told me, next morning, that as soon as my troubles began I had snatched it up and carried it on my arm, which I did quite unconsciously, because I found something in the way of *Juliet's feet.* (2.10; original emphasis)

In the memoir, this anecdote appears as merely another instance of Fanny Kemble, aged nearly 70, recalling an episode in her early life. The anachronistic arrangement of Kemble's narration of her debut, however, exposes Kemble-as-writer practising the dual consciousness that Kemble-as-actress relies on. The statements on dual consciousness—that is, Kemble's specific delineation of the central kernel of her performance theory—though they come later in the volume were written shortly after her debut. By incorporating these two separate instances of explicated performance

theory, Kemble confuses recollection and immediate reaction to create an image of herself as a natural, untrained actress. In the same way, her on-stage performances rely, as she emphasizes, on *appearing* to blur the boundaries between actress and character while retaining a division between the two and complete control over the mechanics of the illusion. The audience in the theatre and the reader of the memoir both receive a composite image: the duality of past and present or actress and character fuses to give the illusion Kemble intends.

Through such instances in her present-day commentary, Kemble creates a very specific image of her younger self. In hindsight, Kemble shows herself exercising "entire self-forgetfulness" as she makes her stage debut (2.13), an image not supported by her contemporary assessment of that first performance. In recounting her first scene on stage as Juliet, Kemble chronicles a nearly-immediate shift from absolute terror to complete absorption in her character:

> My aunt gave me an impulse forward, and I ran straight across the stage, stunned with the tremendous shout that greeted me, my eyes covered with mist, and the green baize flooring of the stage feeling as if it rose up against my feet; but I got hold of my mother, and stood like a terrified creature at bay, confronting the huge theatre full of gazing human beings. I do not think a word I uttered during this scene could have been audible; in the next, the ball-room, I began to forget myself; in the following one, the balcony scene, I had done so, and, for aught I knew, I was Juliet […]. After this, I did not return into myself till all was over. (2.60)

This chronicle of progressive immersion in the character she plays, to the extent of forgetting her self entirely, diametrically opposes the theory of dual consciousness she recounts in the letters written at the time of her debut. Kemble, writing immediately following the performance, focuses on the layered nature of self and character, marvelling at the duality necessary to the

process of acting; in hindsight, Kemble instead focuses on her loss of self. The later tactic diminishes her technical skills as an actress, and supports the image she has created throughout the memoir of her younger self as entirely untrained and acting only through natural talent gleaned from association with her family circle. In emphasizing her self-forgetfulness on stage Kemble also suggests that, while her performance may have received good reviews, the individual on the stage was not *her*. This second implication entirely removes the observing self necessary to Kemble's theory of dual consciousness. By arranging these two instances of commentary on her debut so that the assessment in hindsight comes first and the contemporary analysis of dual consciousness only later, Kemble manipulates the reader into privileging both the distanced assessment and the self-image created by the nature of that assessment.

Throughout the memoir Kemble emphasizes this distance from her younger self by explicitly commenting on the tone and content of those earlier letters she includes. In introducing the first of the edited letters to St. Leger, Kemble reminds the reader that she "was between sixteen and seventeen, which will naturally account for the characteristics of these epistles" (1.174). She later remarks that her comments on the characters she played on stage "of course partake of the uncompromising nature of all youthful verdicts. Hard, sharp, and shallow, they never went lower than the obvious surface of things" (2.118-119). In contrast, her present-day tone deliberately reflects the analytical nature of the later passages: in hindsight, Kemble explicates, clarifies, and provides commentary, but does not chronicle her own reactions or interests, posing a marked contrast to the exuberant, colloquial style of the letters and journals.

The most telling instance of this separation in tone comes at the very end of the memoir, when Kemble relates, with striking brevity, the death of her aunt and her own marriage. She does

so entirely in her present voice, though there must have been contemporary letters to St. Leger covering both of these significant events:

> My aunt died in consequence of an injury to the spine, received by the overturning of our carriage in our summer tour to Niagara.
>
> ---
>
> I was married in Philadelphia on the 7th of June, 1834, to Mr. Pierce Butler. (3.321)

In situating these two events in her present voice, Kemble denies the reader any emotional commentary on either the loss of her aunt or her marriage to Butler. Throughout her memoirs, Kemble depicts her own emotional reactions and discusses her own feelings only through the mediating material of her letters. When quoting from these letters, she removes any reference to her husband—even those mentions of his name that came during their courtship—and to her married life (Armstrong 361; David, *Kemble* 137-138; 177). Throughout the narrative such lines as the one inserted between her marriage and Aunt Dall's death take the place of the emotional responses she has omitted. Her writing self narrates from a point of emotional distance, appearing not to be connected to the events she chronicles. The death of Aunt Dall and Kemble's marriage are two of the most emotionally fraught points in her early life. Kemble's decision to address these events only in hindsight—using the voice which, throughout the memoir, has been associated with the emotionally-distant, factual portions of the narrative—allows her to remove any explicit emotion or analysis.

Engel suggests that Kemble includes excerpts from letters and journal entries deliberately to imply the truthfulness of her narration, to create "the illusion that she was not engaged in active self-fashioning strategies" (137). Jacky Bratton points out, however, that Kemble's "copious autobiography is strained through her editorializing in later life" ("Kemble" 102). Her

memoirs are meant to create a very particular image of Kemble as separate from her youthful profession as an actress; she desires instead to be seen as an accomplished writer. To that end, she subjects even her apparently spontaneous early writings to editing prior to publication. Comparison with the draft manuscript of Volume Three shows evidence of word-level edits—significantly, both to her present-day commentary and to the incorporated letters. Many of these edits merely make changes to improve the flow between letter and commentary, but others actively reframe a previous assertion or reassess her earlier reactions. In a journal entry narrating a performance of Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* in which she played Belvidera opposite a particularly violent but ineffective Jaffier, for instance, Kemble states: "I was able to do justice to myself, and having gone mad, and no wonder, died rather better than I had lived" (*Record* 3.58). The typescript shows that the commentary on the reality of her madness, "having gone mad– + no wonder," was added by Kemble, in ink, later in the editorial process (Add MS 55048, f. 47).[6] The published memoir includes no mark to indicate that this particular instance of commentary has been added in hindsight. The reader, then, receives the entire assessment of the performance as a single statement, with the result that Kemble appears to have used 'natural' processes to reach the emotional points of her characterization.

Evidence of larger cuts indicates those letters which Kemble, in editing the manuscript, considered border-line, those which made it past her initial selection process but not into the final publication. For instance, Kemble removes a section of a journal entry that characterizes her dislike of the stage in a manner inconsistent with her emphasis throughout the memoir on her

[6] Kemble narrates the process she followed in compiling her memoirs within those memoirs themselves. In the 1870s, she received a parcel of her old letters from Harriet St. Leger and began selecting those she wanted to publish. As she did so, she wrote the connecting commentary. She had the whole typed, then went back over the typescript, adding amendments in ink. After each step, she destroyed the previous materials, and so the existence of this typescript, complete with evidence of Kemble's editorial work, is a rarity (*Further* 1.18; *Record* 1.1; see also Clinton, *Journals* 11 and David, *Kemble* 274).

dutiful adherence to her parents' wishes: "I'm so sorry I must stay in town + do hateful acting instead of going into Hertfordshire – I feel like a bird in a cage + like beating my wings against imaginary bars" (Add MS 55048, f. 14 verso). The simile of the caged bird provides an image of her dislike of the stage that situates her too strongly in opposition to her parents' wishes. Kemble edits the statement out rather than compromise the obedient self-image supported by the rest of the chosen letters and journal entries. Kemble similarly removes from the manuscript a section addressing the possibility of going into management. The section cut consists of a journal entry reflecting on "a long discussion about acting + big Theatres" which culminates in her brother suggesting she "take the Hanover Square Rooms by way of a small subscription Theatre." Kemble has added commentary relating a similar suggestion made "many years later […] by Mr S— a very rich man with a perfect crase [sic] for every thing connected with the stage" (Add MS 55048, f. 28). The entire episode is crossed out, again because it does not support the self-image Kemble uses the memoir to create. She specifically situates herself as a writer, and thus as separate from any desire to advance her association with the stage except when necessary to contribute to the support of her family and to properly carry out her duty to her parents. This suggestion of her potential for management goes against Kemble's carefully-cultivated image in suggesting an ambition to rise in her profession.

To ensure the survival of this very specific image, Kemble undertook an extensive and thorough project of destruction, leaving only those sources that supported her preferred character. In her final memoir, *Further Records* (1891), Kemble includes a letter to St. Leger, dated 14 February 1874, stating explicitly the impetus behind her destructive process of archival censorship: "The letters which could have revived any distressing associations were all destroyed

when first I received the box containing my whole correspondence" (1.18).[7] The typescript fragment of *Record of a Girlhood* has survived in the face of this widespread destruction of primary documents in the archive of the publisher, Macmillan, rather than in any archive created from Kemble's surviving papers. As Deirdre David points out, Kemble's destruction has ensured that "apart from the occasional and often innocuous letters scattered around various […] libraries, very little remains of Fanny Kemble's papers that provides anything beyond what she wished us to know" (*Kemble* 287).[8] In limiting the possible exposure of the editorial work that went into her written act of self-making, Kemble worked to ensure that the image of her that survived would be the one she had created.

Respectability On and Off the Stage: Marie Bancroft

Marie Bancroft writes not long after Kemble publishes *Record of a Girlhood*, but her memoirs address a much more recent moment in theatrical history: Bancroft focuses on the progression of her stage career in the decades from 1865, when she entered into management, to her retirement in 1885. The changes in the theatre from Kemble's London debut in 1829 to Bancroft's in 1856 underlie the striking contrast in the two women's writing, most clearly in the actresses' respective approaches to the intrinsic duality of acting a character on the stage. While Kemble constantly separates the self writing in the 1870s from the self which went on the stage in 1829, Bancroft writes to ensure that her performing and performed identities align seamlessly. Both actresses see their particular course of action as a way to cement their own public identities

[7] Kemble, of course, provides no hint of what these "distressing associations" might include, but given Butler's total absence from her memoirs, many of the destroyed letters likely spoke of her marriage.
[8] Every Kemble biographer and commentator emphasizes Kemble's memoirs as the main source material for modern attempts to write about her life. See for instance Ashby, A. Booth, Marshall, and even a 2007 article in the *Economist*.

as respectable professional women—Kemble as a writer, Bancroft as the actress-manager who "reaffirmed the respectability of the theatrical profession" (Lorenzen 175). In her two published memoirs, *Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft On and Off the Stage* (1888) and *The Bancrofts: Recollections of Sixty Years* (1909)—written jointly with her husband and managerial partner, Squire—Bancroft establishes, emphasizes, and ensures her personal respectability by equating her self with the characters she plays on the increasingly-respectable stage of her own theatre.

Following the conventions of the nineteenth-century theatrical memoir, Bancroft begins by chronicling in detail her early childhood and her introduction to the stage. Like many other actresses of the nineteenth century, Bancroft was born into a theatrical family; unlike Kemble, her career began before she was "able to speak plainly" (*On and Off* 1.7). Her emphasis in this initial section deviates from the conventional memoir's tactic of idealizing the theatrical childhood. Bancroft instead focuses on her training as work: "I can remember only work and responsibility from a very tender age. No games, no romps, no toys—nothing which makes a child's life joyous" (*On and Off* 1.7). Her parents quickly instructed Bancroft in the system of fines payable for varying lapses in professionalism—lateness, imperfect knowledge of lines or business, and so forth—so that from her early childhood she "was aware of the responsibility of being at [her] post when required" (*On and Off* 1.12). From childhood, then, Bancroft views the stage as a profession, both by nature of the intense training she receives and by the financial situation that necessitates her going on the stage.

Bancroft also implies a childhood knowledge of those elements of society that regard the profession into which she has entered as distinctly lacking in respectability. Bancroft begins the narration of her childhood by discussing her antecedents, focusing on her father's choice of the stage as a profession and the repercussions for the whole family of that choice: "His rashness

cost them dear; their future lot for many years being little else than toil, anxiety, and care" (*On and Off* 1.6). Not only does Robert Wilton's "rashness" necessitate Bancroft's childhood labour, it also separates him from his own family. Bancroft explains this ostracism succinctly in the later of her two memoirs by reminding readers that "at that time theatres were looked upon by the narrow-minded with little less than horror: to become an actor meant exile from home, family, and friends" (*Recollections* 2). In 1888, when the respectability of the stage had not yet been reinforced to some minds by such occurrences as the knighthoods granted to Henry Irving and Bancroft's husband, she devotes more space to explaining how and for what cause her father's family "never knew him again" (*On and Off* 1.4): "He had been defiled, and nothing could wash him clean again. He paid dearly for his folly all the rest of his life" (*On and Off* 1.7). In 1888 Bancroft uses much stronger language to narrate her father's enforced separation from his family. By 1909, Bancroft feels the need to remind her readers of the antitheatrical mindset, assuming—or hoping—that many of them "hav[e] shed the anti-theatrical prejudice of the past" (Pye 73).

Bancroft includes two childhood anecdotes to illustrate both her own position as an actress in the eyes of her society, and her early realization of that position. In the first, she describes a scene following a performance for a church building fund. Bancroft is introduced to a group of charitable ladies who admire her and agree to contribute to buying her "a toy, as a souvenir of the occasion" (*On and Off* 1.12). At this point, Bancroft's identity as the daughter of an actress is suddenly revealed, the purses are "closed with a cold relentless click," and the potential benefactors shrink from her in exaggerated horror (*On and Off* 1.12). Bancroft relates the anecdote in a deliberately light and mocking tone, trusting that her readers will join her in condemning the ladies' prejudice. Her diction, however, belies the dismissive tone of the story

and suggests instead the immediate and unforgettable impression the scene made on Bancroft's young mind. The initial focus on the possibility of a new toy recalls Bancroft's lack of conventional childhood leisure. That such a reward should be promised and then withdrawn seems a double denial to Bancroft of the carefree play that a child not involved with the professional theatre would be allowed. The sudden shift in language once Bancroft's association with the stage has been revealed suggests her early awareness of the assumed link between the actress and immorality. The women react "as if plague-stricken" and, using the same language of contagion she has just used to describe her father's enforced exile from friends and family, Bancroft imagines the ladies going home with a sense of having been "defiled" (*On and Off* 1.12). In framing an otherwise innocuous childhood anecdote in such a negative light, Bancroft suggests that even at such a young age she was necessarily made aware—by her own treatment—of the view some members of society held of the stage.

Bancroft's second anecdote chronicles a solitary overnight journey to rejoin the touring company her family was then part of. In the midst of this journey she stops briefly at a roadside inn and, to pass the time, performs a few scenes for a group of rural labourers. She describes the men as "rough but kindly," and notes that they treated her "like a little queen." But when she is about to set out again, the experience changes suddenly: "they asked me for a kiss at parting, [and] I didn't know what to do, for they all smelt of beer. I had 'roughed it' a good deal, but there were limits!" (*On and Off* 1.15). Even as a young girl, Bancroft suggests in her narration of the event, she easily recognized both the conventional exchange value placed on the actress's body and the lack of respectability implicated in this exchange. Later in the same chapter she tells a very similar story about her first meeting with Macready. Bancroft narrates this second instance as a positive experience: she ends with the assertion that she "did not want to wash [her]

face again" after Macready had kissed her (*On and Off* 1.20). Macready's kiss is framed as that of one professional to another, an acknowledgement of their shared talent, while the labourers' had contained an implicit threat. In combining two such similar stories, Bancroft emphasizes that her reaction in the first instance did not stem from the shyness of a child or squeamishness in reaction to the kisses of strangers, but rather from her knowledge of the more disturbing implications of her audience's behaviour.

Bancroft's early recognition of the treatment she could expect as a working actress directly inspired her later project to reform the English stage. As Deborah Pye suggests in her reading of Bancroft's motivations, the actress's main drive throughout her career came from a determination "to reclaim for herself the social position that she saw her father as having sacrificed" (79). As such, Bancroft's primary purpose in narrating her life—especially in looking back at her theatrical career—is to establish and emphasize her own innate respectability. Having grown up experiencing the "social ostracism and ignominy" of the profession (Davis and Emeljanow 162), Bancroft desires, in reforming the stage, to allow its practitioners to be considered acceptable within society more broadly. As such, her memoir "takes the shape of a return from exile, a homecoming she achieves by conforming to middle-class standards, and particularly those that define femininity" (Corbett 124). In claiming her own position of respectability, she also reclaims by implication the respectable position her father had forfeited merely by entering into his chosen career.

Bancroft's first step in working to establish her personal respectability was to separate herself from the burlesque roles she had primarily played since her London debut. While she welcomed these parts for the financial stability they allowed her to give her family, she struggled to reconcile her ideas of respectability with performing almost exclusively as burlesque cupids

and other similar characters. Bancroft frames this dislike as a longing to portray on stage an image of conventional femininity: "Season after season I found myself still a boy in burlesque. When I was talking with my mother one day on the subject, and wishing that I might appear as myself now and then, I exclaimed, 'Oh, dear me! Why can't I be allowed to be a girl?'" (*On and Off* 1.82). Bancroft identifies here her wish that her characters might match her image of her self. Unlike Kemble, who works to establish only her off-stage respectability, Bancroft assumes that playing more conventionally feminine characters onstage will impart her off-stage identity with a parallel conventionality.

Having attempted and failed to move from burlesque into comedy by means of the more usual channels—approaching managers of other companies in search of roles—Bancroft chose to go into management for herself. Throughout the nineteenth century, monopolized as the London theatre world was by actor-managers, actresses might take full control of their own careers, down to the parts they were to play, only by putting themselves into positions of power. Having failed to find a theatre known for comedy that would hire her, she opened her own instead: the re-named and re-decorated Prince of Wales. Bancroft arranged her theatre along the lines of respectability she saw lacking elsewhere in the London theatre. Bancroft "presented the decoration of the Prince of Wales Theatre as she might her own drawing-room, bringing the discourse of the domestic […] into the theatre" (Gardner 76). She laid carpets, hung draperies, added antimacassars to upholstered chairs, and decorated with greenery, transforming the theatre's auditorium into something reminiscent of a respectable home. This highly-respectable, domestic atmosphere in turn brought more affluent audiences to the Prince of Wales, affirming Bancroft's—and Bancroft's theatre's—new respectability. While the opening of the Prince of Wales in 1865 did not immediately remove Bancroft from association with the burlesque

characters she disliked—her managerial partner, the playwright H. J. Byron, suggested she continue temporarily to take those roles to appease her large fanbase and ensure an audience—the renovated theatre reflected in every other facet the respectability Bancroft sought.

The primary signifier of respectability Bancroft required for her new theatrical venture was the focus on domesticity reflected in these renovations to the auditorium. On the stage, Bancroft extended the homey feel of the Prince of Wales into the creation of her company of actors and actresses. Throughout her management—both at the Prince of Wales and later at the Haymarket—Bancroft created an ensemble company rather than embracing the more conventional star system. The *Athenaeum*, reviewing an 1872 production of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Money*, highlighted this system of equality as one of the innovations that set the Prince of Wales above "the current blemishes of English acting," praising the fact that "no attempt is made by any one of its members to eclipse his fellows, or to monopolize either the space on the boards, or the attention of the audience" (18 May 1872, 631). Bancroft emphasizes the ensemble focus of her company in both memoirs, quoting the *Athenaeum* praise in each, and in the 1909 version dismissing the prevailing star system as an "obnoxious" method that survives by each actor constantly striving to "defraud […] a comrade of a chance" (*Recollections* 75; see also *On and Off* 1.344). This ensemble system, and the equality implied in its organization, in turn created a domestic, familial atmosphere on the stage and in rehearsal. The ensemble cast and familiar décor of the Prince of Wales worked with innovative staging methods to create the illusion of respectable, middle-class domesticity on the stage as well as in the auditorium.[9]

[9] In implementing these reforms, Bancroft largely followed in the footsteps of another famous actress-manager of the nineteenth century, Mme. Vestris, who similarly fostered a family feeling amongst her company members. Contrary to Squire Bancroft's claim (*On and Off* 1.230), it was Vestris, not the Bancrofts, who introduced the box-set and first experimented with such realistic stage settings. On Vestris's reforms see, for instance, Bratton, *West End* and Norwood.

Bancroft arranged her theatre to reflect her desired audience, putting recognizable (and functional) rooms, scenes, clothing, and—most significantly—characters on the Prince of Wales stage. This domestication of the Prince of Wales and later the Haymarket had multiple implications for those theatres' audiences. Bancroft's primary concern was to attract increasingly affluent audience members through presenting equally respectable characters in relatable circumstances surrounded by recognizable stage settings.[10]

The large-scale staging and decorative innovations at the Prince of Wales allowed for the kind of attention to detail on stage that created the illusion of realism and domesticity.[11] Bancroft's 1867 production of Robertson's *Caste* is conventionally credited with the advent of practicable stage settings: the play "was set in carefully designed drawing-rooms full of genuine furniture and carpets, authentic books and china, edible bread and butter […], useful hats and sticks and real doors with actual doorknobs" (Holroyd 72). The term ascribed to this innovation in realistic staging, "cup and saucer drama," refers specifically to the scene immediately preceding the emotional climax of the play, where Polly, Sam, and Captain Hawtree drink tea. Robertson narrativizes the stage business in the extensive stage directions included in the published playtext, including such comedic business as "Polly stirs her own tea, and drops [the]

[10] Achieving this aim necessitated certain front-of-house alterations that increasingly drove the lower-end audience members away from the stage, and in some cases out of the house altogether. Current debates on elitism in the London theatre can largely trace their roots to such reforms as the replacement of the pit benches with stall seating, the subsequent rise in prices, and the delayed start time to accommodate fashionable dinner hours. The modern implications of such reforms are discussed in, for instance, Blomfield, Bratton, *West End*, Davis and Emeljanow, and Oost.

[11] As William Kleb points out, "'Realism,' of course, must be dealt with comparatively" (58). Many aspects of those mid-nineteenth-century plays characterized in reviews as "realistic" seem from a twenty-first century perspective to be far from "realistic." Similarly, such innovations in realism practiced in the eighteenth century were considered outdated and inauthentic by the nineteenth. In describing Bancroft's staging innovations here as "realistic" (a remarkably contentious term) I primarily mean that they paid attention to what had until her management seemed to be irrelevant details. This unvarying attention to detail contributed greatly to the illusion that what they presented on stage was *reality*: was a replica of rooms, scenes, lives, and so forth that could be found in the offstage world. The realism of this illusion, as assessed by middle-class, respectable audience members, largely accounts for the growing respectability associated with the Prince of Wales Theatre.

spoon into Hawtree's cup, causing it to spurt in his eye," and "Sam, with his mouth full, and bread and butter in hand, [sinks down under the table] on the other [side]" (III.i).[12] In doing so, Robertson emphasizes the connection between business and character, and between apparently-innocuous object (a slice of bread-and-butter, or a single spoon) and the emotional responses of the characters who interact with those properties. This connection, the relationships formed between characters and practicable objects on the stage, supports and indeed allows for the innovative realism attributed to the staging of Robertson's plays at the Prince of Wales.

A large part of this realistic illusion comes from seeing relatable characters on the stage, a relatability Bancroft emphasizes in using the increasing respectability of her theatre to establish her own, off-stage respectability. From her early burlesque performances, audiences singled out the total identification with her character as one of Bancroft's greatest talents. Charles Dickens, for instance, in a letter to John Forster from 1858, comments on the extraordinary talent evident in her ability to present a character "so stupendously like a boy, and unlike a woman" (*Letters* 8.722). This ease of identification played a role in Bancroft's desire to leave burlesque: "My friends had begun to tease me about playing so many Cupids, declaring that I must have been born with wings, and could do nothing else" (*On and Off* 1.64). At the Prince of Wales, Bancroft used this assumed conflation of her self with her characters to her own advantage, publicly identifying herself with a very different kind of character in Robertson's heroines. This identification proceeded more logically as Robertson began to write his characters for members of the company. Characters such as Polly Eccles in *Caste* and Naomi Tighe in *School* (1869)

[12] This particular scene also provides the setting for one of Bancroft's more humorous anecdotes, which at the same time illustrates the potential dangers of such instances of realism. One night Mr. Younge, who was playing George D'Alroy, was the victim of a prank and had to come on in this scene without the wig that usually went under his hat. The hat, of course, did not fit properly without the wig, and hilarity ensued on stage. Bancroft recalls that "in the business of the scene I had to go off into hysterics when I ascertained for a fact that George was really alive. This was lucky for me, for it helped me to give vent to my laughter. But poor Mr. Hare [as Sam], whose mouth was full of bread-and-butter, had no such safety-valve, and almost choked" (*On and Off* 1.226).

were written to be "perfectly suited to [Bancroft's] nature and skills" (Barrett 120), to the extent that "one gets the impression while reading *School* that Naomi Tighe is playing [Bancroft], not the other way round" (Barrett 160). In her memoirs, Bancroft solidifies this association of her self with the Robertson characters she played so often on stage by using their names to refer to herself—either in recalling a particular moment in hindsight, or in incorporating quoted materials that use the characters' names to refer to the actress. She includes, for instance, in a long list of the gifts "Polly Eccles" received on the evening of Bancroft's retirement from management, "the gift of a bracelet composed of large brilliants and inscribed, 'From Captain Hawtree to Polly Eccles,'" clearly a present to her from her husband, who played Hawtree in the original production and subsequent revivals (*On and Off* 2.323).

Because of Robertson's active involvement in the rehearsal and staging of his plays, Bancroft also contributed to the original creation of her characters, through what she termed "writ[ing] up" parts to make them play better on the stage (*On and Off* 2.397). The apparent interchangeability of Bancroft and Naomi Tighe, for instance, stems in part from the creation of the character in rehearsal. Bancroft includes an anecdote from rehearsals for *School* in which she reacts to a particular line in a way that immediately becomes Naomi's scripted reaction:

> One morning, we were going through the scene where Lord Beaufoy […] asks the girls 'if they have lost anything?' […] This particular morning, so imbued and engrossed was I in the situation, that while wondering what I could have lost, I instinctively and in alarm suddenly put my hand to my chignon with a look of terror, and remained so for a second. This purely impulsive action so amused and impressed Tom Robertson that he begged me to do it at night. I did so, and I shall never forget the burst of laughter and applause which

> greeted its effect. Needless to add, I repeated it every night until further notice, and the 'business' was written by Robertson in his book. (*On and Off* 2.413-414)

Bancroft's use of "I" in this anecdote is telling. On the one hand, the pronoun suggests that Bancroft's reaction—reaching up to her chignon to ensure she had not lost her hair piece—stems from the instinct of the actress. On the other hand, the emphasis Bancroft then places on this action being written into Robertson's published version of the play suggests that the actress has in this anecdote *become* Naomi. The physical gesture, whichever half of the dual nature of the acting process it may stem from, connects the two sides of that duality in such a way that they become inextricable.

Like Kemble, Bancroft adapts this central element of her performance—the respectable reputation she creates through the characters she plays—into her writing method. Bancroft emphasizes her personal off-stage identity as a respectable woman by writing two joint memoirs with her husband, rather than publishing her own story. They write as a pair; their memoirs are published under the communal identity of "Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft;" the story they tell comprises a joint narrative, rather than the respective stories of two connected individuals. Doing so situates Bancroft, apparently naturally, in the subordinate position of wife and assistant, as the supporting member of the eminent and powerful Bancroft management team. Even in those necessarily separate portions of each memoir, Squire narrates as an active, masculine presence, Bancroft as an observing, feminine collaborator. Squire recounts his childhood as a series of remembered public events, situating himself in the narrative of public, national history. Bancroft's childhood, in contrast, emerges from a collection of personal stories, memories, and anecdotes, which combine to narrate a private history of childhood, girlhood, and the development of stage technique. A similar division appears when they chronicle separate holidays. Their respective

travels after the 1871-72 season, for example, reflect a stark contrast between the two authors. Squire here tells a rushed chronicle of continental cities, with very little detail, and confesses that he kept no note of the trip. Bancroft, in contrast, tells a personalized story, with countless specific domestic details, and emphasizes the emotional content of the anecdote.

Though the Bancrofts frame much of the narrative in both of their memoirs as jointly written, and carefully use the first-person plural, in fact the writing becomes increasingly focalized through the husband. The pronoun choice suggests joint decisions, joint experiences, and joint narration, and yet the narrative often transitions from these moments directly into an event told from his point of view. This progression away from the joint endeavour is most overt in the narration of the Bancrofts' move from the Prince of Wales to the Haymarket in 1879. In the 1888 memoir, the move to the Haymarket marks an overt shift in pronoun usage: following the choice to take the Haymarket, the number of first-person singular phrases identifiably attributed to Squire greatly outnumber those attributed to Bancroft, and begin to challenge the predominance of the first-person plural. The event itself is overtly narrated from his point of view, but with an attempt to suggest the joint nature of the new endeavour: "I now approach a most important event in our theatrical life,—why we took the Haymarket Theatre" (*On and Off* 2.176). The easy synthesis suggested in the plural pronoun becomes problematic when considered alongside the narration of the same event in their 1909 memoir. This later rendition situates the move to the Haymarket as Squire's own project: "Without mentioning a word to [his wife] of what I had been told, I had, during our drive home, made up my mind how to act. […] It was not until the matter was really settled that I breathed a word to my wife of the negotiations" (*Recollections* 244-245). The move to the Haymarket, then, is revealed in the later memoir not to have been a joint decision at all, however the earlier memoir had framed the event.

The narrative marginalization of Marie Bancroft becomes complete three-fifths of the way through the 1909 memoir. At this point, with nearly 200 pages remaining, Squire introduces her final words: "My wife adds a farewell note" (*Recollections* 318). This moment in the narrative, however, also marks Bancroft's final onstage performance. In leaving the stage—and thus leaving public life—she no longer has anything to contribute to a professional memoir. Here Bancroft faces one of the conventional barriers of nineteenth-century women's autobiography: where and how does one end? Male professional memoir tends to end with the subject's retirement or, as Squire does in his own later memoir, trail vaguely off into a series of memorials for past associates. The joint nature of Bancroft's writing alleviates this necessity of finding a suitable end point: she essentially vanishes from her own memoir, leaving the remaining narration entirely to her husband. Bancroft's erasure of her self from her own memoir draws a parallel between her stage practices and the conventionally respectable identity these practices were meant to support.[13] Her husband paraphrases "a distinguished critic, […] reviewing the progress of the stage during our management," to characterize Bancroft's willingness to take smaller roles for the benefit of the play or the company as the product of "loyalty" and a desire to "subordinat[e] herself for the sake of the general harmony of the work" (*Recollections* 167). Bancroft is well aware of her own popularity and that audiences will pay to see her, particularly in central roles, and yet she consistently puts the best interests of the piece, and of the ensemble

[13] This disappearance also echoes Bancroft's offstage practice: after their retirement from management, Squire increasingly takes the conventional social position of representing, speaking for, and standing in for his wife. When giving speeches, especially to all-male theatrical banquets, Squire constantly speaks on behalf of the pair. In including excerpts from these speeches in the joint memoir, Bancroft supports the image she creates of her subordinate position in marriage, in management, and in society relative to her husband. The social repercussions of this personal and managerial arrangement appear even in modern commentaries which propagate the apparently accepted nineteenth-century view that Squire's knighthood in 1897 was "of course" intended to recognize Bancroft's contributions to the profession as well (Kleb 69; see also Blomfield 311).

as a whole, ahead of such self-serving concerns.[14] Bancroft echoes this on-stage subordination, which contributes significantly to creating the image of a domestic ensemble out of her actors, in the parallel subordination of her own voice in her memoirs: for the betterment of the play, in the first instance, the better to create an image of respectability and propriety, in the second. Bancroft, in both memoirs, takes the supporting place of the respectable feminine helper in her husband's active, business-oriented, successful, professional work. Her pride comes not from her own accomplishments, but from having assisted her husband to such a preeminent position. Her reward, the honour that goes to her, comes in witnessing the public recognition of *his* achievements.

As well as submerging her narrative within that of her husband, Bancroft also, like Kemble, drastically edits, elides, and omits certain aspects of her life in order to support the created image of her own respectability. Bancroft's primary editorial act consists of removing any event or reaction that might be classified as personal rather than professional. Even though they title their first memoir *On and Off the Stage*, the Bancrofts focus primarily on those matters which concern their joint professional life: they explain that "matters simply of home life, merely joys or sorrows, have been thought by both of us to have no claim to be recorded in this book" (*On and Off* 1.292). In the few instances in which they do pause to chronicle an off-stage event of personal significance, they frame these events through the impact on their professional lives. During the successful run of Herman Merivale's translation of Victorien Sardou's *Fedora* in 1883, for instance, the Bancrofts comment that the play's "success allows us a pause to speak of other things" (*On and Off* 2.331). The private event they narrate here, however, is their change of

[14] Playwright and actor Dion Boucicault, a great fan of Marie Bancroft, wrote to Squire berating him for allowing his wife to "take a backseat" in the theatre's productions, warning that "'there is nothing so destructive as *rest*, if persisted in; you must alter the vowel—it becomes *rust*, and it eats into life'" (qtd. in Bancroft, *On and Off* 2.294-295; original emphasis).

address from Cavendish Square to Berkeley Square. This particular personal event in fact fits easily into the professional narrative: as the Bancrofts are careful to point out, "a manager's private address becomes somewhat public by the Lord Chamberlain's license requiring it to be printed on every playbill" (*On and Off* 2.331).[15] But Bancroft here chooses to deviate temporarily from the tactic of splitting private from professional because the private (their new address) signifies their increased respectability, and so works seamlessly into the narrative image Bancroft has created of herself.

Similarly, the Bancrofts narrate the death of their youngest son, Arthur, not as a tragic personal story but rather as an off-stage moment that influences their professional endeavours. Arthur's illness and death appear in one of the moments early in the joint narrative identifiably told in Squire's voice. This positioning allows the Bancrofts to relate what would otherwise be the most private of events as if it were a professional matter. Squire recalls "a grief which—though briefly—interfered with my duties as an actor," framing the baby's illness and death as something that calls Squire from his work (*On and Off* 1.292). Later in the memoir the reader receives Bancroft's emotional reaction to the loss of her child, but she too frames this reaction through her work on stage: "When I played the Vicar's wife [in Clement Scott's *The Vicarage*] I had to deliver a particular speech which always affected me deeply […]. The remembrance of the death of my own child was revived in these words. My mind was full of his image, and my tears came in tribute to his memory. I could not have stopped them if I had tried" (*On and Off* 2.96). By including Arthur's death only in these professional contexts, Bancroft subsumes the private in the professional. The Bancrofts' marriage similarly disappears into the onstage,

[15] Although the 1843 Theatres Regulation Act stipulated that "the name and place of abode of [the] manager shall be printed on every playbill announcing any representation at [the] Theatre" ("A Bill for Regulating Theatres" 487.3), the Bancrofts seem to be amongst few managers to do so. See, for instance, Haymarket playbills for 1883 and 1884, which do publicly chronicle this change of address (Mic.C.13137/Playbills 344).

professional focus of their writings: the actual events of their courtship and marriage do not appear in either joint memoir. Like Arthur's death, the fact of their marriage is introduced only in reference to their professional status. In the 1888 memoir, the only explicit hints the Bancrofts include that a marriage has taken place come obliquely: they excerpt a letter from Dion Boucicault addressed to "Mrs. Bancroft" (*On and Off* 1.245), and mention in passing taking a holiday house in the summer of 1868 (*On and Off* 1.252), about six months after their marriage had taken place.

Bancroft explicitly removes such private events as might be expected to appear in the narrative of her joint life with her husband—events such as their marriage and any mention of their children—to mask the omission of other events that would diminish the respectable image she has worked so hard to secure for herself. Foremost amongst these omissions are Bancroft's other children, born before she met Squire.[16] The means by which Bancroft removes her daughter Florence from the memoir are easiest to identify: Bancroft reconfigures the timeline of events in her memoir to disguise the fact of Florence's existence.[17] Upon her mother's death in 1866, Bancroft writes that her "last duty was (although [she] could as yet but ill afford the cost) to build a tomb in Norwood Cemetery" (*On and Off* 1.215), essentially a true statement, as Georgiana Wilton was buried in the same vault as Florence, constructed in 1862. In narrating the fact of the payment with a four-year delay, Bancroft avoids addressing the actual circumstances in which she purchased this vault.[18] Bancroft removes her son Charles—who took his step-

[16] In entirely refraining from mentioning her illegitimate children in her memoirs, Bancroft stands as an interesting contrast to such actresses as Sarah Bernhardt and Ellen Terry. In their memoirs, both Bernhardt and Terry avoid mentioning the circumstances that led to the birth of their children. Unlike Bancroft, however, neither avoids the *fact* of their children; they "[represent] them as having simply sprung into being" (Pye 84).

[17] Evidence for Florence's life exists only in her birth and death certificates, and the record of her interment in Norwood Cemetery.

[18] Caroline Blomfield points out that the vault itself is recorded as paid for by Robert Wilton, Marie's father: a financially unlikely scenario, since Marie was the only member of the family earning an income at the time (108). This added element of subterfuge suggests that Bancroft's attempt to create a respectable image of herself in the

father's surname when his mother married and was raised on equal footing with George, the Bancrofts' legitimate son—even more thoroughly from her memoirs. During her lifetime, Bancroft publicly acknowledged Charles as her son. A brief mention in the *Era*, for example, links the two with no mention of Squire (25 June 1898, 12). He is fully removed from all Bancroft-penned narratives of their lives, however, because his existence proves Marie Bancroft *not* to be the perfect ideal of respectable domestic middle-class womanhood she has worked so hard to present herself as. He is living proof that in fact the eminently respectable individual identified as "Mrs. Bancroft" is a textual and performed creation.

In later publications, the Bancrofts' surviving legitimate son, George, surfaces briefly, making the narrative invisibility of Charles even more overt. The second joint memoir includes a single photograph of George, though without providing any contextualizing information. In Squire's individual memoir, published after his wife's death, George appears more often and with more coherent contextualization. The book is dedicated "to my son," a singularity that occurs throughout the memoir. He mentions conversing with someone whose own sons "chanced to be at Eton with my son" (89); later he chronicles a Christmas visit by Irving, when the other actor was invited to join the family, "ourselves and our son George, then a small boy" (183).[19] Blomfield, in her extensive history of the whole family, notes that Charles would have been present in each of these instances, having attended Eton as well, and having spent his holidays with the family (273). This continued exclusion of Charles from written versions of the

public record significantly predates her management career and the writing of her memoirs. In 1862, Bancroft was already well-aware of the stereotyped figure of the actress, and was already working tirelessly to ensure she could not be identified with that stereotype.

[19] George Bancroft, writing his own memoirs in 1939—after the death of Charles and of both his parents—also removes his half-brother from this family Christmas scene (55-57), and indeed from the memoir as a whole.

Bancrofts' life, even after his mother's death, suggests that Squire and George still write in such a way as to uphold Bancroft's painstakingly created image of respectability.

As in the narrative effacement of Florence's death, Bancroft's primary method of eliding information lies in disrupting the linearity of her narrative. In doing so, she buries events in un- or tangentially-related moments to preserve the anonymity of characters from her past. The identities of her children's fathers, for instance, and the identities of any other lovers, are kept from exposure by her choice to narrate any potentially related scenes out of context and out of narrative order—generally as an apparent aside to an otherwise unrelated event. The story of Bancroft's first love and the near-elopement that results, for instance, comes in the middle of and acts as a connection between two significant moments in her professional career: her first Shakespearean performance and her London debut. The man's name is never given, nor any useful clue as to his identity, and situating the story of their meeting and the progression of their relationship relative only to her stage career leaves few hints or temporal markers by which one might guess at his identity. Bancroft subtly masks the significance of this disrupted linearity by overtly following the same practice throughout the memoirs. Squire gives the pair's relative inexperience as writers as an excuse for these occasional lapses: "an unpractised pen must sometimes beg pardon for not always being kept strictly to the point and sequence of the story it is made to tell" (*On and Off* 2.134). He suggests—or allows the reader to believe—that the non-linearity of their narrative is in fact accidental and the product of their unfamiliarity with professional authorship. In doing so, he masks the fact that this disruption is included purposefully to hide those elements of his wife's past that might trouble the staunchly respectable image she has narrated. In an uncited family story, Blomfield ties this silence explicitly to the Bancrofts' created image of respectability: she quotes Squire saying that "we

Victorians are considered highly respectable by you moderners. That is only because we were wise enough to conceal what we thought might get us a bad name" (333).

Like Kemble, in publishing her memoirs Bancroft created much of what is now the source material for her life. She too worked to limit the possibility of re- or mis-interpretation by destroying those primary documents that diverged from the recorded narrative. The success of Bancroft's self-making project can be traced primarily to her thoroughness, not only in destruction, as Kemble practices, but also in contemporary effacement. She seems to have been scrupulously careful never to have recorded the names of her children's fathers, even on their respective birth certificates (GRO 1861 01D 367; GRO 1863 01A 514), Florence's death certificate (GRO 1862 01A 215), or Charles's marriage certificate, where he is listed only by occupation—as an actor, which may well refer to Squire as step-father (Blomfield 279; *Era* 21 September 1895). What we are left with is the image of the Bancrofts as "an ideal mid-Victorian couple—attractive, amusing, energetic, decent, responsible, rich, and above all, devoted to one another" (Kleb 69). Clearly, judging from the events of her career alone, Bancroft was an ambitious and business-savvy woman, and a talented actress and manager. She limits her reader's potential recognition of this power, however, by the way she frames the narrative of her life and career. In removing any hint of questionable material from her life and in deliberately submerging her own written identity in that of her husband, Bancroft left for posterity only a shadowy image of herself—but an image that is eminently respectable.

Instinct, Audience, and the Suspension of Disbelief: Stella Campbell

Chronicling the relationship between Stella Campbell and George Bernard Shaw, Margot Peters recalls a typically Shavian supposition: "Woman's great art […] is in lying low and

allowing men to imagine things about her." Peters suggests that Campbell, in her relationship with Shaw and in her life more broadly, "practiced this art" and, indeed, perfected it (*Shaw* 358). On stage, Campbell made her reputation through such openness, playing on the audience's suspension of disbelief, their willingness to conflate actress and character to the point of seeing reality on the stage rather than art. In her published memoirs, *My Life and Some Letters* (1922), Campbell continues to play with her audience's expectation of bodily identification between her self and her characters, allowing her audience to believe their interpretation to be reality. To encourage each reader to interpret the text in their own manner—"to imagine things about her"—Campbell's memoirs record multiple potential identities: respectable mother and wife, bread-winner, natural talent, woman with a past, and incorrigible flirt, each of which she plays with much commitment but little constancy.

Campbell's theory combines the practices of Kemble and Bancroft, allowing her to build her performances both on stage and in her memoirs on the ease with which character and actor can be conflated, while distancing herself from the publicity of the stage. Like Kemble and Bancroft, Campbell's theory of performance relies on the necessary duality of acting. While Kemble uses this duality to establish herself as a professional writer and as such necessarily removed from the world of the stage, Campbell, like Bancroft, encourages readers to associate her with the stage by deliberately identifying herself with the characters she plays. When approached with the idea to write her own life, Campbell goes to great lengths to establish her unfitness for anything other than acting: "I laughed, and said I could not write a letter that anyone could read, and I knew only about thirty words—and some of those were 'swear words'" (339). In identifying herself as suited only for the stage, she frames her own writing as a process of unfiltered narration—as a life set down without the benefit of artistic arrangement.

Campbell, like Kemble, lacked any kind of conventional stage training. She reminds the reader in narrating her debut that "before my first appearance on any stage, I had been to the theatre but three times in my life; and, not coming from a theatrical family, I had no traditional knowledge to guide me" (102). Acting half a century after Kemble's debut, however, Campbell found that her audiences for the most part did not want to see her master the points of a classical declamatory method. Instead of picking up the expected techniques of Shakespearean acting in her brief provincial apprenticeship, Campbell relied on her own instinctual reactions to the situations she found herself in on stage—both her own situation as an actress and the performed situations of her characters. In her memoir, Campbell recalls falling back on this instinct in one of her earliest performances: "When I came on to the stage my first feeling was that the audience was too far away for me to reach out to them, so I must, as it were, quickly gather them up to myself" (39). She refers to this "instinctive principle" as the basis of her acting (39).

As the result of instinct rather than on-stage experimentation or training, however, this basic principle cannot easily be explained. Later in her memoir Campbell refers again to this moment early in her career, as she has the same feeling of distance from her audience upon stepping for the first time onto an American stage. On this second occasion, Campbell describes in more detail her theory of performance, comparing her on-stage technique to an inexplicable "hypnotic power" (164). This power, she goes on to say, is the product of "a certain hesitancy, shaping of pauses, tentativeness, sudden precision, instinctive rhythmical movement, calling with my heart—'Love, and listen to, what I believe true and beautiful'" (164). She appears to define the effect here as the cumulative result of certain mechanical processes: methods of voice, pause, and rhythm. But again, Campbell emphasizes the "instinctive" nature of these mechanical functions, removing them from the province of developed theatrical technique. Twentieth-

century theatre critic Alan Dent explains Campbell's apparent contradictions in her performance theory by citing his view of her as a "great interpretative artist. She tries to explain how it works and cannot, for she simply does not know herself" (188). In Dent's reading, Campbell's reliance on instinct at once makes her a "great […] artist" and leaves her unable to comprehend her own process. Campbell's characterization of her acting as "calling with [her] heart," however, suggests an interiority at the centre of her performance theory. Her instruction—apparently imparted from the stage through her "hypnotic powers"—to "love, and listen to, what I believe true and beautiful," similarly situates her performance as the product of her own inclinations and her intention to share those inclinations with her audience. Far from being unable to theorize her own performance technique, Campbell here gestures toward the suspension of disbelief that is an intrinsic part of the "hypnotic power" of performance. The apparent contradiction in Campbell's theory, then, in fact closely parallels Kemble's theory of dual consciousness. Campbell's performance emerges from the intersection of the mechanics of that performance with the audience's willingness to overlook these mechanics in favour of identifying the character on stage as inseparable from Campbell herself.

Campbell's apparent inability to succinctly delineate her theory of performance echoes the intended effect of that performance. Even before she chronicles her professional debut as an actress, Campbell defines the kernel of her performance theory as telling a secret: "The desire was always with me to tell a secret. It would come upon me suddenly in a crowd. I did not know what the secret was, but if only people would stand quite still and listen, then I would know right enough" (14-15). She goes on to characterize this "secret" as "something in [her] heart [she] could not speak" (19). In both statements, Campbell implies that the audience is necessary to her discovery of her own interiority. Campbell's theory of performance, then, represents a circular

exchange between herself and her audience: she draws from them knowledge of the secret she is meant to tell—the character she is meant to play—and they in turn become recipients of what appears to be her self, expressed through this character. This act of mutual exchange results from Campbell's first instinctual reaction to "gather" the audience to her (39; 164).

In citing such an exchange as the basis of her performance theory, Campbell expresses the opposite of Kemble's necessary removal of her self from the self that performs on the stage. Campbell bases her performances on an extreme identification with her character: she uses the stage, uses performance, and uses the audience to find and present what appears to be an image of her true self. This apparent identification imparts the sense that Campbell communicates a piece of herself—her "secret"—to the audience; she thus becomes inextricably bound to the characters she plays onstage. Like Bancroft, Campbell takes full advantage of each aspect of this conflation of actress with character. Throughout her memoir she draws the reader's attention to the constant assumption that she resembles the characters she plays, but makes no effort to disrupt or correct that assumption. Audiences of her performance in Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, for instance, "made sure [she] was an invalid," based only on her "quiet method" in that role and the "sympathy" her performance invited (222).

In her memoir, Campbell subtly supports this conflation of her self with the characters she plays by again recurring to her own lack of training.

> This art [of acting] has nothing to do with impersonation—beyond the *means* by which the artist impersonates. If a personality suits a rôle a fine impersonation may be given with little or no knowledge of the 'art of acting.' […] It has nothing to do with any *real thing*—only with the technical means, apart from inspiration—by which the *real thing* is given to the imagination of the audience. (347; original emphasis)

Campbell here locates the impact of her performances in the connection of personality, reality, and the imagination of the audience. She draws her audience into her reality, allowing them to believe that her performance shows them her real self on the stage. The illusion of reality created by the audience's suspension of disbelief and association of the performer with the character she plays leaves them with the sense that Campbell *naturally* acts as these characters with which she is most associated.

What is seen as 'nature' in other actors is taken much further in reaction to and reviews of Campbell's performances. 'Natural' actors are commended for showing a feeling deemed to be natural to the situation: either the reaction they feel themselves in that moment or, using imagination, the reaction they might have were they, rather than their character, in a given situation. Critics addressing Campbell's performances, however, record her as *being* her characters. Shaw, for example, continually "ignor[es] the actress for the woman" (Peters, *Mrs. Pat* 128), reviewing the impact of Campbell's physical appearance on stage, for instance, rather than the details of her performance. He dismisses the implications of this focus by claiming that "on the highest plane one does not act, one *is*" (Shaw 71; original emphasis). Robert Hichens similarly recalls marvelling at Campbell's death scene as Militza in John Davidson's *For the Crown* at the Lyceum: "directly she was stabbed every bit of expression in her vanished, and she became, as it were, merely dead matter. The spirit had fled. What was left had no meaning. As she fell forward facing the audience one saw neither rapture nor horror—only darkness" (186). In Hichens's memory, Campbell does not perform death by way of the usual techniques of the theatre; instead, she appears truly to die on the stage, to *become*, rather than to act, a lifeless, spiritless body. Hichens's statement proves that Campbell's 'beingness' is really illusion—she

must be acting death, because she is not in fact 'being' dead, however complete the illusion may be.

The role that brought Campbell to public prominence, Paula Tanqueray in Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (St. James's, 1893), exemplifies such critical focus on Campbell's talent for being, rather than acting, her characters.[20] When George Alexander agreed to produce Pinero's play at the St. James's, the two men immediately began a search for the perfect actress to play the title role. In keeping with the play's status as an English answer to Ibsen's current vogue, they first considered those actresses associated with Ibsen's early London forays: Janet Achurch and Elizabeth Robins among them. Not convinced, Alexander sent his wife and Graham Robertson out to other London theatres in search of an actress. Campbell was at the time acting at the Adelphi in Robert Buchanan's *The Black Domino* with Evelyn Millard, one of the actresses under consideration. Despite reviews of the Adelphi production which critiqued Campbell's performance—"my voice was weak, my gestures ineffective, and nothing I said or did 'got over the footlights'" (Campbell 63)—Alexander's emissaries saw on stage the perfect Paula. Campbell was invited to hear the piece read, and offered the part. After much back and forth involving contracts at the Adelphi, and Elizabeth Robins being cast and giving the part up again, rehearsals got underway. Each rendering of the story emphasizes the fact that at every potential roadblock Alexander and Pinero reverted to the assertion that an actress like "Elizabeth Robins could act Paula Tanqueray, but Mrs. Patrick Campbell would *be* Paula Tanqueray" (Peters, *Mrs. Pat* 72; original emphasis). The actor-manager and playwright were not interested

[20] The story of the hunt for the perfect Paula Tanqueray appears in nearly every study of the play, of Campbell's career, of the history of the St. James's Theatre, and so on. See for instance Gregory, "Hybrid," Kaplan, and Peters, *Mrs. Pat*.

in Campbell for her acting abilities, but rather for what they saw of her appearance and personality, which accorded perfectly with how they imagined Paula on stage.

Reactions to the production confirmed Alexander and Pinero in their opinion. Campbell quotes an unreferenced review that traces the effect of the character to the actress's "naturalness, her truth"—that is, her appearance of being, rather than acting, Paula (72). This perceived naturalness of her performance directly led to the widespread assumption that she played the character so well because of her own similarity to Paula: "how could any sensible person doubt that [Campbell] must have much in common with these hussies if she was able to portray them so convincingly?" (Huggett 11-12). This assumption of Campbell's identification with her character not only secured a convincing performance on stage, but also immediately influenced her treatment off the stage. Campbell mentions in passing the "many people" who "held the attitude—'She could not play "Mrs. Tanqueray" as she does if she did not know something of that kind of life'" (82), and those who accidentally refer to her in conversation by her character's name, excusing the slip by explaining its ease: "you are as natural on the stage as you are off" (83). In relating these moments of mistaken identity, Campbell does nothing to disprove the assertions that underlie the mistake, nor does she make any attempt to establish in her memoirs a distance between her own off-stage identity and that which she has absorbed, in the public imagination, from her characters. Indeed, Campbell encourages the association because it directly correlates to her financial and social success. Years later, once offers of parts had begun to dry up and Campbell again found herself in financial straits, she wrote to Pinero asking, it seems, for him to write another play along the same lines.[21] Association with Paula Tanqueray

[21] Pinero responds favourably, in a letter dated 21 September 1910: "I don't know what I shall turn to after I've finished a little light play upon which I am now engaged; but should I become possessed of an idea leading in your direction I should be delighted" (Add MS 45982 ff. 37-38 verso).

had started Campbell in her successful career; another character like Paula, she thought, might revitalize that career.

In her memoir, Campbell, like Kemble and Bancroft, elides, omits, and rearranges certain details of her life, emphasizes particular moments, and disrupts linear temporality to continually encourage this association of her off-stage self with the characters she has played on stage. Campbell's most overt editorial act removes any explicit mention of her various love affairs, and restages her marriage as one of true love. Such known lovers as Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Phillip Burne-Jones are mentioned only as "Mr. Robertson" (102; 108) and as a "warm friend" (87). Campbell thus reduces her dramatically rumour-filled life into a series of banal working relationships and unelaborated friendships. She similarly sanitizes her account of her marriage: her narration of meeting Patrick Campbell and their elopement is "factually false" (Peters, *Mrs. Pat* 477). While she states in her memoirs that they "eloped within four months of [their] meeting" (25), in fact their courtship was much longer. Unpublished letters to her sister "indicate that the courtship began sometime in 1882" (Peters, *Mrs. Pat* 477), a date supported by Campbell's own statement that she was seventeen when she met her future husband (24). She accelerates the timeline of their courtship to hide the pregnancy that was the reason for her hasty elopement. Campbell also frames her marriage as one of true love, as an ideal match marred only by the financial difficulties that necessitated their separation. She introduces the first group of Pat's letters by suggesting that they provide a truthful image of the couple's life together: "the world has invented many strange stories about me, so the *truth* of our young lives and struggle may be found interesting" (27; emphasis added). Campbell problematizes this emphasis on truth—both in contrast to the "strange stories" the world has told of her, and in the suggestion that the true story is one of romance—by including only one side of that story. The reader is not

allowed access to Campbell's own letters, and, in the excerpts given from Pat's, Campbell does not leave many hints as to the contents of her own side of the correspondence.

Campbell's omissions here adapt the stage techniques which allowed her to create images of "widely different women with lasting solidity" (Campbell 174, n.).[22] By leaving her side of, for instance, the story of her marriage open to interpretation based only on the scanty evidence she does provide, Campbell recreates the relationship of mutual exchange she relies on onstage. The reader, like the audience member, can insert her own preferred character into the blanks left in Campbell's writing. As such, the "interest" in Campbell's memoir "lies more in what is omitted rather than what is included" (Huggett 188). Through her overuse of ellipses especially, Campbell deliberately draws the reader's attention to the fact that she often trails off and the very good possibility that in visibly trailing off she has left something unsaid. Dent suggests that "the three dots—occurring twice over—do not with Mrs. Campbell, as with professional writers, indicate a suppression or elision. They were her characteristic way of indicating a stop—whether period or colon or semi-colon she could not quite be positive" (226). Leaving aside Dent's constantly-stated bias in favour of Campbell's general perfection, the possible intention behind the ellipses does not remove the fact of them, nor does it remove the interpretation most readers would immediately put on such overuse of a mark of punctuation conventionally used to signal an omission or a trailing off.

In deliberately omitting and reframing specific instances in her memoir, Campbell ensures that each element of her written life clearly contributes to the image she creates. One of the most thorough omissions from Campbell's memoir is her off-stage relationships. For obvious reasons she does not discuss her more contentious off-stage connections. But even those more

[22] Campbell quotes here from a "Drama of the Month" review by Norman Hapgood which notes admiringly that the actress "prefers omission to fabrication."

conventional relationships with family and friends are not discussed at any length. Her sister Lulo, for instance, with whom, judging from their unpublished correspondence, Campbell had a remarkably close relationship for much of her life, appears only twice in Campbell's brief narration of her childhood.[23] Similarly, regardless of the few instances in which Campbell appears as a domesticated woman (that is, as the opposite of her Paula character), she avoids any attempt to emphasize her off-stage respectability. Such an image would entirely destroy the illusion of 'being' those characters she has become best known for, and addressing her domestic ties would necessitate including evidence of, anecdotes about, and commentary on the nature of those ties. Any consideration of her relationships off the stage (with lovers, children, husband, even friends) adds an element of incontrovertible fact to the narrative, which removes the possibility of the audience's active role.

Campbell also, like Bancroft, reorders her narrative, arranging events strategically to better create her desired self-image. She begins the account of her professional life, for instance, by chronicling her first visit to a theatrical agent in London—on the way to which she saw a cat with its drowned kittens. Unable to control her emotional reaction to this sight, she bursts into tears in the office of the agent, Harrington Baily. After "sympathetically" leaving her in his inner office to collect herself with tea, Baily returns after "about a quarter of an hour" with the offer of a part in Hermann Vezin's *Bachelors* (37). Campbell's narration of this formative moment in her career suggests that the expression of an instinctual emotion leads directly to her first professional contract. As Campbell frames the anecdote, her emotional outburst influences the agent in her favour. The scene, however, is deliberately arranged to have this effect: the timeline is inaccurate. Campbell edits the temporal progression of events to give the impression that her

[23] These letters, part of the larger Tanner collection of letters, form the basis of, and are quoted from at length in, Margot Peters's 1984 biography of Campbell.

natural, unfiltered, and instinctual expression of emotion is immediately recognized by Baily as theatrical genius and rewarded with a contract. In fact, there was a significant delay between the initial meeting narrated in the memoir and the signing of her contract (Peters, *Mrs. Pat* 478). By eliding the intervening weeks, Campbell emphasizes the connection between her expression of real emotion and the agent's professional judgement of her acting abilities, situating the reality of her feeling—that expression of apparent truth which gives the appearance of 'being' on the stage—as the most significant component of her performance.

Campbell similarly disrupts the linearity of her narrative in discussing her performance as Juliet in 1895 at the Lyceum. In taking this role, she played opposite—and under the management of—Johnston Forbes-Robertson, with whom she had an extended affair (Eltis 178; Gregory, "Rest Cure" 212; Peters, *Mrs. Pat* 139). Even by Campbell's standards the narration of the casting process is bewilderingly vague: "Sir Henry Irving had let Mr. Robertson have the Lyceum if he 'could get Mrs. Patrick Campbell….' The flattery of my manager was misleading—I was accused of flirting….What matter, Juliet was over for me, for ever!" (108). Campbell's reference to Juliet being "over […] for ever" has multiple implications. The literal connotation is that Campbell writes from a considerable distance: she has finished playing the role and it does not now matter what rumours there may have been about how she acquired it. But also, coming as the reference does after one of the more tantalizing of her ellipses, the reference holds the possibility that in referring to Juliet as "over," she refers to the time at which she was cast. This second reading allows Campbell's portrayal of Juliet to support the image she emphasizes throughout her memoir, created from the conflation of character and actor and the audience's subsequent belief that she *is*, rather than acts, her characters. Here, then, her "Juliet" stage is over—she cannot ever *be* that young, loving, innocent girl again. Obviously Campbell is

not a fourteen-year-old Venetian girl, which necessarily limits the thought of 'being' that her acting usually rests on. But also, the woman who lives fairly openly away from her husband, however respectably she may otherwise appear, is about as far from the conventional image of Juliet as one can get. In the language of Campbell's characters, Paula and Juliet are at opposite ends of the spectrum of late-nineteenth-century femininity. In her convoluted inclusion of Juliet here, then, Campbell provides one of those frustrating hints at the truth of her life—the real life behind the "secret" she seems to give both the audience at the theatre and the reader of her memoirs. By the nature of her off-stage life, the possibility of Campbell "being" Juliet is, indeed, "over […] for ever."

The self-image Campbell successfully creates in her memoirs, much like the characters she created on the stage, rests on her *appearance* of sharing an element of her secret interiority, while leaving the interpretation of that appearance to the discretion of her viewing or reading audience. Early in her memoirs Campbell recalls the moment just before the birth of her daughter when she "slowly […] became conscious that within *myself* lay the strength I needed, and that I must never be afraid" (25; original emphasis). As in her attempt to define her theory of performance, Campbell here has difficulty attributing this newfound strength to a single source: "Was it the birth of self-reliance—[…] or the call of my 'secret'? I cannot say" (26). The inclusion of her "secret" here—that aspect of her interiority so central to her on-stage performances—in opposition to her "self-reliance," suggests a version of Kemble's theory of dual consciousness. On the one hand, the diction of this separation of "self" from "secret" is a marked contrast to Kemble's separation of self and character. Campbell deliberately gives away a portion of herself in her acting, while Kemble *retains* a portion of herself from the eyes of her audience. But on the other hand, the action or the impetus behind the action is precisely the

same. Both Campbell and Kemble, in choosing what to give to their respective audiences, do so in order not to give away their entire selves. Kemble emphasizes her division from her characters to establish her older self as a professional writer untainted by her early association with the stage. Campbell, in narrating this gift of her secret self, allows her audience to believe they have been given full access to her innermost self in order to keep them from looking beyond that secret into what she does not allow to be seen. Bancroft similarly associates herself with the characters she plays on stage, and encourages readers of her memoirs to conflate the two worlds. While Bancroft does so in order to mask much of her private life, Campbell instead narrates a version of her off-stage life by way of this reference to the characters she has played. She bares a considerable amount of her emotional journey to the reader, allowing access to a carefully edited selection of private events: her marriage, her concern for her family's finances, her son's death. As on stage, the naturalness with which Campbell infuses her narration of these emotional events creates the illusion of truth and full disclosure. All three actresses wrote to reinforce a particular self-image; each entered into the project of memoir-writing to leave a particular version of her self to posterity. Accustomed as all three were to creating individuals on stage in their acted characters, they naturally adapted their own theories of performance to the act of creating an individual through writing.

CHAPTER TWO

Performing Respectability: Contrasting Stage and Society in the Theatrical Novel

Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell find their counterparts throughout the nineteenth century in the heroines of an often-overlooked novel genre, which Sarah Bilston calls "theatrical women's fiction" (40). Bilston situates the height of the genre's popularity in the 1870s and 1880s (41), but novels such as Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848), Edwina Jane Burbury's *Florence Sackville: or Self-Dependence* (1851), and Annie Edwards's *The Morals of Mayfair* (1858) anticipate the trend, and Mabel Collins's *Juliet's Lovers* (1893) and Louise Closser Hale's *The Actress* (1909) bring the genre into contact with the concerns of the *fin-de-siècle*. The focus of each of these novels is a young actress-heroine, depicted as "sympathetic, hard-working and self-renouncing" (Bilston 41) in deliberate revision of the common stereotype of the immoral, ambitious actress. Many of the novels follow strikingly similar plotlines: a young girl characterized as loving and selfless enters on a stage career to assist her family or provide for her own subsistence. Through hard work, self-sacrifice, and dedication to learning her craft, she slowly works her way up to fame and fortune, at which point she is reunited with her family (if they had been separated at the beginning of the novel) and makes a brilliant marriage which removes her from the stage and grants her a high social standing. The parallels with the self-help novel are inescapable: the protagonist exhibits such virtues as perseverance, selflessness, and a penchant for hard work, through the exercise of which she reaches a vastly improved social status at the end of the novel. Both genres focus on respectability and professionalization, but while the self-help novel situates this advancement solely in the (usually male) individual, the theatrical novel considers both the individual actress and the theatrical profession as a whole.

Like the actresses studied in Chapter One, the majority of these actress-heroines begin their stage careers out of financial necessity. In Bertha H. Buxton's *Nell, On and Off the Stage* (1880) and Eva Ross Church's *An Actress's Love Story* (1888), for instance, the heroines have been born into theatrical families. Going on the stage, for Buxton's Nell, forms an intrinsic part of her familial duty, and her uncomplaining willingness to enter into this career marks her propriety as a dutiful and self-denying daughter. For Ross Church's Myra and for Margherita in Edith Stewart Drewry's *Only an Actress* (1883), the choice to go on the stage is acceptable only because of the girls' theatrical antecedents, and indeed allows them to discover the truth about their respective family situations. In Eliza Lynn Linton's *Realities* (1851) and three of Florence Marryat's theatre novels—*My Sister the Actress* (1881), *Facing the Footlights* (1883), and *Peeress and Player* (1883)—Clara, Betha, Eudora, and Susie turn to the stage to support themselves when they are left penniless orphans lacking any other means of support. In each case, "financial need helps legitimize the young actress's choice, but the novels amplify their defence of the profession by emphasizing that the disposition to perform is inborn and irrefutable" (Bilston 102). Whatever her initial circumstances, each of these actress-heroines proves her morality and dutiful nature by the order in which her motivations are presented: the initial financial need gives way only later to love of the theatre, recognition of talent, and ambition for professional success.

Many of these novels use the stage as a contrast to society specifically to emphasize the actual respectability and professionalism of the stage in opposition to the assumptions put forth by popular anti-theatrical sentiment.[1] Much of this rhetoric addresses actresses specifically, using

[1] In addition to Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* and Marryat's *My Sister the Actress*, which are the focus of this chapter, such novels as Buxton's *Nell, On and Off the Stage*, Drewry's *Only an Actress*, Mabel Collins's *Juliet's Lovers*, and Marryat's *Facing the Footlights* also make this overt contrast between stage and society. On anti-theatrical sentiments, see Jonas Barish who provides an overview of such prejudices, tracing their development from Plato's

the language of separate spheres to suggest that women who perform publicly on the stage have removed themselves from their proper (private) sphere. The public nature of the actress's work, and the reliance of that work on her body, lead easily to a conflation of the actress with the prostitute. In less extreme forms of this rhetoric, "Victorian commentators found female theatrical performance particularly unsettling because it conflicted with ideals of women as purifying agents by evincing their ability to deceive" (Bilston 39). The theatrical novels of the mid- to late-nineteenth century tend to include at least one character who speaks from the position of conventional prejudice. In Buxton's *Nell, On and Off the Stage*, for example, both Nell's mother and Mrs. Dalrymple, the mother of Nell's society counterpart, lament their daughters' love of the stage in terms that describe the profession as improper, unladylike, and demeaning to their social position. This expression of anti-theatrical rhetoric enables authors to write "on the defensive": to explicitly combat the stereotype by including in direct response "lengthy discursive passages [which] adjure the reader to re-evaluate such ideas about the theatre and distance the true artist from the shallow actress of popular imagination" (Bilston 48-49). Working against the stereotype, theatrical novelists present their actress-heroines as role models rather than as cautionary tales, as idealized figures rather than as sites of potential contamination, focusing on the hard work and dedication necessary to a successful career on the stage.

In this chapter I read Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* and Marryat's *My Sister the Actress* as examples of the theatrical novel which most closely tie their commentary on the opposition of stage and society to language reminiscent of the self-help movement. *The Half Sisters* charts the development of Bianca Pazzi from a teenager into a renowned London actress, after she moves

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Republic and Plutarch's "Life of Solon" into the twentieth century and focusing on the prevalent concern throughout that history with what was interpreted as the necessary duplicity of the stage. Tracy Davis's *Actresses as Working Women*, Kate Newey's "Women and the Theatre," and Kristina Straub's *Sexual Suspects* address at length the specific prejudice against actresses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

with her mother from Italy to England in search of the father who abandoned them. A parallel plot follows Bianca's legitimate and English-born half-sister, Alice, in a downward spiral of destruction. Though Alice makes a lucrative marriage, ennui leads her to the fatal error of taking a lover. Bianca, the illegitimate daughter and celebrated actress, achieves fame, fortune, and a brilliant marriage to Lord Melton through her dedication to learning and mastering her profession; Alice dies miserably, having sought out a love affair as the only possible escape from her aimless life. In *My Sister the Actress*, Marryat chronicles Betha Durant's similarly successful career. At the novel's opening, Betha is disowned by her father for taking her dying mother's side in a domestic dispute. Alone and unprovided for, Betha accepts an offer to train for the stage with a London manager, eventually making a sensational success. The ridicule and derision she meets with from her former friends and family—the companions of her previous life as the elder daughter of a respectable middle-class household—only encourage her to devote herself more enthusiastically to her chosen profession, with the result that her former companions begin to seek out her company once she has achieved fame. Like Bianca, Betha leaves the stage to marry once perseverance has taken her to the top of her profession.

Both Jewsbury and Marryat provide a stark contrast between their actress-heroines and their respective high-society counterparts in order to establish the overall respectability of the theatrical profession. At the same time, the contrast also emphasizes the hypocrisy of a society that condemns actresses for assumed behaviours while turning a blind eye to—and even in some cases encouraging—similar or worse behaviours in women off the stage. In both novels, "the actress and the Society lady are employed in the same business, the only difference being the hard work and discipline demanded of the stage performer" (Eltis 176). In *The Half Sisters* Jewsbury contrasts the role of docile wife with that of successful career woman; the text, in its

support of women's work over idleness and deceit, very clearly stands in favour of the actress. While Jewsbury uses professional labour and dedication to a chosen occupation as the contrast between the actress and the society wife, Marryat contrasts the good intentions of her actress-heroine with the innate hypocrisy of an anti-theatrical attitude that overlooks immorality off stage. *My Sister the Actress* shows an actress who is wholly honest and self-sacrificing, while her society counterparts enact a multiplicity of deceptions. Both novels work to rehabilitate the reputation of the stage and to establish the theatre as a suitable avenue of professional pursuit for women.

The Gospel of Work: Bianca Pazzi

Like many mid-nineteenth-century female novelists, Jewsbury reflects in her fiction the divide in her own life between the necessity of pursuing a profession and the desire to conform to expectations of conventional femininity. In Jewsbury's work as a reviewer for *The Athenaeum* and as a reader for the publishers Richard Bentley and Son, she aligns herself with those calling for the continued reinforcement of the domestic stereotype. Her published novels, in contrast, depict working women or women with a purpose beyond marriage, and focus on the unsuitability of female education and training to fit them for mid-nineteenth-century society.[2] In her radical defense of the stage, *The Half Sisters*, Jewsbury contrasts Bianca, the successful and innately moral actress, with her half-sister Alice. The latter, unprepared by her upbringing to fend for herself, becomes increasingly miserable in a marriage that has doomed her to a life of domestic "ennui" (Jewsbury 220), and eventually dies in consequence. Jewsbury's presentation of the

[2] Numerous critics address Jewsbury's apparently inconsistent treatment of the woman question when considered alongside her own role as a single working woman. See for instance Allen, Chattman, Foster, Fryckstedt, "New Sources," Harman and Meyer, Hartley, and Thompson. Susanne Howe suggests that *The Half-Sisters* is "of all her novels the one in which the woman question looms largest" (105).

contrasting half-sisters and her obvious support of the working—that is, productive—actress over the respectable but idle society wife forms her radical commentary. Here Jewsbury specifically applies Thomas Carlyle's self-help theory of work as a man's salvation, "revis[ing] the portrait of the female artist to represent the 'Gospel' of work and professionalism" (Lewis 67).[3]

In *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle affirms that "work is alone noble" (192). Work, for Carlyle, takes on a religious aspect in its situation as the highest duty of man's life. Essentially, in Carlyle's theorization, "work could be the path to salvation" (Zakreski 12), "for there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work" (Carlyle 244). Idleness, in contrast, leads to "perpetual despair" (Carlyle 244): a loss or lack of vocation removes even the possibility of hope, salvation, and a fulfilling life. Carlyle emphasizes through an almost mantra-like repetition this status of work as a religious pursuit: "all true Work is Religion" (250), "all true Work is sacred" (251), "true Work *is* Worship" (255; original emphasis). Written in the 1840s, Carlyle's text is central to the rising self-help movement. His philosophy of work as the best method of perfecting the self anticipates Samuel Smiles's self-help doctrine of advancement through dedication to hard work, as laid out in *Self-Help*. Carlyle delineates the elements of work as comprising "whatsoever of morality and of intelligence; what of patience, perseverance, faithfulness, of method, insight, ingenuity, energy; in a word, whatsoever of Strength the man

[3] Many critics have recognized Jewsbury's adaptation of Carlyle's gospel, but primarily have done so without accounting for the role of the theatre in the parallel. Linda Lewis, for example, analyzes *The Half Sisters* as a fusion of *Past and Present* and Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* (1807). As such, she addresses Jewsbury's use of the paired sisters as the centre of her commentary, but makes little of the role of the theatrical profession in this pairing. Monica Fryckstedt considers the work to which Jewsbury puts Carlyle's gospel more specifically, but focuses on Jewsbury's *Athenaeum* reviews and thus her application of the gospel in her own life and practice, rather than on its appearance in her novels. Fryckstedt reads these reviews as signalling Jewsbury's own "Manchester spirit and perseverance" ("Shilling Magazine" 329) and suggests that, for Jewsbury, "work constituted the road to female emancipation" ("New Sources" 54), but touches only briefly on a similar application of Carlyle's philosophy in Jewsbury's fiction.

[has] in him" (198). Carlyle's approach to self-help, then, like that expressed by Smiles through his biographies of working men, focuses on the subject's commitment not only to improving himself and his position, but to doing so specifically through his own unswerving commitment to productive labour.

In adapting Carlyle's gospel of work to her female protagonist, Jewsbury draws a connection between his masculine-focused theories of self-help and an equally wide-spread mid-century genre: the female conduct book. Patricia Branca describes the female conduct book broadly as a "represent[ation of] what the woman's position was supposed to be" (13). Such texts, much like Carlyle's treatment of work in *Past and Present*, were largely theoretical, focusing on "social behavior in the abstract rather than practical problems of everyday life" (Branca 13). Sarah Stickney Ellis, who published a series of such books in the 1830s and 1840s, remains the best-known contributor to the genre. Publications such as Ellis's *Wives of England* (1834), *Daughters of England* (1842), and *Mothers of England* (1843) "take it as axiomatic that a woman's responsibility is to make a happy home and devote herself to the service of others from within it" (Foster 6). The conduct book aimed at women echoes the texts of men's self-help in its focus on duty, self-improvement, and dedication; women, however, are taught to apply these virtues within their homes, for the comfort and advancement of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. In *The Half Sisters*, Jewsbury suggests that the professional woman—the woman who adheres to the teachings of Thomas Carlyle rather than to those of Sarah Stickney Ellis—becomes the more desirable domestic role model. In doing so, Jewsbury "explores and exposes the damaging effects of the period's conventional beliefs about women" (Wilkes ix), and emphasizes "the beneficial effects of an independent career on a woman's life" (Wilkes xvi). Bianca, *because* she works as an actress, is protected by her commitment to her profession from

giving in to Conrad or to any other potential lover. Alice, whom Jewsbury clearly characterizes as amongst the intended audience for conduct books such as Ellis's, has no outlet other than fantasy—and, ultimately, adultery.

In *The Women of England* (1839), Ellis argues that women like Alice "are, in fact, from their own constitution, and from the station they occupy in the world, strictly speaking, *relative* creatures" (149; emphasis added). Women who form their lives around the conventional roles stipulated in conduct books such as Ellis's "are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them" (Fraiman 6), rather than what they choose to make of themselves. Jewsbury uses the contrasting pair of half-sisters to refute the implication that such relativity is beneficial to the mid-nineteenth-century woman. Alice, who leads a purely relative existence—reliant first on her mother, then on her husband, and finally on her lover for her sense of being—is miserable, plots to elope with Conrad, and dies. Bianca, in committing to her chosen profession, takes control of her own life: rather than living as the dependant of another, she has her work to give her a personal sense of self, accomplishment, and purpose. Jewsbury's explicit statement of this contrast comes, as so many of her explicit statements do in the novel, in one of Lord Melton's speeches.[4] In replying to one of Conrad's many anti-theatrical and misogynistic rants, Melton argues that "to be 'agreeable', is *not* before all things necessary, even in a woman: they never were intended to lead a purely *relative* life; and, until they cease to be educated with a sole view to what men admire, they will never be any better than they are" (221; original emphasis). Jewsbury's emphasis on Melton's refusal to treat women as "*relative*" creatures deliberately signals her interaction with Ellis.[5] Melton goes on to aver the benefit of "a woman with real

[4] Lewis identifies Melton as Jewsbury's "spokesman" (69).
[5] Howe builds on this emphasized but unreferenced quotation from Ellis's *The Women of England* to read *The Half Sisters* as Jewsbury taking "the long-wished-for opportunity to say her say against the 'Mrs. Ellis woman' and the 'Mrs. Ellis code'" (106).

genius and qualifications for it, following a profession, because, to a degree, it gives her a personal and independent existence" (221). Pursuing a professional calling suitable to one's talents and interests, far from—as Conrad argues—making a woman unfeminine and undesirable, instead allows her to exist as an individual separate from such conventional relativities as wife, daughter, or mother.

Much like Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell, Bianca initially takes to the stage for financial reasons and out of a sense of familial duty rather than from any personal inclination or ambition for fame. As Norma Clarke summarizes, Bianca's priorities are "first, to support an insane mother; second, to win the love of a scoundrel she unaccountably thinks is a good man;" third, to secure personal satisfaction in a profession she enjoys (189). When Bianca agrees to go on the stage at the start of the novel, Jewsbury writes that "she had no idea of vanity, or of getting admiration, or of displaying herself in any way; her sole idea of the circus was, that it was the means of earning a certain number of shillings, on which she might support her mother" (32). Bianca, Jewsbury implies, would take any opportunity to secure financial stability for her family. The fact that she happens to have an innate talent for acting is of less importance to her than the consideration that that talent might be used as "an extension of [her] domestic self-sacrifice and devotion" (Rosen 27). Once her mother has died and Bianca no longer has a family to support by her work, she does begin to seek advancement in her chosen profession. But, contrary to the anti-theatrical assumption that an actress would only seek to advance herself for personal renown and fortune, Bianca's desire to rise to the top of her profession has a self-sacrificial element that places her ambition in keeping with her earlier devotion to duty. Bianca explains that she intends to raise herself in order to make herself the "equal" (Jewsbury 155) of Conrad, with whom she has been in love since their first meeting in the novel's opening chapters. As such, her desire for

improvement and advancement takes on elements both of Carlylean self-help and Ellis's relativity. She wishes to improve herself through work in order to raise herself in the eyes of the world, but she wishes for advancement not for her own sake, but for that of her (she thinks at the time) future husband.

The gradual revelation of Bianca's love for the stage and her personal ambitions within her profession allows Jewsbury to present her actress-heroine in a positive light. As Linda Lewis argues, "Jewsbury avoids provoking the distaste that would be attached to the actress if she had been motivated initially—instead of secondarily—by ambition, the desire for freedom, and 'passion' for her art" (75). Jewsbury narrates this shift almost apologetically, as if the narrator can only narrowly avoid making judgmental statements about Bianca's chosen profession: "Accident had thrown Bianca into this line of life; but we are obliged to confess she continued in it from choice" (33). The narrator's diction allows Jewsbury to distance herself from any close connection with the stage, even while showing that following such a profession is vastly preferable to the idleness deemed conventional for women in society.

As in the actress memoirs addressed in Chapter One, Bianca's decision to go on stage comes at the instigation of an outside source—a male figure of authority—and she merely goes along with the suggestion out of a sense of duty. Mr. Simpson, having recognized Bianca's apparently innate talent for acting, offers her a means to support herself and her mother. Having no other financial option, she jumps at the chance of any income. Bianca's first response to her new career, however, reflects common anti-theatrical sentiments, however "natural" her talent for the stage seems to be. In her first experience of public performance with Mr. Simpson's circus, Bianca is "stunned, bewildered, and ashamed of her conspicuous position, and of the wonder and notice they obtained from the crowd" (Jewsbury 30). Even after years in the

profession—and numerous statements of her personal enjoyment of the power she wields over an audience—Bianca retains her early "perception […] of the tinsel tawdry reality of all stage effects […]. No one could loathe the details of her profession more than she did" (Jewsbury 145). She enters into the profession only to support her mother, and this continued separation of her self from the details of the stage limits the negative connotations of her career.

Jewsbury initially emphasizes a similar lack of agency—a relativity, to use Ellis's term—at the bottom of Bianca's desire for professional advancement. In speaking to her actor-mentor, Bianca asserts that "if there had been no one to whom, in my soul, I might dedicate my efforts, for whose approval I strained every nerve, I could not have worked. I could not work from a mere personal motive—it needed something to take me out of myself to induce me to aspire to excellence" (161). Even after her mother's death and Conrad's desertion, Bianca's professional ambition aims not at her personal advancement but, like that of Marie Bancroft, at the betterment of the profession as a whole. Bianca articulates this desire to Lady Vernon in a conversation that seems to change the latter's previous opinion of the stage: "I hope to elevate my profession into one of the fine arts,—to see it ennobled, and freed from the meretricious degradation into which it has sunk" (Jewsbury 254). Both Bianca and the narrator repeatedly state the personal joy the actress takes in her profession and her personal improvement (33, 161, 200, 254), but in keeping with the dictates of Carlyle, much of this enjoyment comes from the work itself. Bianca follows the advice of her actor-mentor to consider "the work […] of infinitely more importance than the reward" (Jewsbury 160). Carlyle similarly commands his acolytes to "let 'Fame' and the rest of it go prating" in favour of "genuine WORK" (167). Fame, for Bianca as for Carlyle, is not an end in itself, but rather a means to a more worthy end.

The sense of familial duty that first compels Bianca to act provides an early point of contrast between Jewsbury's central pairing of the half-sisters. As Lauren Chattman writes, "acting is presented as [Bianca's] daughterly duty, and she stoically takes it on, much in the same way that Alice is expected to become a wife" (76). While Bianca first appears to put even personal comfort aside in order to provide for her mother, Alice's introduction in the text shows her being berated by her mother for her lack of such selfless consideration. Mrs. Helmsby complains that since Alice has returned home from school she has expressed "every day more and more neglect of [her] duties, more and more dislike to the sober-minded condition of life in which [she was] born" (14). Alice's mother reminds her young daughter of the role she will be expected to fill in later life: "Your life will be domestic; you are neither to be a fashionable woman nor an authoress; therefore your excessive devotion to books and accomplishments will bring no useful results, but only unfit you for your duties" (14). Echoing Ellis, Mrs. Helmsby encourages Alice to think only of her duty to others, rather than follow her own interests or use her time in a way that might lead her to discover her own vocation. As a young, middle-class woman in mid-nineteenth-century England, it is assumed that her "life will be domestic," whatever her personal inclination.

Jewsbury quickly expands into the novel's central question this initial contrast of Bianca's dutiful self-denial with Alice's apparent inability to perform her duty to her mother. Immediately after introducing Alice, the narrator states that, "indeed, whether [Alice] or her poor unknown half-sister Bianca were in the worse position for all that regards real help and training for the lifetime opening before each, it would be hard to say" (23). Alice merely receives the instruction from her mother, in the manner of Ellis, that "it will be [her] duty to love [her] husband more than anyone else in the world" (45); Bianca receives a single sentence of theatrical

training from Mr. Simpson in her first rehearsal (29). Both are told their respective positions in life are natural to them (8; 47), and are given no choice in their own course of action. As the narrative continues, however, and Bianca begins to take more control over her life, both professionally and personally, Jewsbury implies the answer to her earlier question: both half-sisters may have begun the novel with little training and less agency, but Bianca's professional path clearly emerges as the more productive of the two.

In establishing the contrasts between Bianca's world and that occupied by Alice, Jewsbury creates a web of coincidence and connectivity that positions the characters as two indivisible halves of a whole picture. Even though Bianca and Alice meet only in brief and infrequent scenes, Jewsbury emphasizes the significance of their relationship as early as the novel's title. The familial relationship between the characters emphasizes the universality of Jewsbury's message: "since half-sisters have a parent in common, but only one, they can be expected both to resemble each other and to differ, and this relationship stands for that between one woman and another" (Wilkes xix). Together they present a wider range of female representation than could be covered by a single heroine.[6] Such sister pairings often take a central symbolic position in the nineteenth-century novel, but Jewsbury uses the trope to reverse the "conventional pairing of middle-class heroine and abject actress" (Allen 100).[7] Bianca, the illegitimate sister, should by convention be the less respectable. But Alice, the legitimate daughter and respectably married woman, follows the plot of the fallen woman instead.

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[6] As J. M. Hartley points out, Jewsbury's choice of half rather than full sisters and her situation of Bianca as illegitimate problematize the novel's central contrast by clearly putting one sister in a position of greater propriety, and as such "provid[e]" Jewsbury "with an escape route" (146). Similarly, Judith Rosen suggests, "making an actress foreign or half-foreign, usually on the mother's side"—as Bianca is, and as many actress-heroines are—"allowed authors a safety valve of sorts, for it could excuse or diffuse their characters' passionate and expressive 'natures' by placing them outside the bounds of 'true' womanhood" (23).

[7] On the sister relationship as central to many nineteenth-century novels see Brown, Levin, and May. Contrasting sisters appear in such novels as Collins's *The Woman in White*, Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, and many of Jane Austen's novels.

The contrast thus formed between Bianca and Alice echoes one of the conventions of the theatrical novel that Bilston identifies. Like many of the works in this genre, *The Half Sisters* "contrasts a theatrical life with a social existence, defining the former as an authentic expression of an inner need and the latter as the sphere of *true* artifice" (Bilston 44; original emphasis). Many of these novels work to trouble the status quo, disrupt an established anti-theatrical hierarchy, and highlight the hypocrisy which so often underlies this position. As such, emphasizing the negative elements of off-stage society allows novelists to highlight more effectively the positive aspects of a theatrical career. Authors such as Marryat and Buxton take this contrast to extremes. In the first volume of *Peeress and Player*, for example, Marryat writes the society woman, Magdalena, as particularly evil (even narrating her murder of her own dog) in order to heighten the contrast she poses with the actress, Susie. Buxton's *Nell, On and Off the Stage* contrasts Nell's complete devotion to her family and profession with Rosamond's selfish temper and apparently untaught skill in duplicitous coquetry. And in *Jennie of 'The Prince's'* (1876), Buxton sets the eponymous actress's trusting naiveté against Lady Bothwell's continuous, self-focused scheming. In each of these novels, "society girls […] are derided as the real source of moral contagion in contemporary Britain" (Bilston 45). Jewsbury plays with this convention as she subverts the expected moral polarity of the two sisters:

> To the outward eye the contrast between the lot of the half-sisters is painfully glaring. The one, surrounded with all that makes life pleasing, and the precious possession of a strong enduring affection to give a value to all things.
>
> The other, struggling with poverty, leading a life of hard labour, with the prospect of the workhouse if sickness or accident should disable her; suffering all this for no fault of her own, but inheriting it in consequence of her parents. (108)

In her commentary on such conduct-book advice as Ellis's, Jewsbury clearly "demonstrate[s] which role, working actress or working wife, worked for the soul and which destroyed" (Clarke 190). The firm connection between Bianca and Alice, then, works to emphasize the role meaningful work—or the lack thereof—can play in a woman's life.

Jewsbury's version of the conventional contrast focuses on the sisters' respective situations more than on their individual characters: Alice, though frustrating, is infinitely more likeable, for instance, than Rosamond, Magdalena, or Lady Bothwell. As such, Jewsbury highlights the similarities between the two characters, in order to emphasize the relative risk of their situations. As Bianca nears the height of her fame, and Alice the fatal climax of her own plot, Jewsbury emphasizes the sisters' shared artistic temperament. Alice's emotional response to the Wordsworth Conrad reads to her echoes Bianca's reaction when first exposed to sublime acting. In emphasizing Alice's dormant artistic potential, Jewsbury subtly critiques the way in which social training can destroy such potential. Alice is not innately immoral, but her life to this point has allowed her no outlet for, or method to develop productively, her own interests:

> She had the sensibility of genius without its creative power; she had not force enough to break through the rough husk of her actual life and assert her inner soul; she had not the gift of utterance in any way, and the life was almost choked out of her by the rank, over-fed, material prosperity which surrounded her. (41-42)

The opposition of stage and society becomes apparent in the divergent results of Bianca's and Alice's respective moments of artistic awakening: Bianca internalizes her wonder at her mentor's brilliant performance of King Lear, and uses her emotional response to the experience to hone her professional skills. Alice, having attempted to repress her emotional reaction to

Wordsworth's poetry, redirects her feelings towards Conrad, leading directly to her decision to elope with him, and then to her death.

Jewsbury touches on the necessity even to the most dutiful follower of Sarah Stickney Ellis of having a higher purpose in life. She astutely attributes this observation to Lady Vernon, who throughout the novel expresses an aversion to the stage.[8] Midway through the novel, Lord Melton takes Bianca to convalesce with his sister in the country. Here, Lady Vernon introduces Bianca to the school she runs, and describes at great length the ideology behind its foundation: "It is not so much what they learn, after all, that is the most valuable—it is the habit which is burnt into them of being in earnest, of doing *thoroughly* all they profess to do; *that* is a principle which will enable them to go through life" (239; original emphasis). Lady Vernon trains her scholars not in the duties of the "relative" woman, as Alice has been trained, nor in a definite profession, as has been Bianca's experience, but instead in the habits of self-help. Jewsbury's commentary here poses the question of woman's work as a state of mind, rather than a definite profession. She suggests that it is not essential to train a woman for a profession, but merely to instil in her the habit of working at something with the kind of commitment we see Bianca addressing towards her career. The self-help mindset, not necessarily the professional endeavour, saves women from the kind of aimlessness and self-destruction we see in Alice.

When her husband discovers her plan to elope, Alice succumbs to a sudden illness and dies almost immediately. While Jewsbury provides in passing the hint of a physiological cause,[9] Alice in fact dies—very specifically—of ennui, *because* of her lack of meaningful work and her

[8] Jewsbury characterizes Lady Vernon as a woman who "had no taste for actresses; they were entirely out of her line" (235). In the novel's conclusion, it is Lady Vernon, not her brother, Bianca's fiancé, who assumes "that [Bianca] will not again appear on the stage, now that she belongs to us" (389).
[9] Alice's husband references her "weak, nervous state" (288); the doctor called to attend her remarks on "her extreme delicacy and the great general debility under which she is labouring" (289).

inability to cope with or remedy that lack. Alice encapsulates the negative elements of the relative existence supported by Ellis, and lacks any ability to fill her days without the guidance of her mother or husband. Jewsbury suggests that Alice's narrative represents that of woman's experience more generally: the family doctor, commenting on Alice's fatal illness, recognizes "a frequent form of malady with women, not often so severe" (289). He refers here to the specific instance of "hysteria" (Jewsbury 289) brought on by the intense emotional shock of her husband's discovery of her plan to elope with Conrad. When read alongside the rest of the novel's commentary, however, the doctor's comment implies that the whole of Alice's life, not just her final illness, is more broadly representative of women's situation in her society. Jewsbury clearly attributes Alice's sudden turn to adultery to her boredom and purposelessness, warning early in the marriage of "the morbid sinking of heart and deadly sadness which [can] so easily beset imaginative temperaments, whose owners are not subject to the stern tonic of the *necessity* to work" (108; original emphasis). Here, Jewsbury again adapts Carlyle's sentiments: the "one unhappiness of man," he declares, comes from his inability to work and his subsequent inability to "get his destiny as a man fulfilled" (195). Alice's aimlessness keeps her from fulfilling her proper role as a domestic woman: she allows and responds to Conrad's advances and decides to leave her husband merely because the affair has given some purpose to her life.

Jewsbury situates the professional stage as a means to an end, a single example of the benefits, for a middle-class woman, of having "something worthwhile to do" (Hartley 146). That Bianca works as an actress is less important than the fact that she has something meaningful to do with her days. Again, Melton speaks Jewsbury's clearest social commentary:

> Those women who have strong qualities, decided tastes, aspirations after higher and better modes of life, possessing genius, in short, have no bent for their energy; the vitality

> that is in them has no adequate mode of manifestation, unless they have a definite profession. If they are in private life, all their energy is flung back upon them; it becomes overlaid with *ennui*, and they sink into apparent indolence and quietness, but a diseased action goes on within—they are restless, discontented, having so much more energy than they can employ; greedy after excitement, no matter of what kind, their talents and their life are fretted away together. In private life, their soul's energy has no outlet but love—love, or religion—and *that* never comes till afterwards; so they throw themselves headlong into a *grande passion*, and go to the devil, if the devil stands in their way. (220; original emphasis)

Melton overtly summarizes the contrast between Bianca's life and that of her half-sister, anticipating just how disastrously the latter will end. Jewsbury, through Melton, suggests that all women are women of "genius," in the sense that they each have a definite purpose for which they are suited. Melton's focus here on the "diseased action" that silently consumes such women left with no outlet for their passions and talents anticipates the doctor's characterization of Alice's illness as a disease worryingly prevalent amongst women. Jewsbury's arrangement—inserting this summary of the narrative before many of the key events have occurred—allows her to narrate those events without the kind of overt commentary which would mark her novel as dangerously radical. Lord Melton merely states a series of hypothetical truths to counter Conrad's misogyny, but the reader can later recall Melton's statement and apply his commentary to the events which so closely follow his speculations.

The Half Sisters proposes that training women in the virtues of self-help, in the "gospel of work," rather than instructing them to live "relative" lives centred on others, would save women from the kind of destruction we see in Alice. Bianca, praising Lady Vernon's aim for her school,

describes how her own professional training has fitted her for a private existence as well, and how that experience might be applied more broadly:

> I have had a purpose, and have endeavoured to work it out; and I say that if you could furnish women with a definite object, or address motives in them fit to animate rational beings, you would have a race of wives and daughters far different from those which now flourish in your drawing-rooms; the quality of their nature would be elevated; they would be able to aid men in any noble object by noble thoughts, by self-denial, by real sympathy and fellowship of heart. (250)

Jewsbury suggests, through Bianca, not a radical and wide-spread entering of women into the public sphere, but rather a better way to train women for the relative existence they must lead in mid-nineteenth-century society. The self-denial, dedication, and perseverance Bianca has learned through perfecting her natural talent and pursing her chosen profession, here allows her to better serve in the home. Throughout her oeuvre, Jewsbury expresses interest in the opposition of work and idleness; in *The Half Sisters*, she chooses the stage as one example of this particular contrast.

"I could not live a life of duplicity": Betha Durant

Emily Allan writes that, in *The Half Sisters*, "Jewsbury makes it clear that dishonesty is in fact endemic to the middle-class ideal of female behavior" (127). As discussed above, Alice is not knowingly dishonest, but she is the product of the superficial education expected of her social status, and the lack of meaningful employment allowed for by that status. Florence Marryat's theatrical novels correspond more closely to Allan's claim: Marryat singles out and emphasizes the deception rampant in society in contrast to the purer motives and unquestionable morality of her actress-heroines. In *My Sister the Actress*, Marryat uses this contrast to show

much more clearly the "dishonesty" innate to such ideas of female propriety as those propagated by Sarah Stickney Ellis. Like Jewsbury, Marryat establishes a distinct opposition between her central actress figure, Betha Durant, and the well-bred and -trained society women with whom Betha associates throughout the novel. Unlike Jewsbury's heroine, Betha begins the novel as a well-off young lady, and so her progression upwards in the theatrical profession lacks the overt self-help narrative of Bianca's journey. Like Bianca, however, Betha devotes herself to improving the status of her profession and rises through natural talent and genuine propriety rather than through ambition and deceit.

Marryat's Betha, like Bianca and many other actress-heroines, initially enters on a theatrical career for purely financial reasons. Betha, however, has been disowned by her surviving family members and so her financial duty is to her self, rather than to her family. Writing later in the century than Jewsbury, Marryat addresses more overtly the widespread issue of the unmarried woman in need of employment and the scarcity of occupations deemed acceptable by respectable society. Early in the novel, as Betha searches for work, she acknowledges the necessity—indeed, the urgency—of finding employment, but at the same time emphasizes the relative hierarchy of available jobs. When the manager Mr. Henderson suggests that she become an actress rather than a teacher she refuses. Teaching, Betha asserts, would be a "duty," however meagre the salary and however unfit she may be for the work; going on the stage "would be contrary to all etiquette" (1.169). In Jewsbury's novel, Bianca jumps at the first chance of employment offered her, concerned only with making an income on which she might

survive. Marryat, in contrast, notes the prejudices that might keep even a woman who must work from taking on the employment most suited to her talents and inclinations.[10]

Betha's initial position as the elder daughter of a respectable middle-class house removes Marryat's novel slightly from the conventional rags-to-riches plotline of the theatrical novel. Rather than chronicling the upward trajectory of the actress-heroine who achieves fame, fortune, and a position in society through the hard work, perseverance, and dedication of the self-help narrative, Marryat charts Betha's return to the position she held at the opening of the novel. What might pass for the language of the self-help heroine in another circumstance reads in Betha as pride and stubbornness. She asserts unswervingly, in response to her friend Mattie Kemyss's early offer of financial assistance, that she "would not accept five shillings when [she] could earn them" (1.143). When Mr. Henderson asks about Betha's position in life, prior to offering her the chance to go on the stage, Marryat is very specific in her choice of adverbs: "she answers proudly: 'Yes, I *am* an orphan, and dependent on my own resources'" (1.156; original emphasis). Marryat implies here that Betha has inherited the pride and stubbornness her father demonstrates when he refuses to allow her back into his house. Mr. Durant may initially have disowned his daughter, but Betha resists pity by describing herself "proudly" as an orphan. As a variation on the conventional actress-heroine, forced by circumstances beyond her control to seek an income on the stage, Betha makes her circumstances more dire than they need to be, merely because her pride stands in the way of any simpler proceeding. When offered the teaching post she had initially sought, for instance, Betha immediately refuses the position, again "proudly," because Miss Denny offers it to her "on [her father's] sanction" rather than "on [her] own merits"

[10] George Gissing makes this point even more plainly in *The Odd Women* (1893) through Miss Barfoot, who aims to ensure that "girls are to be brought up to a calling in life, just as men are" so that they might avoid "a lifetime of uncongenial toil" as teachers (119).

(1.161). The narrative Marryat charts, then, in returning Betha to her original social position, focuses more on Betha's own development of character: by the time she has returned to her family, her disposition has been tempered into something more worthy of the theatrical heroine.[11]

Betha's motivations shift over the course of the novel: she first goes on the stage to support herself financially, but she soon begins to recognize her own vocation for the stage and ambition to succeed. Unlike Bianca, whose progression from necessity to ambition constantly foregrounds her commitment to duty, Betha recognizes her love of the stage immediately upon making her debut. On reading the papers the next morning, she "feels fairly intoxicated with her success. The love of histrionic display is inherent in her: it has lain dormant, hitherto, for want of encouragement; but it is her second nature, and her present indulgence proves to be like the first drop of blood to the tiger" (1.174-175). While Bianca's love of her profession comes through her mastery of it, Betha's love of acting is described as innate to her character. This love leads to Betha's desire for advancement both in and for her chosen profession. Like Bianca, Betha works to rehabilitate the reputation of the theatre as a whole, reminding her fiancé Rob, for instance, that "it is noble, grand, intellectual, and elevating," and that she "feel[s] honoured to be one of its members" (2.29). Marryat presents her actress-heroine as a more rounded character than Jewsbury's, especially in her desire for personal advancement. When Rob returns to London and asks Betha to fulfil her promise to him—to marry and to leave the stage—she responds by noting her own ambition: "I don't think I can, Rob, not until I have done something to make myself remembered. Perhaps you don't know what a strong feeling ambition is! I yearn to be famous. […] I have tasted the taste of it, and I shall never rest now until I have done something worth

[11] We might recall here the similar focus on character development in such self-help novels as *John Halifax, Gentleman*, discussed above.

doing" (2.35-36). Betha certainly does have personal ambition and a desire for fame and fortune, as she states here, but she remains a dutiful and honest character throughout the novel because of her adherence to the principles of self-help in her pursuit of that fame. Rather than, for instance, taking a well-connected lover to further her theatrical ambition, Betha continues to work hard at her craft, to make personal sacrifices, and to honour those placed above her.

Through this presentation of Betha, Marryat, like Jewsbury, works to rehabilitate the reputation of the hard-working actress, and by extension that of the working woman more generally. In nineteenth-century texts—fictional and factual—on women's work, the actress "often served as a representation of all working women because she was very obviously on display in a public space" (Hill 242). Unlike authorship, which could be practiced in the home, or office work, which often replicated a gendered hierarchy, acting entirely removed women from the private sphere. Focusing on the professional actress allows both Marryat and Jewsbury to draw on experiences in their own lives as professional authors without being too obviously biographical. Jewsbury based Bianca on a combination of her own experiences and those of American actress Charlotte Cushman, with whom she was close at the time she was planning and writing the novel. Cushman, like Bianca, began acting at a young age to support her family financially (Clarke 178). She too was "a hard-working and dedicated actress who devoted herself earnestly to her career and had a great respect for her material" (Wilkes xvii), a living example of the qualities necessary to the heroine of the theatrical novel. Marryat wrote from personal experience of the professional stage. Like her actress-heroines, Marryat took to the stage from financial necessity: to supplement her income from writing in her attempt to support her family. As she wrote three of her theatrical novels, between 1881 and 1883, she was concurrently touring England with Richard D'Oyly Carte's company (Pope 20). Her depictions of the stage,

and of the hard work necessary to succeed artistically and financially as an actress, parallel her contemporary personal situation.

This focus on the hard work necessary to a career on the stage positions both Jewsbury's and Marryat's novels firmly within the self-help tradition. Jewsbury immediately establishes the theatre as a profession that necessitates the perseverance of the self-help mentality: in an early conversation, Mr. Simpson tells Conrad that "ours is a profession, sir, to which people must be born, as one may say, and yet they have never done learning it" (11). Marryat, too, repeatedly mentions Betha's devotion to working "steadily onwards; learning any number of parts for future use, and never shirking trouble in order to perfect, as far as lies in her power, the instructions she receives from her master" (1.210). As many self-help authors do, Marryat overtly glosses over the actual drudgery of this devotion to hard work. We see the early stages of Betha's professional training, and the first triumph, but then skip over the intervening years of devoted work to her establishment at the top of her profession: Volume Three opens with a note that "the months grow into years, and one year succeeds another, until six have been numbered with the centuries" (3.4). By writing the self-help narratives of two women—and two actresses—Marryat and Jewsbury bring the ideology of the "gospel of work" as the basis of a productive self-help mentality into the debate over the propriety of the working woman.

Marryat draws particular attention to the common view of the stage as a frivolous pursuit in order to make this point about the hard work necessary to the profession—and the positive repercussions of this necessary work. Rob, Betha's fiancé, summarizes this view of the theatre as one of "the jolliest things ever," a place of amusement which he attends "whenever [he has] the opportunity" (1.271). Even when not dismissing the theatre as a place of flawed morals and corruption, such anti-theatrical sentiments can limit the theatre to the status of inconsequential

diversion. Having experienced only the entertainment of the audience member, Rob cannot begin to imagine the opposite—hard work and long hours of drudgery—existing in the world of the theatre. Betha in turn credits this necessary hard work with the moral uprightness she situates at the centre of her defence of the stage. "The life of an actor is full of hard work. He has very little time to think of anything but his business; and since the men and women employed at a theatre only meet there for rehearsals or performances, there is not much opportunity for carrying on flirtations behind the scenes" (3.113). Contrary to the popular conception of the stage as a place of idleness and frivolity which leaves its practitioners with endless time to develop their immoral tendencies, the stage here necessitates the devotion to work supported by Carlyle, Smiles, and the self-help movement.

Marryat sets up a contrast between Betha and her society counterparts early in the novel, before ever suggesting Betha might go on the stage professionally. Marryat juxtaposes Betha's unfiltered and uninstructed self-forgetfulness as she searches for her mother—braving inclement weather and seeming not to notice her father's utter dismissal of her—with the self-interest of the woman who will soon become her stepmother, Mrs. Wallerton. While Marryat does not explicitly narrate Mrs. Wallerton's false position towards Betha and her role in causing Mrs. Durant to leave her home, the description Marryat gives of the widow focuses on her talent for and reliance on duplicity: she has "a waist of five-and-twenty inches—that owes its size to compression rather than to Nature," and is "very attractive to such people as have not the power to look below the surface" (1.38). Marryat emphasizes the danger of women like Mrs. Wallerton in terms reminiscent of those used in anti-theatrical rhetoric to represent the dangers of the actress. She is eminently protean, able to take on any character, and thus has "the power of appearing all things to all men" (1.39). Marryat makes clear from this early point in the novel the

contempt she holds towards the elements of contemporary society represented by Mrs. Wallerton, and the central role this contempt will play in her narrative. Having Mrs. Durant, with her dying breath, accuse Mrs. Wallerton of murder (1.46) associates the deceitful society lady with the most dangerous criminal element, an association that colours Marryat's treatment of high society in many of her novels. Having introduced and described Mrs. Wallerton, Marryat's narrator emphasizes the universality of her contempt, shifting focus from the specific to the general, and asking "how many ladylike liars do we not meet as we pass through the world! They are the poison of society—that make it the vile sham it is of subterfuge, and backbiting, and untruth" (1.39).

Marryat describes the reliance of her representative society ladies—here Mrs. Wallerton and later in the novel Betha's younger sister Hyacinth—on cosmetics and other methods of altering ones outward appearance: methods often cited as evidence of the innate falsehood of the stage. Marryat repeats her first description of Mrs. Wallerton, emphasizing the widow's unnatural appearance, on her return in the third volume: "Her age does not exceed forty, and she has a dozen little contrivances by which to make herself look quite ten years younger" (3.59). Without explicit comment, Marryat's description here echoes the earlier introduction of the provincial pantomime star, Kate Montalambert, at the end of Volume One. Kate "comes tripping along the platform as she catches sight of Betha with a juvenile spring that might have belonged to a girl of twenty. She is attired in a very juvenile fashion also; her face is tightly covered with a spotted veil, and is almost as much 'made up' as it is by night" (Marryat 1.220). The description of Mrs. Wallerton, then, both overtly associates her external appearance with the falsity more usually attributed to the stage, but also sets up a clear contrast between the two older women.

The novel parallels Kate's relationship with Betha—the older, experienced, but less successful actress introducing the younger to the ways of their society—to that of Mrs. Wallerton and her new step-daughter, Hyacinth. After Mrs. Wallerton has married Mr. Durant, she teaches Hyacinth the tricks that have allowed her to achieve her current social position, and admits that she has passed her own prime. Both Kate and Mrs. Wallerton are eclipsed by the next generation they have helped to train: Betha becomes the London star Kate never could be, while Hyacinth goes on to make a more brilliant marriage than either of Mrs. Wallerton's two matches. Marryat's parallel of the two pairs, however, highlights the very different manner in which she treats the two older women. While Mrs. Wallerton clearly uses her skill in external presentation to deceive for her own advancement, Kate is presented much more leniently. Both women outwardly refuse to accept their respective positions in society; both present themselves as more youthful, and thus more capable of achievement, than in truth they are. Marryat emphasizes, however, that even with all of Kate's falseness and her reliance on theatrical tricks off the stage, she is a positive associate for Betha: "Though [Kate's] brain is weak and her vanity inordinate, her heart is in the right place" (1.232). Kate's off-stage falseness, unlike the deceptions practiced by society, is harmless.

In contrast, Mrs. Wallerton's successful training of her step-daughter, Hyacinth, in the duplicity expected in conventional society becomes apparent on the young woman's reappearance in Volume Three. Betha's sister has learned how to present a false front to the world: "She is a most wonderful young lady to look at; very pretty and very fashionable: with […] more than a suspicion of pearl powder on her face—and a patch of black plaister under her left eye to increase the delicacy of her complexion and the brilliancy of her glance" (3.70). This initial description of Hyacinth's effective use of cosmetics shifts the point of contrast with Betha

from Mrs. Wallerton to Betha's own sister. As such, Marryat makes use of the same intrinsic duality of sisterhood seen in novels such as Jewsbury's. Marryat, too, situates one of the sisters firmly in the world of high society and the other in the professional world of the theatre, with the latter retaining the moral high ground. Marryat first establishes the contrast between the two almost immediately upon Betha's entering into the theatrical profession. When Betha first sees Hyacinth again after leaving their father's house, the contrast immediately is one of dress: Hyacinth is immaculate, fashionable, and colourful, while Betha's old black dress is "rusty and dusty" (1.212), signalling the change in their respective social positions. But Betha here adheres to moral convention rather than social presentation: off the stage, the actress continues to dress in mourning for her mother, while the society girl has left off her mourning. When the sisters are reunited in Volume Three, Marryat again notes the physical differences between the two, but focuses more thoroughly on the internal differences the sisters' exteriors reflect. Bentham, Betha's maid and Hyacinth's former nurse, remarks that "the bonniest part of [Hyacinth] is on the outside" (3.87). The younger sister's painstakingly-presented external image, that is, masks a much less presentable character. Betha makes the same recognition, noting the "heartless ring" in her sister's otherwise effusive conversation (3.78).

The commentary central to Marryat's novel—against society and in defense of the stage—appears most strongly in her treatment of Hyacinth's conduct in this last volume. The narrator explains that Betha's failure to understand her sister shows that she "has yet to make acquaintance with the fast girl of the period, who has no respect for age, nor religion, nor public opinion, nor even for herself" (3.99). Betha "has not hitherto enjoyed an opportunity of being instructed in the doctrines of fashionable morality" (3.121), and cannot comprehend her sister's reliance on deceit, flippancy, and contempt, even in the younger girl's treatment of her parents.

Hyacinth also embodies the hypocrisy that Marryat reads into the anti-theatrical views of high society. Initially, Hyacinth is to be kept away from her sister for fear of contamination by association with an actress (1.213-217). Only once Betha has achieved fame and fortune, and has thus earned the approval of fashionable society, are they allowed to meet again. Hyacinth then justifies her own actions by stating the assumptions she has been taught to hold about the stage: "I thought you all flirted and made love together on the stage, and would think nothing of a girl having more than one string to her bow" (3.112). Hyacinth endorses conventional assumptions about an actress's loose morals, and therefore assumes Betha's support of her own lapses in proper conduct. Marryat here shows through the contrast of the two sisters that society is at least as bad as, if not worse than, the assumed state of the stage.

Between these two familial examples, Marryat makes her opposition of stage and society even more emphatic by pairing Betha with a series of school-fellows. In doing so, she shows how Betha's entry into and dedication to an arduous professional pursuit has helped distance her morally from those with whom she was brought up. When, having made her professional debut in Buton, Betha encounters Ada and Ella Matthews, classmates from her school days, she is delighted to be treated once again as an equal and as an acceptable acquaintance, after being driven from her family and friends. She makes a point, however, of being honest about her circumstances, ensuring Ada and Ella are well aware of her professional position and why that position means she "should not go and stay with [them] at Black Abbots" (1.241). When Betha does receive an invitation from the twins' mother, she projects her own unswerving honesty onto her friends, assuming they have told their parents the truth of her status: "innocent Betha goes into the trap, blindfold, never doubting that she has been invited there, spite [sic] of her profession, and proportionately grateful for the fact" (1.253). The order in which Marryat

presents the events of this episode—letting the reader know early on that Ada and Ella have lied to their parents while Betha remains blissfully unaware of the falsehood—allows the reader to participate in the author's evident frustration with the Matthews's anti-theatrical sentiments.

Marryat's harsh presentation of Mrs. Matthews (the character lacks a single redeeming quality) cements the novel's treatment of the hypocrisy innate to those who critique the morality of the theatre. Betha explicitly accuses her hostess of training her daughters in the very deceit the older woman has just associated with the professional stage: the actress asserts, scathingly, that *she* has "not taught [Ada and Ella] to tell falsehoods" (2.47). Marryat's social commentary also appears in Betha's tirade against her hostess's prejudices: "if I have chosen a profession that numbers some amongst its numbers that are not all they should be, I have done no more than if I had become a countess, under the idea that all the aristocracy are virtuous" (2.47). Deeming all actresses to be immoral without any proof, when perhaps a few might in fact might be, Betha claims, is no different than making a sweeping judgment of any segment of society. Her specific choice of contrast, here—the implication that members of the aristocracy might be just as immoral as members of the theatrical profession are assumed to be—supports Marryat's larger project throughout the novel. Marryat focuses the reader's attention on Mrs. Matthews's absolute inability to recognize her own daughters' potential for deceit, her blindness to their faults, and the ease with which she attributes evil actions to someone outside the realm of her immediate experience rather than to her own family members. Betha remains remarkably silent in the first half of this scene, allowing Mrs. Matthews to implicate herself and to prove her own hypocrisy. Marryat merely sets out an extreme example of prejudice and allows her readers to mark the implications both for society and for the actress. The conversation ends with Mrs. Matthews's assertion that deception "may be the practice in the miserable calling to which you belong, but

[Ada and Ella] have been brought up, thank heaven! in a very different manner, and do not even know the names of the vices with which you must unhappily be familiar" (2.45). The blatant untruth of this statement, coming as it does on top of a multitude of other examples of the general deceitfulness of society, constitutes Marryat's strongest defence of the stage as a proper occupational space for respectable women.

Marryat sets Betha as a contrast to the novel's other female characters—and the stage as a contrast to high society—by continually emphasizing the honesty of the actress. Hyacinth, Ada, Ella, and Mrs. Wallerton are each described as creatures of deception, using false means and presenting false exteriors to gain their selfish social goals. Through Kate, who has already been established as a site of moral goodness, Marryat turns conventional anti-theatrical rhetoric against those who would accuse such actresses as Betha of immorality. Seeing how upset Betha has been by her time away, Kate regrets that the younger actress ever agreed to visit "those canting hypocrites at Black Abbotts" (2.92). She goes on to warn Betha explicitly about the treatment she will continue to meet with from women like Mrs. Matthews and Mrs. Wallerton. "As you get on in life, child, you'll find scores of women draw up their skirts as you come by, who aren't pure enough to black your boots! And why? Because you're an actress!" (2.92). Throughout the novel, Marryat repeatedly inserts brief phrases explicitly stating Betha's innate honesty. Describing Betha's sentiments about the potential of a reunion with her family, the narrator reminds us that "Betha cannot tell a falsehood even in her softest moments" (3.91). Confronted by Mattie Kemyss's husband and suddenly realizing Mattie's own reliance on falsehoods, Betha reflects that "deceit is foreign to her nature, and she cannot understand it in that of others" (2.136). Most significantly, Betha deliberately contrasts the requirements of her profession with her sister's approach to daily life: "I have many faults, but I could not live a life

of duplicity" (3.115). In refusing "duplicity" specifically Betha recalls anti-theatrical characterizations of the acting profession as inherently duplicitous: as relying on a performer's ability to deceive her audience into thinking she is something or someone she is not. Betha, whose professional success relies on her talent for such "duplicity," can neither understand nor condone the same practices off the stage.

For the majority of Volumes One and Two, Marryat maintains this rigid separation of stage and society. In Volume Three, however, once Betha has returned from America an unquestionable star, Marryat allows stage and society to interact, to show the theatre's potential benefits, in direct opposition to anti-theatrical rhetoric condemning the stage as a site of contamination.[12] In the novel's third volume, Marryat reverses the expected interchange between society lady and actress, using Mattie to illustrate just how positive an influence the professional stage might have on society. Mattie has to this point been nearly as representative of the evils of society as Mrs. Wallerton, "a young, heedless creature, with extraordinary beauty, an affectionate heart, and a very small amount of brains" (1.137). Mattie, like Hyacinth, assumes Betha's morals must lapse with her experience of the stage, and so sees in her friend a perfect accomplice for her own romantic intrigues with the actor Geoffrey Clifford. Marryat uses this relationship to illustrate, in contrast, Betha's extreme naiveté, before condemning society through her relation of Mattie's elopement with Geoffrey. Mr. Henderson, having received news of the elopement, describes Mattie to Betha in terms more often used by anti-theatrical commentators to warn of the danger of associating with actresses: "you must get out of the way

[12] Even here Betha is immovably honest, recognizing that her current social acceptability is nebulous and rests only on her fame and fortune: "She has plenty of acquaintances now, when her fame is at its zenith, and she is making thousands of pounds yearly. But were she to fail and be hissed off the stage to-morrow, Betha is sensible enough to know where her so-called 'friends' would be—slinking out of the way, and round the corners, whenever they heard her footstep" (3.146).

of calling that person 'Mattie,' or of thinking that you'll ever see her again. You're under my charge, remember, and I won't have you corrupted by any such evil example" (2.273). Having fallen out of favour in society after her elopement and Geoffrey's subsequent desertion, Mattie realizes not only that she had previously treated Betha unfairly, but also how worthy of praise Betha's theatrical life has been when considered against her own off-stage duplicity. Betha's advice to her friend as Mattie follows her into the profession emphasizes the honesty intrinsic to Marryat's depiction of the stage: "Be true to yourself, dear Mattie, in the future—and the last part of your life may be better than the first" (3.249). Truth and honesty, which Marryat here associates with a life on the stage, will serve Mattie better than even the most self-interested falsehood.

Although Jewsbury and Marryat fully support the independent, professional woman, both novels end by having their heroines marry and retire from professional life. Such an ending, while apparently inconsistent with the aims of the theatrical women's novel, in fact forms one of the genre's conventions. Of the numerous theatrical women's novels currently available either in print or in digital form, Bertha Buxton is one of the few authors willing to alter the convention of ending with a marriage and the actress-heroine's full removal from her professional career. In *Jennie of 'The Prince's'*, we see the successful merging of domestic and professional futures; in *Nell on and off the Stage*, Buxton strays even further from convention, ending with Nell pursing a successful career in the provinces, with only the hint of a future marriage.[13] Henry Chorley, reviewing *The Half Sisters* in *The Athenaeum*, notes that Bianca's assent to a "high marriage" by

[13] Edith Stewart Drewry also ends *Only an Actress* with Margherita both married and continuing her stage career. The heroine of Marryat's *Peeress and Player* marries in the course of the narrative, but returns to the stage when she leaves her husband. Juliet Vane, in Mabel Collins's *Juliet's Lovers*, is in fact married for much of the novel, but details of the plot require the marriage to be kept secret. When she remarries at the end of the novel, she too leaves the stage.

way of her artistic talents "is a familiar intention" in those novels that focus on "women of genius" ("*Half Sisters*" 288). Chorley suggests that such an ending is not only conventional but also natural: the marriage of the actress-heroine "is not introduced merely because novels usually cease with the marriage ceremony;—but because […] it has never been admitted that Art can be the main business of her life, as of Man's" ("*Half Sisters*" 288). Art, like all work, remains a masculine world, Chorley suggests, and so even when a novel has chronicled a female artist's rise to fame that novel must, to remain plausible, reposition the heroine in her natural—that is, domestic—sphere.

In Jewsbury's novel, Bianca's marriage to Lord Melton is a reward for her perfect performance of respectable femininity: her work as an actress has trained her into "the novel's domestic paragon" (Allen 131). Her professional successes teach her the kind of adherence to duty, self-forgetfulness, and "energy of thought" (Ellis 22) set out in conduct books as key to attaining perfection as a wife and mother. Contrary to the more usual opposition of the public sphere of work with the private sphere of proper femininity, Jewsbury shows in Bianca's marriage the adaptability of her professional mentality to the private sphere. The virtues of devotion, hard work, and self-denial Bianca learns in her professional life here improve her skills as a wife. As such, "*The Half Sisters* does not finally propose an alternative to middle-class domesticity, but rather situates the possibilities for women's work within the conventions of domestic fiction" (Roberts 406). As Jewsbury asserts in Lady Vernon's description of her school, certain habits of mind, rather than a specific profession, would benefit a woman in any situation.

Marryat ends *My Sister the Actress* on a more radical note of ambiguity. Rather than explicitly removing her heroine from the stage and placing her back into the domestic sphere, Marryat closes her novel just before Betha's marriage to Rob takes place. By ending before

Betha's marriage, Marryat emphasizes her heroine's independence and control over her own life: qualities associated with the public sphere and the stage, not with the private sphere and the "relative" woman. As Catherine Pope points out, many of Marryat's novels end in a similar state of ambiguity, rather than a definite marriage and a sentimental closing image of the perfect domestic scene: "This is a device she frequently employs – reaching a morally acceptable resolution, but leaving an air of ambiguity – suggestive of alternative endings" (118). In *My Sister the Actress*, the ambiguity of the ending rests on Betha and Rob's previous discussion of what would occur after their marriage: Rob's second proposal, at the beginning of the second volume, relies on Betha leaving the stage. This promise, "to leave the stage and become [Rob's] wife" (2.30), is the one Betha renews in her concluding letter to Rob. Marryat leaves her reader with the assumption rather than the certainty that Rob will hold Betha to both aspects of her earlier promise, and that she will retire to the domestic sphere. Marryat refuses, however, to remove the possibility that Betha the wife might coexist productively with Betha the actress. The implied ending—in which Betha marries Rob and leaves the stage behind for a life in society—in turn implies that such a course would be to society's benefit. While Bianca raises herself to the point of a brilliant marriage for which her professional training has fitted her, Betha raises herself to the point at which society will accept her back into its fold: where she can temper, if not entirely eradicate, its hypocritical dishonesty.

CHAPTER THREE

Offstage Performance: Acting an Identity in *No Name*

Of all the novels infused by the performance culture of the nineteenth century, Wilkie Collins's are amongst the most self-consciously theatrical. Collins was intimately associated with the stage throughout his career: he took part in amateur theatricals, wrote for the stage, adapted his own novels, and was an enthusiastic spectator. The result of this constant association with the theatre is that, as Kathleen O'Fallon notes, "Collins freely applies techniques of playwriting to his fiction" (227). Collins himself asserts, in the dedicatory letter which prefaces his 1852 novel, *Basil*, that "the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of Fiction" (4). *No Name*, serialized simultaneously in *All the Year Round* and *Harper's Weekly* (1862-63) and published in three-volume form in 1862, is amongst the most overtly theatrical of all Collins's novels. Divided into a clear framework of scenes and behind-the-scenes interludes, the novel positions the reader—alongside the characters—immediately into the world of the theatre.[1] This structure "makes all of the characters into actors, even those who do not adopt false identities" (Simpson 119). As such, Collins emphasizes the necessity of performance within the world of his novel—and the nineteenth-century society he represents more broadly.

While Jewsbury and Marryat use their actress-heroines to establish a contrast between stage and society, Wilkie Collins includes actress characters to emphasize the innate theatricality of the nineteenth century. In *No Name*, Collins illustrates how the methods of the stage might be used as a tool for self-advancement. Magdalen Vanstone's off-stage acting exemplifies the work that, in a traditional self-help novel, hard work and dedication do for the self-made man: they raise her social station. Magdalen's success depends, like that of Stella Campbell, on her

[1] Many critics discuss *No Name* as the most theatrical of Collins's novels. See, for instance, Bisla, Michie, Pykett, and Stange.

audience. The character's off-stage performances rely on suspension of disbelief: other characters' entire association of her self with the role in which she appears. For Campbell, this sustained illusion secures her fame and fortune as an actress; for Magdalen, it secures her identity as a respectable woman in society.

Collins wrote during the growth both of the self-help movement and of the fear of imposture generated by that movement. Magdalen's off-stage acts of self-making reflect this growing fear of the self-made man: the fear that appearances no longer revealed the true status of an individual. Patricia Zakreski describes this fear, in language reminiscent of the anti-theatrical sentiments also rampant at the time, as an "anxiety that the actress could use her ability for impersonation as a means of social manipulation" (161). Actors, after all, were trained in skills which would easily lend themselves to imposture. Rohan McWilliam argues that the perceived dangers of the theatre and of off-stage self-making were intrinsically linked: "imposters were engaged in a specific kind of theatricality because they possessed self-consciously performed selves, which needed to be acted out" ("Unauthorized" 68).[2] The perceived danger of self-making was the destabilization of an established social hierarchy. Through the doctrines of self-help, an individual might create a place for himself in society, rather than remain in the place society had assigned him.

The sensational plot of *No Name* forms "a highly self-conscious exploration of the consequences of losing one's identity" (Bolus-Reichert 23). *No Name* opens in the idyllic family home of the Vanstones, an idyll which quickly disintegrates through a series of loosely-connected events. Unbeknownst to the household, Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone have never legally

[2] McWilliam's book-length study of the Tichborne claimant (2007), one of the most well-publicized cases of nineteenth-century imposture, also addresses at length the ties between mid-century views of the stage and spreading fear of the kind of self-making which could lead to prison.

married. Receiving news that Mr. Vanstone's first wife has died, they promptly—and secretly—travel to London to marry, unaware that in doing so they render Mr. Vanstone's current will void, disinheriting their daughters. When Magdalen, the younger of two daughters, becomes engaged to a neighbour, Mr. Vanstone discovers the uselessness of his will. Following the melodramatic deaths of both parents, Magdalen vows to regain her and her sister's inheritance. She takes to the stage, and uses her acting skills in seeking to re-establish her respectable identity. The novel first critiques society for its treatment of women in Magdalen's and Norah's position, and then, through Magdalen, posits an alternative means of securing identity.

The idea that performance is an essential part of modern society highlights Collins's other preoccupation throughout his oeuvre: the position of women, particularly those considered to exist on the margins of society. "Collins was […] well known as a writer whose work showed great sympathy for marginalized people, and for women and domestic servants in particular" (Steere 63), and many of Collins's novels work to explore women's role and status. *The New Magdalen* (1873), for instance, addresses the fallen woman and the possibility of redemption; *The Woman in White* (1860) considers the potential dangers to an unprotected heiress of marriage to a fortune-hunter; and, as we will see in the final chapter of this dissertation, the sensational plot of *Armadale* (1866) revolves around the lengths to which a woman must go to secure a place in the world. In *No Name*, Collins connects social issues of illegitimacy and women's independence. Lillian Nayder argues that "Collins uses the illegitimacy of the Vanstone sisters to criticize patriarchy and the laws that make women 'non-persons' in Victorian culture" (147). As such, Nayder suggests, Collins links the denial of social identity contingent on illegitimacy with the difficulty women face in maintaining a public identity.

Collins opens the novel with a focus on external appearance and its relation to character, establishing from the first pages his theatrical framework. Introducing the members of the Vanstone household, Collins describes each first by his or her role in the household and then gives a brief description of the character's appearance:

> The housemaid came down—tall and slim, with the state of the spring temperature written redly on her nose. The lady's-maid followed—young, smart, plump, and sleepy. The kitchen-maid came next—afflicted with the face-ache, and making no secret of her sufferings. Last of all, the footman appeared, yawning disconsolately; the living picture of a man who felt that he had been defrauded of his fair night's rest. (8)

We learn nothing about these characters which cannot be gleaned from a brief glimpse of their external appearances: the narrator does not describe the characters as they *are*, but instead states that their appearances *reflect* what they are. As such, we are immediately thrust into a world in which character is assumed to be legible on the outside. Magdalen, however, is first described as "self-contradictory" in her facial appearance (13). This brief observation sets up Magdalen's ability to rapidly shift between characters, which she does throughout the novel. In describing Mr. Vanstone, Collins betrays no subtlety: "Mr. Vanstone showed his character on the surface of him freely to all men" (9). Here, however, Collins also hints at events to come, suggesting the manipulation to which such judgments based on external appearance are open. As we soon discover, Mr. Vanstone's apparent "character" as a gentleman who "freely" reveals his true nature does not reflect his social reality. He appears the respectable head of a respectable family because this is the persona he presents to the world. This separation of appearance and reality—and the ability of the Vanstones in particular to manipulate the former to their own ends—quickly becomes the central plot device of the novel. Collins thus, from the novel's opening

pages, explores how appearance can manipulate social identity: a significance Magdalen will, throughout the novel, use to her full advantage.

Magdalen's performance technique, both on and off the stage, relies on these external markers of character. In key scenes of emotional significance, Collins either masks Magdalen's reaction from us by narrating only the external effects of that reaction, or removes it altogether, providing a glimpse of Magdalen's responses only through, for instance, the multiple filters of others' letters. When Magdalen first reads her father's final letter to Mr. Pendril, the lawyer, for instance, Collins provides no description of his heroine's mental reaction to what she reads. Instead, he describes the "outward signs of what was passing within her" (156). Not only does Collins position the reader at a remove from the protagonist's reaction here, he filters even these external markers of reaction through the other, observing characters: "the other persons assembled in the room, all eagerly looking at her together, saw the dress rising and falling faster and faster over her bosom—saw the hand in which she lightly held the manuscript at the outset, close unconsciously on the paper, and crush it, as she advanced nearer and nearer to the end" (155-156). When she has finished reading, we receive no hint of her thoughts, merely the information—again, by way of the observers in the scene—that "something in her expression had altered, subtly and silently" (156). Collins shows Magdalen reacting to what she reads, and clearly beginning to formulate the resolve that will lead to her schemes, but deliberately hides Magdalen's thoughts from the reader, as she hides them from the observers in the room. We, like Norah, Miss Garth, and Mr. Pendril, are left to make assumptions, to infer Magdalen's thoughts from what she allows to show on her face and in her body language.

As the novel progresses, Collins repeatedly relies on this filtering distance between the reader and Magdalen's thoughts. When she receives Frank Clare's letter breaking off their

engagement, for instance, we get others' responses to the letter, but only get Magdalen's by way of the double removal of letters written by others describing (necessarily in hindsight) the *effects* of her reaction (315-316). Similarly, as Magdalen begins to explain her plots to Captain Wragge in Aldborough, Collins narrates Wragge's continued dissimulation through the descriptions of his facial expressions and his assumed manner (336-337). But Magdalen here merely speaks, without being described. Her face, deliberately averted from the captain for the space of her revelations, also remains hidden from the reader. These narrative silences all come at key moments in Magdalen's plot to recover her inheritance. While Collins suggests, in his preface to the novel, that "the only Secret contained in this book, is revealed midway in the first volume" (6), in fact the specific details of Magdalen's plots are in this way kept from the reader as they are kept from the novel's other characters.

Similarly, as Helena Michie points out, Magdalen's own family identifies her based on excessive publicity: in advertising for Magdalen through a detailed description of her personal appearance, Norah "makes Magdalen's body public in a way even the Victorian theater would not allow" (31). Magdalen, who willingly uses her body in pursuing her own agenda, reacts with disgust and shame to the flyer circulated by her sister, especially the "description of her in pitiless print, like the description of a strayed dog" (*No Name* 195). While clearly Mr. Pendril and Norah include the detailed description in order to have the best chance of finding Magdalen, the flyer objectifies her in a way even her public theatrical performances cannot. On stage, in contrast (and, in her off-stage characters) "she could control the scrutiny of the audience with lighting, costume, and makeup" (Michie 31). The moles on her neck, for instance, which threaten to be the decisive indicator of Magdalen's identity, can easily be covered with stage makeup. Collins presents this identification of Magdalen through external means at its most extreme point

when the character momentarily becomes her dress. Mrs. Lecount, clutching the fragment of fabric she has cut away from the dress, apostrophizes Magdalen with melodramatic fervour: "I hold you in the hollow of my hand" (294). Tatiana Kontou remarks on the significant doubleness of this moment. Mrs. Lecount, on the one hand, metaphorically defines Magdalen through her costume. On the other hand, however, Mrs. Lecount proves unable to capture Magdalen as she has captured the piece of material: "because the 'brown alpaca dress' is a *costume*, a surface adornment, the fabric demonstrates how Magdalen's false identity is only skin deep—she steps out of character as if out of a dress" (Kontou 50; original emphasis).

Magdalen's great skill in manipulating her external appearance in order to portray a variety of characters becomes apparent in her brief professional stage career. The "Entertainment" Captain Wragge creates for her—and for which, in his view, she is so eminently suited (*No Name* 237)—is an adaptation of Charles Mathews's famous monopolylogue performances. Mathews appeared on stage in a wide variety of characters, often including imitations of famous actors and figures of the day, differentiating each character, as Magdalen does, by key pieces of costume, properties, and physical markers such as accents and specific mannerisms.[3] Wragge, having seen Magdalen perform once for him, recognizes in her a perfect fit for a similar kind of performance, "in the shape of an 'At Home,' given by a woman" (*No Name* 237). From a single example of her performance, Wragge identifies Magdalen's talent as her ability to submerge her own character and appearance in the characters she plays, a skill which allows her, like Mathews, to shift quickly between a multitude of characters, each identifiable by their external markers.

[3] On Mathews and his "At Homes" see, for instance, Davis, *Comic Acting*, Davis and Holland, and Mathews.

Lauren Chattman suggests that "when Magdalen runs away to go on stage, we might expect *No Name* to become a full-fledged theater novel" (82), and indeed Magdalen's plot here does take on some of the elements of the theatrical novel discussed in the previous chapter. From this point in the narrative, for instance, Collins focuses on the actress while positioning Norah, her domestic counterpart, in the background. Even more noticeably, he places particular emphasis on the actress-heroine's apparent passivity in pursuing her own career. While Magdalen's choice to go on the stage clearly works to her own advantage—financially and for the advancement of her schemes—the step initially appears primarily to benefit Captain Wragge. Collins emphasizes the captain's interest in Magdalen's career by narrating the majority of her professional theatrical experience through Wragge's Chronicle rather than through the omniscient narrator. While in the theatrical novel such a choice would work to emphasize the self-forgetfulness of the actress-heroine, here the positioning of Magdalen's entire theatrical career "between the scenes" suggests its relative unimportance to the main plot.[4] Collins's marginalization of Magdalen's professional career focuses our attention instead on the area in which Magdalen does exercise the most agency: in her adoption of roles off the stage.

The skill Captain Wragge identifies in Magdalen, which suits her so eminently for his envisioned Entertainment, is that of the mimic. He comments in his Chronicle that "she has the flexible face, the manageable voice, and the dramatic knack which fit a woman for character-parts and disguises on the stage" (236). This skill forms part of our initial introduction to Magdalen, when in the opening scene she comically re-enacts the previous night's concert "so accurately and quaintly true to the original, that her father roared with laughter" (17).

[4] William Baker claims, reading the alterations Collins made from MS to serial, that the author in fact consciously limited this apparent passivity: "Noticeable throughout is a toning down of practical detail concerning Wragge's management of Magdalen's concert parties, dates, and the actual content of her musical performances" ("Manuscript" 201).

Magdalen's talent is both encouraged by her father's laughter, and read as dangerous or at least undesirable. Her mother urges Mr. Vanstone to "check Magdalen," remarking that "those habits of mimicry are growing on her" (17). The first extended example of Magdalen's talent for mimicry appears in the amateur theatrical presentation of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*, when Magdalen incorporates elements of her sister's character into the role of Julia. Watching the performance, Norah "saw all her own little formal peculiarities of manner and movement, unblushingly reproduced—and even the very tone of her voice so accurately mimicked from time to time that the accents startled her as if she was speaking herself, with an echo on the stage" (62). Norah's horror at seeing this "appropriation of [her] identity to theatrical purposes" (63) anticipates the more widespread fear suggested in Magdalen's future, off-stage acting. The casual putting on and taking off of another's character not only positions Magdalen's mimicry as an unforgivable act of appropriation but also suggests the impermanence of any identity. This second implication, that a woman's social identity can so easily be appropriated or otherwise taken away, becomes particularly apt when Collins reveals soon after this exchange that Norah's identity is not only impermanent but false, and can be taken from her as easily as—and more destructively than—Magdalen has demonstrated here.

Beyond this revelation of the impermanence and openness to appropriation of an identity, Sheridan's play is central to the novel more generally. As in many more conventional theatrical novels, Magdalen's participation in the amateur theatrical production precipitates her professional acting career. But on a more fundamental level, the play works "indirectly to precipitate the chain of catastrophes that animates the plot," primarily by throwing Frank and Magdalen together (Blain xiii). Like Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* (1814), Collins overtly links his choice of play to the events of the novel, giving play and characters "a covert role in

foreshadowing the outcome of the story" (Blain xiii). Magdalen's and Frank's roles as lovers, by throwing them so much together to rehearse, lead directly to their engagement, which in turn leads to Mr. Vanstone's death and Magdalen's disinheritance. The ease with which Magdalen enters not only into her new acting career but into each of the two widely divergent roles she is assigned foreshadows the importance of performance to her future and her comfort in exercising her newly-discovered talent. In Sheridan's Julia and Lucy, Collins chooses two opposite ends of the spectrum of female morality. Lucy, the scheming maid, anticipates the moral deviance implied in Magdalen's future practices; Julia, in contrast, represents the idealized feminine exterior which Magdalen presents in many of her adopted characters. She spends the rest of the novel, as Collins suggests in his preface, "struggl[ing …] under those opposing influences of Good and Evil" (5), split between the characters she plays and her own sense of identity, as well as between her desire for a functional, respectable social identity and the necessary duplicity, even villainy, she must practice in order to achieve this goal.

In describing this early amateur theatrical endeavour, Collins makes very clear that Magdalen has an innate talent for acting. The narrator emphatically situates Magdalen's first foray onto the stage as an astonishing example of apparently natural talent, asking, "under the circumstances, where is the actress by profession who could have done much more?" (63). The extent of this talent first becomes apparent during rehearsals for *The Rivals,* when the professional manager, exasperated with constantly having to correct the other amateur actors, meets Magdalen's evident competency with a sigh of relief: "The manager started in his chair. 'My heart alive! she speaks out without telling!' […] The manager rose excitably to his feet. Marvellous!" (55). The governess, Miss Garth, who has known Magdalen her whole life, echoes the manager's surprise at the girl's skill, "reflecting the manager's look of amazement on her

own face" (56). Though Magdalen, of course, from her "total want of experience" (56), does meet with some difficulties during this first rehearsal, she proves that not only does she have talent, she is also a quick study. In keeping with the apparent passivity so central to the actress heroine of the theatrical novel, however, Collins positions Magdalen's achievements on the amateur stage as the manager's triumph, not her own. The rehearsal ends with "the manager celebrating her attention to his directions by an outburst of professional approbation, which escaped him in spite of himself. 'She can take a hint!'" (57). Even before her first rehearsal provides tangible evidence of Magdalen's talent, she has shown to her family—and the reader—her awareness of that talent. In appeasing Frank's reluctance to take a part in the amateur drama, she promises to coach him, expressing "the strongest internal conviction that [she] could act every character in the play" (45). Later, Captain Wragge, too, quickly recognizes Magdalen's innate aptitude for the stage. While he at first expresses skepticism, dismissing her success in *The Rivals* as the flattering opinion of "audiences of friends" (227), upon watching an example of her work he immediately declares her "a born actress" (229).

In recounting each of Magdalen's off-stage performances, Collins situates the basis of her success in her brief foray onto the professional stage. Collins most clearly does so through the first of those performances, when she impersonates her governess, Miss Garth, to gain access to Noel Vanstone. This character is one of those she has performed on stage, and apparently one of her best.[5] When her characterization slips in front of Mrs. Lecount, the narrator comments that "nothing but the habit of public performance saved her from making the serious error that she had committed more palpable still, by attempting to set it right. Here, her past practice in the

[5] Captain Wragge remarks incredulously that the audience "actually try to encore one of her characters—an old north-country lady; modelled on that honoured preceptress in the late Mr. Vanstone's family […]. I don't wonder at it. Such an extraordinary assumption of age by a girl of nineteen, has never been seen in public before, in the whole of my theatrical experience'" (246).

Entertainment came to her rescue, and urged her to go on instantly, in Miss Garth's voice, as if nothing had happened" (289). Similarly, when Captain Wragge notes Magdalen's evident discomfort performing for Noel Vanstone, and offers advice, she responds "bitterly": "When the time comes for smiling, […] trust my dramatic training for any change of face that may be necessary" (356).

Intriguingly, Collins only allows the reader a glimpse behind the scenes once Magdalen comes to prepare for her first off-stage performance. The entirety of her professional career has been narrated through the mediation of Captain Wragge's Chronicle, limiting the reader's access to Magdalen's thoughts and feelings as she enters this new phase of her life. Here, however, we get a piece-by-piece catalogue of the elements that go into making "Miss Garth" successful. In addition to the padded cloak and "north-country" accent we have already seen in Captain Wragge's description of the character on stage (246; 256), Collins describes at length the cosmetic process of aging Magdalen's face (268-269). In doing so, he draws our attention to the difficulties in adapting an on-stage character to an off-stage performance:

> The same quick perception of dangers to be avoided, and difficulties to be overcome, which had warned her to leave the extravagant part of her character costume in the box at Birmingham, now kept her mind fully alive to the vast difference between a disguise worn by gaslight, for the amusement of an audience, and a disguise assumed by daylight to deceive the searching eyes of two strangers. (267)

As such, for the off-stage version of the character Magdalen must add a layer of veils to ensure that neither her own face nor the theatrical tricks used to hide her face can be seen through her performed character (268). Mrs. Lecount's easy penetration of this disguise also delineates its specific components. She describes to Noel the process Magdalen will follow in removing her

costume—in, that is, stepping out of her character—in a way that reveals the metaphorical removal of each layer Mrs. Lecount has practiced while Magdalen was in the room.

> When our visitor gets home she will put her grey hair away in a box, and will cure that sad affliction in her eyes with warm water and a sponge. If she had painted the marks on her face, as well as she painted the inflammation in her eyes, the light would have shown me nothing, and I should certainly have been deceived. But I saw the marks; I saw a young woman's skin under that dirty complexion of hers; I heard, in this room, a true voice in a passion, as well as a false voice talking with an accent,—and I don't believe in one morsel of that lady's appearance from top to toe. (296)

As we see here, in creating her off-stage character Magdalen merely adds layers of external, presented identification, masking both her own identity and the tricks by which she has hidden herself.

Magdalen's role as the new housemaid at St. Crux-in-the-Marsh shows the most depth she puts into any of her characters. She undergoes extensive training with her own maid, Louisa, in "those domestic lessons, on the perfect acquirement of which her […] daring stratagem depended for its success" (*No Name* 621).[6] In chronicling this extensive preparation—preparation notably absent in Magdalen's other roles—Collins emphasizes that this is the one role in which she cannot rely only on external appearance or costume to perform. She must learn

[6] Critics seem not to comment on the fact that, in Magdalen's use of Louisa as her teacher here and later as her reference, Collins actually does pass a fallen woman off (however briefly) as a lady. Surely this one scene would have hit straight at the heart of the general fears about self-help, the fears of those who desired to protect and maintain rigid stratifications and class-based hierarchies. The contemporary critics who seem so perturbed by the thought of Magdalen's actions—actions which, after all, only aim at *returning* her to her proper sphere, the place to which, had her father lived a day or two longer, she would have been fully entitled by law—ignore completely that in order to achieve her ends, she trains her maid to perform as a lady. Even Louisa expresses her discomfort with this proceeding, though she also expresses uncertainty about the reverse, about Magdalen's ability to perform as someone from a lower station in life (612-613). Like Magdalen, Louisa ends the novel by beginning a new, respectable married life—and again no one seems to comment on this particular falling-away from expectation in the sub-plot of the fallen woman.

the business of the maid and be able to enter fully into the role. Significantly, then, it is in this role that Magdalen's performance most overtly falters. As the maid, her lapse is immediately noticed and commented on (644); as Miss Garth, while the lapses are noticed, Mrs. Lecount keeps that knowledge to herself to be used later, and so they do not interrupt the immediate effect of Magdalen's performance.

Magdalen practices her very theatrical mode of self-making—undertaking a string of characters created through costuming and mimicry—in order to perform a single act of off-stage self-making: re-establishing her own and her sister's identities. Jenny Bourne Taylor argues that the novel "hinge[s] on probing the boundaries of the social self, and explore[s] how a 'legitimate' identity is in many ways a trick of the light created by the manipulation of self-possession and propriety" (135). Collins uses this performative identity as the basis of the novel's extensive social commentary against the treatment of illegitimacy and the status of women. In opening the novel with what appears to be an idyllic family setting, Collins exposes the family's reliance on pretence. Similarly, by addressing the lengths to which a woman must go to regain a legitimate identity once she has been declared illegitimate—and, as such, essentially a non-person—Collins gestures towards growing debates over "the economically and socially disadvantaged woman whose very need to earn a living was itself considered aberrant" (Wynne 102), the woman without the means, ability, or desire to create a social identity based solely on marriage.

Collins posits Magdalen's off-stage reliance on performance as a woman's alternative to Smilesean self-help. Not only does her series of performances lead her to secure an identity and position in the world (the ultimate aim of Smiles's self-help ideology), her success also contrasts the absolute failure of Frank Clare to make effective use of the principles of self-help. Frank's

career uses "the old-boy network" (Rance 90), rather than the ideals of self-help: each of the positions he takes has been found for him by an older male acquaintance, or by a friend of his father's. Once in these positions, Frank clearly lacks the qualities to move himself up in the world. While Frank disappears from the novel in the third "Between the Scenes" interlude, Collins has already established him as an extreme contrast to Magdalen in those areas that comprise the self-help mindset: perseverance, agency, and control over one's own future. This apparent contrast, however, becomes ironic when Frank *does* improve his lot by marrying for money. Frank, then, takes the conventional woman's road to self-improvement, by way of marriage, while Magdalen deliberately plays with this convention, creating a variety of "selves" before using her own mercenary marriage to provide herself with a stable social and legal identity. This contrast suggests the necessity of a female variation on a doctrine not conventionally intended to be adopted by women. Nicholas Rance suggests that "one might conceive of a Victorian novel about disinheritance in which Magdalen's role initially was filled by a male character" (93), a novel which would fit easily into the self-help tradition. He goes on, however, to note that Collins's depiction of Magdalen, when read in this same tradition, "would imply that a Smilesian woman is a monster" (Rance 93). The self-help mentality adopted by Magdalen propels her beyond the conventional relative identity of a woman, and in so doing loses the positive associations with which such characteristics endow a male character.

Magdalen recognizes that marrying her cousin—with whom she has nothing in common and from whom she physically recoils—will allow her to re-establish her name, identity, and fortune, which provides one of the sensational bases of Collins's story. As Catherine Peters points out, throughout Magdalen's scheming, Collins never "gloss[es] over" the consequences and "the horror of marrying a man who makes her flesh creep" (254). She requires merely time

and rehearsal to face the ordeal of her marriage: going away for a few days ahead of the ceremony allows her to go through with the end of her scheme, the anticipation of which leaves "her face stiffened awfully, like the face of a corpse" (473). Collins highlights the duality of her characterizations—the real, commodified female body underneath the costumed and presented exterior—by repeatedly pointing towards such momentary failings in her performances. However Magdalen may have disguised her own identity throughout her plot to beguile Noel into marriage, Collins continually reminds the reader that underneath these illusions Magdalen nevertheless makes "use of her own body as sexual object in a marriage contract" (Bauer 135).

Magdalen's performances are a means to an end: re-establishing a legitimate social identity for herself and, by extension, for her sister. Collins connects such proceedings to his larger commentary on the status of women in his society by positioning Magdalen as a representative—if melodramatic—female character. In conversation with Mrs. Wragge, Magdalen reminds the captain's wife—and the reader—that "girls no older than I am have tried deceptions as hopeless in appearance as mine, and have carried them through to the end" (335). Christine Bolus-Reichert notes that the events which precipitate Magdalen's career of off-stage performance are "merely a sensational pretext for something much more likely to happen to a middle-class Victorian woman: a shift in family fortunes that forces her to leave home" (23-24). Collins establishes Magdalen's representative nature by hinting in passing at the parallel lives led by other characters. Mrs. Wragge, for instance, briefly narrates her meeting with the captain who controls not only her sense of identity but everything about her down to the angle at which she holds her head. This story establishes her as a more commonplace parallel to Magdalen's sensational loss of identity. Deirdre David describes how Mrs. Wragge, working as a barmaid, "does not know her own name, [and] feels herself deprived of identity by the incessant discipline

of male directions; she becomes, in a sense, somewhat like Magdalen, a woman deprived of her identity as inheriting daughter and disciplined by laws that legislate legitimacy and correct irregularity" ("Rewriting" 193). Similarly, the landlady with whom Magdalen finds respite at the end of the novel briefly narrates her own history to Captain Kirke, emphasizing that "her husband […] never came near the house, except to take her money" (700). While Collins presents the landlady as sympathetic to Magdalen's predicament and willing to help her, he emphasizes the husband's sustained control over her actions, even in his absence. Magdalen's off-stage performances, then, address a common situation, but allow her to exert agency in establishing the social identity *she* has chosen, even if the only way in which she can gain such an identity is through the conventional route of marriage.

Magdalen's ability to act for herself—to create the social identity of her own choosing—stems from her state as "Nobody's child" (*No Name* 201). With the revelation of her illegitimacy, Magdalen loses her previous, conventional, relative identity as her father's daughter; in Frank's desertion, she loses her best chance of forming a new relative identity as a wife. As she works to further her schemes, then, Magdalen acts from essentially a place of non-existence: "She has no legal identity because she had no father to create one for her, and no husband to give her one" (Huskey 10). In a society which primarily grants identity to women only by way of their interactions with or relationships to men, women like Magdalen have few independent options. Magdalen aims, then, not merely to revenge herself and her sister on those who have, she feels, wrongfully kept their inheritance from them, but also to return to the status quo represented at the opening of the novel: a time at which she was in full possession of a legitimate social identity. To achieve this end, she undertakes the series of performances which eventually lead to her marriage. That Magdalen's plot to furtively marry her cousin Noel rests on

more than mere vengeance appears clearly in Noel's first will. Magdalen specifies that eighty thousand pounds should be left to her as his widow, "exactly the fortune which Michael Vanstone had taken from his brother's orphan children, at his brother's death" (554). Magdalen could easily have insisted on receiving a larger percentage of her new husband's fortune, but financial gain, beyond recovering what was originally hers and her sister's, was never her intention.[7] Finally, Magdalen's aim to re-establish herself by gaining a relative identity through marriage becomes clear in her triumphant letter to Miss Garth: "Do you know who I am? I am a respectable married woman, accountable for my actions to nobody under heaven but my husband. I have got a place in the world, and a name in the world, at last" (*No Name* 590).

Magdalen, like Stella Campbell, relies on the imperceptibility of her characterizations. Both women build their self-making projects on their audiences' full and unquestioning association of them with the costumes they wear and the characters they perform. Magdalen's success in marrying Noel and re-claiming her identity, like Campbell's in using her stage characters to secure a place in *fin-de-siècle* society, relies entirely on her audience's suspension of disbelief and willingness to buy into the illusion. The care Magdalen puts into preparing her first characterization, however, emphasizes the infinitely higher stakes of performing a character off the stage. Here, the actor is unable to rely on or assume the audience's suspension of disbelief, their willing, if unconscious, participation in the illusion. Instead, Magdalen must constantly second-guess the success of her performance, taking into consideration her audience's reactions: "The bare doubt whether the housekeeper might not have seen her already under too strong a light, shook her self-possession for the moment. She gave herself time to recover it" (276). Noel alone buys into the illusion and unquestioningly attributes the woman he sees before

[7] Collins emphasizes the connection between this money and Magdalen's identity by ensuring that the amount specified in the will is the detail which assures Mrs. Lecount of Magdalen's true identity (554).

him with the identity she has performed. He forms the perfect audience for Magdalen's purposes, paying just enough attention to encourage Magdalen in her continued impersonation, but not enough so as to penetrate the illusion. Whatever Magdalen's natural talent, then, her performances depend less on her own work than on the willingness of her audience to accept unquestioningly the illusion she presents.

While Magdalen's performance leads to her marriage with Noel and she temporarily manages to re-establish her social identity, Mrs. Lecount, the skeptical audience member, quickly intervenes and checks Magdalen's success. The novel's conclusion, however, allows some ambivalence on the point of Magdalen's success or failure, an ambivalence ingrained in the novel's critical history. Victorian critics read the conclusion as too forgiving, too easily rewarding Magdalen for her villainy throughout the novel by providing her with a respectable and loving husband and a stable identity. Henry Chorley, for example, reviewing the novel in *The Athenaeum*, suggests that Magdalen "is let off with a punishment gentle in proportion to the unscrupulous selfishness of her character" ("*No Name*" 10) and that the ending as a whole is "too rapid, too unchequered, to be natural" ("*No Name*" 11). Margaret Oliphant, similarly, expresses incredulousness at Collins's implication that Magdalen finishes "a career of vulgar and aimless trickery and wickedness, […] as pure, as high-minded, and as spotless as the most dazzling white of heroines" (170). Magdalen's apparent reward for her theatrical, villainous career was considered distasteful at best, and shocking at worst. Modern critics, in contrast, tend to read Magdalen's marriage to Captain Kirke (and especially the fact that Collins gives the sailor the final words of the novel) as disproportionate punishment for her previous agency, confining her, like countless women, to a relative identity granted through marriage. Virginia Blain, in her introduction to the Oxford edition of the novel, suggests that Collins "shrank from allowing

[Magdalen] to win a victory entirely on her own terms. In the end she must be 'rescued' by the love of a good man" (xx). This reading of the ending as a "rescue" of Magdalen from the necessity of her schemes—from the necessity, that is, of acting for herself and on her own behalf—surfaces in many modern readings of the novel.[8]

Throughout the novel, however, Collins has set up a very different reading of this ending by emphasizing Magdalen's devotion, even at her lowest or most apparently villainous, to her sister. As she begins her professional stage career, for instance, she cautions Captain Wragge to "say nothing about [her] sister" (371). She recognizes the distance she has put between herself and Norah, and while this distance pains her, she expresses her willingness to make the sacrifice for Norah's own sake. She says as much in a passionate letter: "Let me live, Norah, in the hope of better times for *you*, which is all the hope I have left" (317; original emphasis). That she "live[s]" and works for Norah and in Norah's best interests forms an important and often overlooked element of Magdalen's underlying character. She carries out her schemes to restore the lost inheritance at least in part for the benefit of someone else, not for purely selfish or villainous reasons. Her lack of selfishness, to which Collins repeatedly draws our attention, keeps her, even in her darkest moments, from irredeemable villainy, and so supports her redemption at the end of the novel. Norah's triumph, "the novel's apparent rewarding of Norah's passivity" (Brown 96), in fact justifies Magdalen's controversial actions. Captain Kirke's 'rescue' of her can thus be seen as a reward rather than a recovery. Magdalen achieves, at the end of the novel, her goal of establishing legitimate social identities both for herself and for Norah.

[8] See, for instance, Huskey, Lonoff, and Wagner.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I acted to please myself": Self-Making and Audience in *Villette*

In Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Lucy Snowe draws on the techniques of the stage in support of her unreliable narration, to both establish and conceal the self-image that she develops over the course of the novel. As we have seen, identity creation for a woman in the nineteenth century primarily came through family or through marriage: Sarah Stickney Ellis's "relative" identity. Lucy lacks the family connection to create a functional social identity in this way, and so turns to the techniques of the stage in her self-making. Helen Davis, however, emphasizes the difficulties Brontë faces in writing a female protagonist who does not, by the end of the novel, achieve a defined sense of self by way of marriage or other family connections: "Since ambitious, independent women were not socially acceptable in the nineteenth century, Brontë […] cannot have Lucy openly acknowledge her goals without alienating contemporary readers" (203). Lucy instead implies her adherence to the expectation of a relative identity, "presenting her success as the result of circumstance and others' actions rather than the endpoint of her own active striving" (H. Davis 202). In doing so, Brontë's character anticipates the self-making narratives of the theatrical novels and actress memoirs addressed above. Lucy distorts a traditional relative identity through much of the novel; she establishes her character as a reflection of others, rather than through her own relation to those other characters. She watches, assesses, and contrasts her own situation, reactions, and thoughts to those of the other women with whom she comes in contact. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas defines this process over the course of the novel as Lucy "gradually learning to become the subject of her own gaze" (50). Like Magdalen Vanstone, Lucy anticipates an aspect of Stella Campbell's performance: she leaves the question of interpretation open to her audience. As a narrator, Lucy provides a range of options

to the reader. In addition to the series of reflexive self-images, Lucy incorporates multiple possible reactions, plot-lines, and outcomes into her narrative, and actively encourages the reader to make her own assumptions. She finally uses her single on-stage experience to bring together the various strands of this identity. Though emphatically not a professional actress, Lucy makes explicit use of her experience of the stage to craft an identity which allows her to survive and thrive as a single, professional woman.

Like many of the novelists addressed in this dissertation, Brontë benefited from childhood exposure to the theatre, though her early experience was limited to the home and the creations of her own imagination. Elizabeth Gaskell, in her biography of the author, quotes a letter from her father, Patrick Brontë, which notes the theatrical leanings of Brontë's childhood: "When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own" (46). Elliott Vanskike suggests that because of this early theatrical experience, Brontë's novels are all "suffused with theatricality" (469). *Villette* in particular, with its reliance on what Penny Boumelha terms the "key motifs" of observation and confessional performance (183), relies on the tropes of the theatre novel. Anticipating *No Name*'s overtly theatrical structure, *Villette* follows a "halting episodic" format which "recalls a sequence of scenes, a succession of set-pieces which lends the text an air of contrivance and theatricality less like a unified drama than a series of tableaux" (Dolin 58).

Villette's most overt relation to the theatrical comes through the novel's focus on spectatorship. Many critics have read Lucy's narration as that of a passive spectator, relating the events she witnesses without overtly connecting those events to her own experience, feelings, or character.[1] Rather than begin her autobiographical narrative with, for instance, a physical

[1] See, for instance, Cline, Flint, Jacobus, and Litvack.

description or a brief summary of her antecedents, Lucy begins by describing Polly Home's arrival at Bretton. The self-effacement of such an opening reappears throughout the novel, at key points in Lucy's narrative of self-making. In the Villette art gallery, M. Paul comments vaguely on her erasure from her own story, teasing her for her "temerity" and reminding her that she has not been "cast in an heroic mould" but has only the power to "gaze with sang-froid at pictures of Cleopatra" (228). M. Paul encourages Lucy to "gaze" instead at the series of images which depict expected female identities—the relative identities of "La vie d'une femme," from "Jeune Fille" to "Veuve" (225-226)—implicitly suggesting that she put her observational powers to more constructive use. This role as spectator positions Lucy, as Toni Wein notes, at first as "innately passive" (740). In fact, Lucy seems the only passive object in a world of activity: "while Lucy's eye passively *falls*, seats *dawn* on her, wallpaper *runs*, the blue arm-chair *grows*" (Cohen 50; original emphasis). But Lucy clearly, if ambiguously, positions herself at the active centre of her narrative. In the novel's opening chapter, Mrs. Bretton instructs her to "take no notice at present" of Polly; the narrator immediately resists this command: "But I did take notice" (Brontë 11). The scenes that follow unfold in a series of active verbs—"I watched," "I observed," "I heard" (11), "I perceived" (12), "I witnessed" (16)—with the other characters' actions radiating outward from, and narrated as relative to, Lucy, the narrating "I".

What Lucy chooses to observe holds similar significance. She mentions in passing Polly's daily round of activities with Mrs. Bretton, but goes into no detail, explaining that she "ceased to watch [Polly] under such circumstances: she was not interesting" (Brontë 27). The mundane domestic routine has no place in Lucy's story. Rather, she observes and relates to her reader moments of heightened emotion, passion, and spectacle. Polly's reaction to her father's departure provides the clearest example of Lucy's use of others' emotions to narrate her own

story. Lucy begins by describing Polly's external expression of the "agony" she feels at her separation from her father, but then, casting her eye around the room, proceeds to narrate the other characters' reactions to Polly's emotions: "Nobody spoke. Mrs. Bretton, being a mother, shed a tear or two. Graham, who was writing, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, Lucy Snowe, was calm" (25). This silent early scene firmly establishes each of the characters through their individual responses to strong emotion. Polly feels, and controls, her extreme reactions; Mrs. Bretton expresses a conventional feminine reaction through her tears; and Graham, distracted temporarily from his work, turns Polly into a domestic spectacle without himself reacting. Lucy, uncharacteristically, remarks upon herself, but only as a stoic contrast to the emotional scene she narrates. This scene, in its apparent effacement of Lucy, in fact positions her at the centre of her own narrative. She situates herself as the subject of her first sentence: "During an ensuing space of some minutes, I perceived [Polly] endured agony" (Brontë 25). Brontë focuses on Lucy's observation and perception rather than on Polly's emotion. As such, she emphasizes the effect that witnessing Polly's emotion has on Lucy, rather than the effect of experiencing the emotion. Even at this early stage in the novel, then, Lucy narrates her story through—and while apparently focusing on—others, creating a reflexive image of her self while appearing not to discuss that self at all.

Later, in the Villette art gallery, Lucy makes even more explicit the motivation behind her choice of scene to observe and narrate. She choses to "watch" Graham, who has come to collect her, without making herself known to him, and mentions, apparently in passing, that de Hamal has also just arrived at the gallery (229). The motivation implied for Lucy's reticence in approaching Graham—her choice to observe, rather than interact—appears in her assumption that there will be some kind of passionate exchange between these two rivals for Ginevra's heart.

When it becomes clear that the anticipated confrontation will not occur, Lucy ceases her observation and makes herself known to Graham. In keeping with her earlier assertion that she will not narrate what does not interest her—that is, scenes of mundane activity, scenes lacking in heightened emotion—Lucy stops narrating at the moment she chooses to stop observing and become an active participant in the scene.

This emphasis on observation allows for the novel's focus on external markers of character or identity. The pensionnat at Villette, in particular, seems to run entirely on surveillance and phrenology—with these ideas receiving considerably more attention in Brontë's text than, for instance, methods of teaching.[2] Our first introduction to the pensionnat—and to M. Paul—emphasizes the importance of a phrenological establishment of character to Mme. Beck's educational practices. She judges Lucy, and decides to hire her, based solely on M. Paul's "read[ing]" of her "countenance" (73). Lucy's courtship plot, such as it is, relies just as much on this external legibility of character as her professional plot does. One of the primary points in M. Paul's eventual favour in Lucy's eyes, over the handsome and successful Graham Bretton, appears in their relative abilities to read Lucy's character. While the teacher's ability to judge Lucy from her "countenance" plays a large part in her professional success, this ability also quickly becomes the centre of Lucy's apparent attraction for him. M. Paul suggests that, because of his skill in phrenological analysis, he is the only person in Villette who "know[s]" her: "Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed" (171). M. Paul sees through Lucy's façade, through her continued location of herself as secondary. Graham, in contrast, continually misreads Lucy.

[2] In contrast, *Jane Eyre* (1848) narrates at length the pedagogical methods in place at Lowood School, and later those practiced by St. John Rivers and his sisters. In the earlier novel, Brontë is more interested in how characters come to be formed and perhaps re-formed, while in *Villette* her focus is on how character might be expressed or perceived.

He does not even recognize her, for instance, when they re-encounter one another as adults in Villette, even though, as Polly later says, Lucy is "still [her]self" in "countenance" (305). After Lucy has confronted the spectral nun for the first time, Graham tries to exercise his professional skills as a doctor to "reveal the hidden meaning of Lucy's inner state" (Shuttleworth 9). He claims that, in observing her "from a professional point of view" he can "read, perhaps all [she] would conceal – in [her] eye, which is curiously vivid and restless; in [her] cheek, which the blood has forsaken; in [her] hand, which [she] cannot steady" (276). Graham implies that his professional training allows him to see through Lucy's attempts at concealment, and that her body expresses more than she would want it to. Graham, however, unlike M. Paul, is a bad phrenologist. While he easily recognizes the physical signs of Lucy's distress, he cannot interpret from those signs any conception of her character. Lucy later comments on this "misapprehension" on Graham's part: "he wanted always to give me a rôle not mine. […] He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke" (352). Lucy's "countenance" clearly does provide some hint to her character, but only, we see through the contrast of Graham and M. Paul, if one can read and interpret those external markers correctly.

As a consequence of this focus on external evidence of identity, Lucy creates her own sense of self by way of things external to her.[3] Her self-making primarily takes the form of a reflexive creation of identity through other women. As a first-person narrator, Lucy tells her own story, and so creates and expresses her own character, but does so by relating what occurs around

[3] Many critics read Lucy's act of identity-creation by way of others as a negative, destructive, or otherwise undesirable practice. Parkin-Gounelas, for example, describes Lucy's self-image not as carefully crafted but as "radically splintered by others' conflicting scripts" (72). She later reads Lucy's "attempt" at constructing "a coherent and integrated identity" as "ultimately doomed to failure" (100). Tim Dolin suggests that Lucy's narrative merely "brings into question the very conditions under which the fixing of identity might occur" (59). I read Lucy's reflexive self-making, however, as positive, productive, and ultimately successful. As Kate Flint suggests, Lucy is "a shaper of her own fiction" (188).

her, that which she observes, rather than by explicitly narrating her own life experience. Kathryn Bond Stockton suggests that the characters with whom Lucy surrounds herself "function *vocationally* for Lucy, letting her touch upon a series of vocations that may or may not be available to her—roles as bourgeois housewife, wealthy widow, kept coquette, actress, capitalist career-woman, [and] nun" (122; original emphasis). At the same time, these roles represent conventional female identities that Lucy deliberately rejects. In reflexively defining herself in contrast to other women, Lucy suggests that, as a narrating, independent, professional woman, she "cannot be contained by the roles available to her. But neither is she free of them, since all these women do represent aspects of herself" (Gilbert and Gubar 419). As we have seen, Polly forms the most obvious external reflection of Brontë's protagonist, given her role in Lucy's complex non-courtship plot with Graham. Polly, of course, plays the role of Ellis's "relative" woman perfectly, a perfection Lucy often presents with snide overtones: "I often wished [Polly] would mind herself and be tranquil; but no – herself was forgotten in [Graham]: he could not be sufficiently well waited on, nor carefully enough looked after" (28). Lucy takes issue with Polly's overtly relative sense of identity, even as a child. Her condescending presentation of Polly implies an innate contrast between the two characters. Even the names of the two emphasize their opposition: Polly's surname reflects her role as angel-in-the-house while Lucy's suggests both coldness and exteriority.

This apparent opposition, however, works in support of Lucy's narrative creation of her own character. While avoiding any mention of her own griefs—especially at the loss of her family, which is only briefly glossed over—Lucy nevertheless hints at her feelings by recalling Polly's situation at the opening of the novel. Mary Jacobus notes that "Paulina's grief – that of the abandoned child cast among strangers – has […] already acted out Lucy's. Asking no pity for

herself, Lucy earlier had invoked it for her surrogate" (43). Lucy's emotional reactions, then, while not explicitly narrated in response to specific events, can be inferred from the reactions she narrates while observing other characters. Brontë establishes Lucy's reliance on this method of distanced feeling early in the novel, when the narrator expresses impatience with Polly's stoicism at her sudden reunion with her father: "I wished she would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease" (17). Lucy, who lives and feels through others, needs the characters around her to express emotion and passion so that she can achieve, by the reflexive nature of her narration, the release of that emotion. And of course, while Lucy comments dismissively on Polly's formation of her sense of self through Graham, Polly's relativity in fact forms an intrinsic element of Lucy's own relative creation of her identity. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that "though Lucy seems determined not to exist in another's existence, we soon notice that her voyeuristic detachment defines her in terms of others as inexorably as Polly's parasitic attachments define the younger girl" (404). Once Lucy travels to Villette, a combination of women serve the same reflective purpose, a group which includes Mrs. Bretton, Ginevra Fanshawe, and the spectral nun. Mme. Beck's observational control over her surroundings parallels Lucy's over her own narrative, and even such a minor character as Mme. Sweeney, whom Lucy replaces as nursery governess in Villette, serves such a purpose. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Mme. Sweeney is "a counterfeiter" and thus "reminds us that Lucy too hides her passions behind her costume" (416).

Brontë expresses symbolically Lucy's preference for self-making by way of reflection in others through a proliferation of mirror scenes.[4] The only physical descriptions Lucy provides us,

[4] Pauline Nestor notes this literal and symbolic mirroring focus as one of the main differences between *Villette* and Brontë's previous version of the same story, *The Professor* (1857): "in *Villette* the 'objective' analyses swapped by Crimsworth and Pelet [in *The Professor*] are turned by Lucy against herself in her fixation with her own reflection in mirrors" (126).

for instance, are filtered through mirror images, because only with this added layer of separation can she turn her narrative explicitly on herself. At the concert she attends with Graham and Mrs. Bretton, for example, Lucy describes herself through the distancing mechanism of her own mirrored reflection as "a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle" (234). She goes on, once she has revealed that the "party approaching from the opposite direction" is in fact the mirrored image of herself and her two companions, to comment on the novelty of being thus able to encounter herself as a separate individual: "for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the 'giftie' of seeing myself as others see me" (234).[5] Splitting herself in two through the mirror allows Lucy both to observe and to act, to reflect and to exist as a separate entity. Similarly, in moments when Lucy is forced by the event she relates to narrate her own emotional state or reaction, she often switches to the third person. At the festival, for instance, when Graham half-recognizes her, she comments that "had he persisted, he would perhaps have seen the spectacle of Lucy incensed: not all that was grand, or good, or kind in him (and Lucy felt the full amount) should have kept her quite tame, or absolutely inoffensive and shadowlike" (504-505). Even the possibility of making a spectacle of herself, of showing her anger at being recognized, must be kept at a distance.

These methods of removing herself from her own story while simultaneously relating that story both allow for and necessitate the most overt characteristic of Lucy's narrative: her reliance on omission and suppression.[6] While Lucy may appear to narrate everything *but* her own story,

[5] In *No Name* Magdalen uses her mirrored image to a similar end. Rather than using the reflection to "see" herself, though, she situates herself in the reflected image, using the subsequent separation to achieve a momentary freedom from that self. As she remembers Frank, "the tears gushed to her eyes. She passionately dried them, restored the bag [of treasured objects] to its place, and turned her back on the looking-glass. 'No more of myself,' she thought; 'no more of my mad, miserable self for to-day!'" (Collins, *No Name* 306).

[6] Parkin-Gounelas terms *Villette* "the novel *par excellence* of repression" (64); Judith Williams notes that Lucy is "very good at not telling us things" (82).

in fact, through her use of reflexive characterization, "Lucy's emotions, rather than any external events, create the real structure of the novel" (Ewbank 175). Unlike Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell, Lucy does not erase or elide, but instead conceals in plain sight, building her narrative—and thus her character—on implication and suggestion. Meghan Freeman notes the significance of this difference: "To elide something is to omit it, to take it out and then to smooth over what remains so as to leave no trace of the extraction. Lucy Snowe's narration, however, is defined by her obstinate refusal to perform such cosmetic operations; the omission is there, but the smoothing-over is not" (650). Helen Davis terms Lucy's narrative technique "circumnarration," and suggests its necessity to the specific identity Lucy creates. This form of narration, Davis argues, "allows [Lucy] to end the novel in a position of autonomous authority" (216), a position incompatible with a conventional relative female identity. Lucy's secrecy and submersion of her own emotional reactions becomes, in Patsy Stoneman's words, "a matter of self-preservation" (70).

Lucy, in hindsight, tells a story that—were she a man—would not be out of place in Samuel Smiles's series of eminent biographies. In fact, Brontë's first attempt at writing the story of an English teacher in Brussels based on her own experiences—*The Professor*, originally rejected but published posthumously—follows the pattern of the self-help novel.[7] Brontë's later novel suggests a female version of the self-help narrative as an alternative to the marriage plot through which relative female identity is more conventionally established.[8] Brontë emphasizes her heroine's position in the self-help tradition by including M. Paul as a contrast to Lucy's self-help plot. In doing so, she emphasizes the higher stakes Lucy encounters, and the greater

[7] On *The Professor* as a self-help novel see, for instance, Glen, Kronshage, and Shuttleworth.
[8] As illustrative of this difference in the gendered tropes of potential self-help narratives, Gretchen Braun notes that "*Villette* opens with its heroine's entry into the labor market rather than the novelistic convention of entry into the marriage market" (205).

challenges she faces in attempting to make her own way in the world and to establish her own sense of identity. “Lucy’s bereavement involves social and economic consequences that his does not. Paul manages to overcome the financial straits caused by his father’s business failure through industry and professional achievement” (Braun 207). Lucy’s employment choices, once she has been left to fend for herself in the world, “command neither social status nor significant financial reward” (Braun 207), and she either lacks the qualities to enter the marriage market, or choses not to do so: Lucy never clarifies her motivations for remaining single. Brontë describes Lucy’s pursuit of an independent sense of self, the final goal of the self-help plot, as dangerous, convoluted, and challenging, necessitating inordinate levels of commitment and self-denial. M. Paul’s achievement of a socially and economically stable identity as a well-regarded school master seems, in contrast, remarkably straightforward.

This self-help plot meets the theatrical novel in Lucy’s denial of her own agency and elision of any sense of her own ambition. Like Kemble, Bancroft, and Campbell, Lucy writes from a point of success: her school has flourished and she has achieved the means to survive as a single, professional woman. At no point in the novel, however, does Lucy overtly acknowledge the ambition which has led her to the point from which she narrates. Like the actresses writing memoirs later in the century, Lucy elides her own active pursuit of these ambitions. Her first steps towards independence, after the unnamed tragedy that strikes her family, come through the actions of others: “when Miss Marchmont, a maiden lady of our neighbourhood, sent for me, I obeyed her behest, in the hope that she might assign me some task I could undertake” (40). After Miss Marchmont has died, Lucy reflects on her own idleness: “It seemed I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy” (42). Brontë implies that Lucy lacks the initiative to make her own way; she might have remained a companion indefinitely, had

external forces not decided otherwise and sent her back into the world. Even when she does strike out alone—travelling to London and then Villette without assistance—Lucy narrates her actions as if they were those of another woman:

> Into the hands of Common-sense I confided the matter. Common-sense, however, was as chilled and bewildered as all my other faculties, and it was only under the spur of an inexorable necessity that she spasmodically executed her trust. Thus urged, she paid the porter: considering the crisis, I did not blame her too much that she was hugely cheated; she asked the waiter for a room; she timorously called for the chambermaid; what is far more, she bore, without being wholly overcome, a highly supercilious style of demeanour from that young lady, when she appeared. (51)

Anticipating Lucy's later switch to third person at moments of intense emotion, she here isolates the active, independent aspect of herself, implying that she—the narrating "I"—does not, or cannot, actively work towards her own ends. In the next paragraph, Lucy immediately switches back to the first person to describe the chambermaid: the narrating "I" can observe and comment on her surroundings, but cannot overtly control or arrange those surroundings. Similarly, upon achieving her ambition of opening her own school, she asks M. Paul, incredulously, "is there another Lucy Snowe?" (536). Brontë leaves us with the suggestion that Lucy's ambivalence towards ambition complicates her sense of self. Even here, at the height of her achievement, Lucy maintains the division between the Lucy she narrates and the desiring, ambitious, and ultimately successful woman who is and is not her: who has her name but remains at a distance.

Brontë positions the actress Vashti at the centre both of her novel and of Lucy's self-making process. Vashti's performance is so powerful that Lucy is unable to look at anything else, interrupting her usual practice of observing and describing each of the characters around

her. She reflects that "for long intervals I forgot to look how [Graham] demeaned himself, or to question what he thought" (287). Her usual practice of defining her own reactions by watching others proves useless when faced with Vashti: "The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit" (287). While watching Vashti's performance, she can instead lose herself in the passion depicted by, and inspired by, the actress on the stage. As such, the scene at the theatre forms an intrinsic step in Lucy's growing ability to define her sense of self without reference to others. Witnessing Vashti's performance, Lucy finds herself able, suddenly, to respond to strong emotion with an expression of her own strong emotional reaction:

> I had seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what *might* be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was *not* done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen, winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent. (287-288; original emphasis)

Lucy begins the scene describing Vashti's performance in much the same reflexive way she has described the other female characters in the novel. But she quickly gets carried away by the power of the actress's performance, and shifts here to describing the effect it has on her.[9] Apart from this scene, Lucy has positioned herself as the passive, narrating spectator, describing only

[9] Lucy's description of Vashti's acting echoes Brontë's own commentary, in letters from 1851, on the French tragedienne Rachel Félix, whom she saw on a trip to London. To James Taylor she writes: "It is scarcely human nature that she shews you; it is something wilder and worse; the feelings and fury of a fiend. The great gift of Genius she undoubtedly has—but—I fear—she rather abuses than turns it to good account" (Smith 718). In a letter to Sydney Dobell, she calls Rachel "a demon. […] Fiends can hate, scorn, rave, wreathe, and agonize as she does, not mere men and women" (Smith 652; original emphasis). Nearly every critic who writes about Vashti mentions this connection to Brontë's own experience in the London theatre. See, for instance, Marshall, Sanders, and Voskuil. Brownstein goes so far as to credit Brontë's Vashti with Rachel's continued prominence: "Most people who know her name at all came to it […] through Charlotte Brontë" (38).

what she sees, and leaving the reader to extrapolate from her stoic narration any emotional effect these scenes may have had on her.

While Vashti's performance is a clear turning point for Lucy's strategy of self-making, the scene comes after the narrator's own brief stage experience, during which we see her beginning to work towards a stable off-stage identity of her own. When a student falls ill, threatening the success of the pensionnat's fête day performance, M. Paul convinces Lucy to step in as a last-minute replacement. Here, as elsewhere, Lucy denies her own agency and interest. She states clearly her pleasure in remaining a spectator to these theatrical events, just as she remains an observer in day-to-day life (Brontë 143), shying away from any active undertaking that might make her appear a "public spectacle" (Parkin-Gounelas 105). To the reader, Lucy expresses her immovable disinclination: "A thousand objections rushed into my mind. The foreign language, the limited time, the public display … Inclination recoiled, Ability faltered, Self-respect (that 'vile quality') trembled" (148). To M. Paul, however, her "lips *dropped* the word 'oui'" (148; emphasis added), at once agreeing to participate and distancing herself from any suggestion of agency. Having undertaken the part and spent the day locked in the attic rehearsing "before the garret-vermin" (149), Lucy resigns herself to doing her "best" (152), with her usual self-deprecation and erasure of ambition. Even her characteristically reserved self-narration, however, cannot hide the success of her performance, especially after so short a rehearsal. Instead, Brontë implies that Lucy—however much she may attempt to deny or distance herself from the fact—has a natural talent for acting. Earlier, Lucy had commented that "nature had given [her] a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion" (88), a voice apparently intended by nature for the stage. This talent aligns perfectly with Lucy's preferred methods of self-making. In first undertaking the part, she characterizes

acting as an "imitat[ion]" (148). That is, she takes what another has done and creates herself (here, her stage role) in reflection of that example—just as she has been doing throughout her narrative.

Lucy's characterization of what makes good acting has, of course, a second, contradictory component. While she initially creates her stage character by mimicking M. Paul, she also complains that the role is "disagreeable […]. One could put into it neither heart nor soul" (148). This necessity of putting one's heart and soul into a performance positions the stage as Lucy's ideal self-making vehicle. Acting as someone else, she can build that character on her own feelings, desires, passions, and tastes, all while masking the fact that these *are* her own. Gillian Beer describes Lucy's stage experience as "the speculative donning of another self for whom she need not bear the consequences" (183). On stage, in a character not her own, Lucy can express those passions she has otherwise identified only in those she observes. Brontë's protagonist admits that her "fear" had to this point been of her self, of her "own voice" (154). This fear is forgotten as she enters fully into the character she plays: "I thought of nothing but the personage I represented" (154-155). Instead of distancing herself by shifting to third person, Lucy uses the "I" to describe the actions of the character on the stage as well. Her narration shifts subtly, as she describes her performance, from identifying the "I" with herself to identifying it with her character:

> I followed [Ginevra's] eye, her smile, her gesture […]. The spectacle seemed somehow suggestive. There was language in Dr. John's look, though I cannot tell what he said; it animated me: I drew out of it a history; I put my idea into the part I performed; I threw it into my wooing of Ginevra. In the 'Ours,' or sincere lover, I saw Dr. John. Did I pity

> him, as erst? No, I hardened my heart, rivalled and out-rivalled him. I knew myself a fop, but where *he* was outcast *I* could please. (155; original emphasis)

By the end of the narration of her performance, "I" and "the part I performed" have become one, subsumed into the same narrating "I". Lucy's recognition of herself within the character she plays allows her to *be* herself while playing a character on stage.

While the duality inherent to Brontë's heroine connects Lucy's act of self-making to Kemble's theory of dual consciousness, Lucy's narrative creation of identity links more readily to the theory posited by Stella Campbell that character is created through and in conjunction with the audience. During the fête performance, Lucy uses her audience to create her on-stage character. Seeing Ginevra's exchange of glances with Graham in the audience inspires her to change her characterization so as to essentially compete with him for Ginevra's affection (155). Beer notes that "of course the spectator is part of the performance," and suggests that "no-one saw this more vividly among the Victorians than Charlotte Brontë" (181). Brontë incorporates this relationship between performer and spectator into her novel primarily through Lucy's constant evasions and elisions. Early on, for instance, when Lucy first arrives in Boue-Marine, she expresses in a lengthy aside her incredulity at "the sagacity evinced by waiters and chambermaids in proportioning the accommodation to the guest. How could inn-servants and ship-stewardesses everywhere tell at a glance that I, for instance, was an individual of no social significance and little burdened by cash?" (65). Here, as throughout the novel, Brontë emphasizes the legibility of character through external appearance. But at this point, we have not yet been given a full description of Lucy's physical characteristics. As such, the reader, unlike the staff at the hotel, cannot judge Lucy's character in this way but must extrapolate from what she does allow us. Brontë leaves the reader to make her own assumptions, to draw her own

conclusions, and to carry on with the narrative, revising, if necessary, those conclusions as we go.

Lucy's character, then, is not formed by her narration alone, but by an ongoing collaboration between Lucy and the reader. "Unlike Jane [Eyre], who fears that others will misinterpret and thus misappropriate her into fictions of their own devising, Lucy relishes the variant readings that others derive from perusing the sphynxlike text she offers for their observation" (Bock 130). Like Campbell, Lucy's self-making is a collaborative effort between actor and audience member: in Lucy's case, both the audience of other characters within the novel, and the audience of readers. Brontë provides plenty of options from which the reader can draw in assisting Lucy's act of self-making:

> Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional, perhaps, too strict, limited, and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile, and audacious. (334)

In a novel so rooted in spectatorship and surveillance, it is fitting that Lucy builds her sense of self from the outside: both by revealing aspects of her self only through her descriptions of other characters, and by leaving space for the audience's interpretation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Self-Making in the Home Department: Performing Identity in *Dombey and Son*

Although the nineteenth century was an age steeped in the theatre and the Victorian novel particularly was saturated by theatricality, the vast majority of Victorian novels are not set amongst a theatre company and do not feature professional actors among their primary characters. In this chapter, I take Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848) as an example of this non-theatrical majority; the novel focuses just as meticulously on performance as any of the theatrical novels I have discussed above, while not explicitly incorporating the theatre. Dickens's theatrical references in *Dombey and Son* are two-fold: on the one hand, he writes of the kind of performed self necessary to succeed in the business world, and how destructive these acts can be when transferred to the domestic sphere. On the other hand, he critiques the way mid-nineteenth-century society trains women to behave. In discussing theatrical self-making in *Dombey and Son*, I focus on the latter of these two areas, addressing primarily the multi-layered characterization of Edith Dombey. Throughout the novel, the second wife of the titular businessman exercises the split levels of consciousness described by Fanny Kemble in order to mask her true feelings and, eventually, to escape from her marriage. Fluid identity and identity performance are both tropes that surface in countless Dickens novels, and here they meet.[1]

From its opening scene, *Dombey and Son* combines the worlds of business and domesticity.[2] Each world, in Dickens's novel, requires specific performances and those characters who fail to adhere to the guidelines of the sphere they are expected to inhabit fail in

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[1] We might think of Nancy's necessary dissembling for Bill and Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1837), Little Nell's uncanny identification with the waxwork figures in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), or Pip's journey of identity formation in *Great Expectations* (1861), which relies on various methods of constructing gentlemanliness. Perhaps the most ready example, however, is John Harmon / John Rokesmith / Julius Handford in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865).

[2] Dickens sets this parallel at work in the novel's original title page, which was headed by the novel's full title, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation*, above an illustration of a strikingly domestic scene.

one way or another. Little Paul, for instance, fails to live up to his father's business expectations, preferring the domestic world of his sister and nursemaid. Edith fails to properly embrace the expected role of domesticated female. Edith is exiled to the continent; Paul fades away into an early death. Chapter One opens with Paul Junior and Senior positioned in their respective public or business identities rather than their domestic or private ones. The birth of the younger Paul marks the arrival of a male to make use of the designation "and Son" in the name of the family business, rather than the arrival of an infant, with the domestic associations of such an event. The event, then, is less a birth than a hiring or recruitment: the younger Paul is "bred to 'be' the corporation of Dombey and Son" (Houston 93).

Throughout the novel, Dickens consistently shows Paul Dombey the elder as "at the Head of the Home-Department" (33), treating his domestic space as if it were a place of business. Dombey's business persona similarly suggests this conflation of public and private: his employees refer to him as "the House," the same name given to his company, linking man and business to the domestic sphere (200, 203, 333). While in actual practice home and work were often combined—especially by, for instance, women of the working class who took business into their homes to add to the family income—Dombey's particular model "masculinizes a decidedly feminine cultural space, and therefore loses moral authority" (Klimaszewski 140). Dickens narrates the hiring of the wet nurse Polly Toodles, for instance, in such a way as to emphasize Dombey's error of judgement in combining the domestic and economic spheres. In the nineteenth-century household, the wet nurse held an unenviably complex position, standing as she did at the brink of these two worlds. As a hired mother-figure, Polly serves as a character "with which to demonstrate the gravity of, and the extensive implications of, Mr. Dombey's errors in parental as well as commercial judgment" (Klimaszewski 140). In the novel, the

nursemaid "exposes the interdependence of domestic and imperial relationships" (Klimaszewski 139): on the one hand, Dombey fears the possible contamination a lower-class nurse's milk might bring to the security of his family business. On the other, Dombey expresses concern over the possibility that Paul's loyalties might be divided between the business and this extrafamilial interloper. He makes perfectly clear in his interview with Polly that her position in his household is one of object, there merely to serve a practical purpose: "It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you. […] When you go away from here, you will have concluded what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting" (28-29). Dombey hires Polly to perform a service; he does not expect, nor desire, Paul to find in her the emotional attachment of a mother figure.[3]

Dombey's ideological conflation of House and house extends to a similar fusion of his literal house with the business. In part, this association stems from the fact that Dombey inherits the house and its furnishings from his own father, along with the business—when he moved from "and Son" to "Dombey" (Dickens 35). This parallel becomes particularly obvious when Dombey's business fails: Dickens takes full advantage of the metaphorical association of bankruptcy with architectural ruins. After Dombey's firm falls, Dickens describes the dismantlement of the physical house, as auctioneers and brokers value, sell off, and cart away each piece of the furnishings: "The house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it" (899). Though he refers here specifically to the residential dwelling, Dickens makes an obvious analogy to the similarly ruined and emptied-out House of Dombey, from which all the previous employees have

[3] Polly, as a successful businesswoman herself, takes full advantage of Dombey's prejudices. Dombey, by insisting she go by a different name, seeks to mark her as his property, as a commodity under contract to his firm. Her insistence that this name change be "considered in the wages" (28) marks in turn her recognition of her body as a commodity—and, more positively, her full control over charging for its use. This association of the female body with the business commodity is of course problematic, but, as I discuss below with Edith and Alice, it is an association Dickens troubles throughout the novel.

vanished, as the rats do here, to be "superseded" by "the strange faces of accountants and others" (878).

After the simultaneous failure of the business and of Dombey's second marriage, the two Houses—represented by business and businessman—become essentially interchangeable in their ruin. For the first time, Dickens personifies the business, rather than the reverse, as Mr. Perch spreads the story of the bankruptcy "in a low voice, as if the corpse of the deceased House were lying unburied in the next room" (878). Dickens takes this association further in the scene of Alice Marwood's death. The narrator comments solemnly: "Nothing lay there, any longer, but the ruin of the mortal house on which the rain had beaten, and the black hair that had fluttered in the wintery wind" (892). This deliberate parallel of House (Dombey and Son) and house as body (Alice) reverses the conflation of Dombey's body and the House of his business, as Dickens shows explicitly what happens when one commercializes the body. The female body, which properly belongs to the private, domestic sphere, is "ruin[ed]" by its forced entry into the masculine sphere of business. Finally, the narrator bleakly states that the ruined Dombey "was fallen, never to be raised up any more. For the night of his worldly ruin there was no to-morrow's sun; for the stain of his domestic shame there was no purification" (904). In his economic failure, Dombey becomes associated not only with the fallen (as in bankrupt) House, but also, through the "stain of his domestic shame," with Alice the fallen woman. Dombey is doubly fallen, as House and as house; publicly and privately; commercially and morally.

A substantial part of Dombey's conflation of domestic and economic spheres rests on his particular brand of self-help. As Andrew Sanders distinguishes in his introduction to the novel, Dombey does not fit the criteria for the economic self-made man, "but he *is* a self-fashioned one," a man, that is, who has created his sense of self around a particular "nineteenth-century

business ethic" (xix; original emphasis). While Dickens does not explicitly attribute a self-help mentality directly to Dombey—he inherits his business, wealth, and position rather than working his way up to them—such a mentality nevertheless permeates the text as one of the criteria that makes a proper Dombey. The Dombey way of life centres on effort, on self-help in the sense of helping oneself first in all circumstances and at the expense of anything else—emotion, bodily necessity, and common sense all included.

Dombey's sister, Mrs. Chick, is the primary mouthpiece of this Dombey version of self-help, a significant choice in a text that, as Dickens repeatedly suggests, could perhaps have been titled "Dombey and Daughter" (58, 253). Mrs. Chick epitomizes the Dombey mindset in all but name, and never ceases to remind others—the reader and her unfortunate husband included—that she was once a perfect Dombey in name as well. In her speech to her sister-in-law, the first Mrs. Dombey, she reminds the dying woman of the behaviour expected of a Dombey: "I shall have to be quite cross with you, if you don't rouse yourself. It's necessary for you to make an effort, and perhaps a very great and painful effort which you are not disposed to make; but this is a world of effort you know, Fanny" (20-21). Mrs. Chick imparts the same advice to Polly Toodles, suggesting that the unhappiness of parting indefinitely from her children can be gotten over by "mak[ing] an effort" (31). Though not herself a Dombey, Polly is responsible for the future of the family, and so must be instructed in the Dombey character. Even the death of young Paul, the sole source of the family's continuity, can be overcome with effort. Mrs. Chick reassures Florence: "Your papa's a Dombey, child, if ever there was one […]. He'll make an effort. There's no fear of him" (273). Mrs. Chick even applies this Dombey version of self-help to Mr. Dombey's inability to interact with his daughter Florence. "If she's a strange girl, […] and if my brother Paul cannot feel perfectly comfortable in her society, after all the sad things that

have happened, and all the terrible disappointments that have been undergone, then, what is the reply? That he must make an effort. That he is bound to make an effort" (450). Mrs. Chick's advice in the situation does not involve fitting Florence into the business of the House; she merely insists that her brother must make the effort to overcome his antipathy for her, however much doing so may go against his feeling and inclination.

Walter Gay, though he spends very little time actually present in the narrative, embodies the more traditional self-help hero. Dickens describes the character as an orphan, pure of heart, always more concerned with others, and temperate, and he eventually works his way up in the world. John Peck points out that, while Walter goes to sea not as a sailor but as a clerk, "he seems to have all of a sailor's good qualities […] which by this time, with the country taking its lead from an image of the British naval officer, are thoroughly established as the national character virtues" (73). Dickens's introduction of Walter and his uncle Sol emphasizes Walter's distinct *lack* of inheritance, situating him as a contrast to the Dombeys. Walter's position at the novel's opening necessitates the kind of self-effacing advancement associated with the self-help narrative to shape the character into a hero worthy of the angelic Florence Dombey. As Walter's uncle fantasizes about the possibilities of economic and social advancement open to Walter through his position in Dombey's firm, Walter responds with the modest "I'll do everything I can, Uncle, to deserve your affection" (53). He works to secure his uncle's peace of mind and economic security, rather than his own: a very different kind of self-help to that practiced by Mr. Dombey and Mrs. Chick. Equally significant, though, is that most of his self-help narrative occurs outside the events recorded in the novel (when the uninformed reader assumes him to have been lost at sea). "The reader is thus spared the spectacle of Walter ascending the ladder"

(Daly 139), and can imagine his final situation as a natural one, rather than the result of hard work and potentially questionable business activities.

In our first introduction to Edith, Dickens draws on the language of Dombey's self-help to make clear that she and Dombey cannot possibly be compatible. She is described as "walking by the side of the chair, and carrying her gossamer parasol with a proud and weary air, as if so great an *effort* must be soon abandoned and the parasol dropped" (316; emphasis added). The description emphasizes Edith's body language as she walks beside her mother's chair, an attitude expressive of her utter inability to exert any effort at all, even to hold up the lightest of parasols. Appearances, as Dickens repeatedly notes, can be particularly deceiving. Edith's expertly crafted and intensely controlled performances emphasize that, "unlike the former Mrs. Dombey, Edith [… is] obviously capable of 'making an effort'" (Dabney 55).

Dickens parallels this effort—the self-help of the male economic world—with the form of self-making encouraged for women through the mid-nineteenth-century marriage market. Contrary to Mrs. Chick's statements advocating "effort," the route to self-help for the mid-nineteenth-century female, as discussed above, lay primarily through marriage. Dickens bookends Edith's half of the novel with two overt instances of the training young girls receive in this matrimonial form of self-making.[4] At Edith's marriage, Dickens describes almost as if in passing "the twenty families of little women who are on the steps, […] every one of whom remembers the fashion and colour of her every article of dress from that moment, and reproduces it on her doll, who is for ever being married" (485). Each of these unidentified and undifferentiated young girls, the narrator notes, has an "instinctive interest in nuptials, [that] dates from their cradles" (478). Society drills this focus into the heads of these girls, training

[4] The novel divides nearly between Edith and Paul Jr.: the first half ends with the younger Paul Dombey's death and Edith's first appearance.

them from childhood—even from infancy—to dream of weddings. The commentary underlying this remark comes from the juxtaposition of Edith, her mother, and Mr. Dombey—all of whom, as we have seen, enter into this marriage for mercenary rather than romantic reasons—with these unindividuated girls. The dream of self-making through marriage promises these girls that they will achieve an identity, a sense of self, by making a good marriage. On the surface, Edith here stands as a perfect example of this kind of successful female self-making. In the scenes leading up to the wedding, however, Dickens shows Edith's dissatisfaction with her situation, suggesting that the beliefs into which these young girls are being trained are not, after all, as fulfilling as society wishes them to appear.

Dickens returns to the implications of the social training imparted to young girls at the end of the novel, when Captain Cuttle gets caught up in Mrs. MacStinger's surprising marriage to Bunsby. The narrator comments at some length on the terror of this ceremony for Cuttle, which lies primarily in "the deadly interest exhibited therein by Juliana MacStinger; and the fatal concentration of her faculties, with which that promising child, already the image of her parent, observed the whole proceedings" (925). Juliana, like the anonymous young girls at Edith's wedding, recognizes marriage as her future, the means by which she can achieve selfhood. All of these girls have been trained "not simply to accept marriage" but to "look forward to a life of renunciation of self, of not only living with, but living for, living by, living through others for the rest of their lives" (Zangen 62). Marriage, for these well-trained girls, is the ultimate act of self-making; Dickens's implied commentary, however, insists that it is also the ultimate act of self-renunciation.

Dickens's narrator emphasizes that, at her mother's wedding, Juliana MacStinger is "already the image of her parent" (925). This deliberate creation of a daughter in her mother's

image echoes Dombey's dream of creating Paul in his image, as he had been created in the image of his own father. Zangen notes that the idea of passing women's business from mother to daughter as economic business passed from father to son was well-established in the mid-nineteenth century (66). Dickens, however, describes this inheritance—in both its masculine business and feminine domestic forms—as a negative phenomenon. Alice Marwood, who stands with Edith as a conspicuous argument against such training, comes close to excusing as inevitable her mother's grooming of her into prostitution: "Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us" (532). As Alice notes here, the endless cycle of intergenerational training allows for no deviation, no individualization, and no reformation of the skills passed down. As Dickens notes in describing in the masculine version of such training, however, the best laid of such plans rarely work in the way one has anticipated. Dombey's son dies before he can grow into an appropriate junior partner; Edith leaves her husband rather than lose herself fully in him, as her mother had done, and as Edith is expected to do.

Both Edith and Alice recognize their respective subject positions as direct results of their mothers' training. Edith's suspicion of this intergenerational system leads her not only to reject this training for herself, but also to go to great lengths to ensure that her step-daughter Florence avoids these elements of a typical female education. Before her wedding to Dombey, Edith instructs Florence to return immediately home rather than accept any invitation: "'I shall be easier at heart if you will come home here. No matter who invites you to stay elsewhere. Come home here. It is better to be alone than – what I would say is,' she added, checking herself, 'that I know well you are best at home, dear Florence'" (462). Edith alludes here, of course, to the danger of her own mother's company—even speaking her name, it seems, might have consequences. Edith attributes Florence's purity and goodness to the fact of having grown up

without a mother, having gone through childhood without being forcibly indoctrinated into the ideologies of proper feminine behaviour. Edith explicitly sees this training—and, by association, those who spread such ideas—as a corrupting influence; she will exert all of her own considerable will to keep Florence from being "tampered with and tainted by the lessons" her own mother has imparted to her (474).

Dickens does include one redeeming mother in his text, prior to the pure and untouchable Florence of the sentimental ending. Polly Toodle stands as the diametric opposite of Dombey's business-minded sense of domestic duty and efficiency. She also opposes the other mothers in the novel who propagate marriage as the female version of self-help. Each time Polly appears in the novel, her focus centres on the happiness of the children around her: her own children, the younger Paul Dombey, Florence, even after she has grown up, and finally Mr. Dombey, descended into the second childhood of senility. The Toodles children, who belong to the multitude of Dickensian minor characters, remain nameless, apart from Rob; Dickens nevertheless imparts the sense that these anonymous "apple-faced" (24) children each have a better and more individualized sense of self than, for instance, the briefly-named MacStinger children, or the caricatured collection of boys at Dr. Blimber's academy.

The other primary mother-figures in the novel, Mrs. Skewton and Mrs. Brown, echo Dombey's conflation of domestic and economic spheres through their mercenary exploitation of their respective daughters. This mercenary attitude towards marriage in particular, and towards life in general, permeates the novel. Miss Tox, for instance, initially sees her imagined marriage into the Dombey family as a business merger with the House, a view Dickens describes as "that lady's faltering investment in the Dombey Firm" (106). In fact, one of the greatest signs of Miss Tox's essential goodness, however ridiculous she may be as a character, comes in the shift in the

narrator's description of her relationship to Dombey: after Florence and Walter return, "Miss Tox is not unfrequently of the family party, and is quite devoted to it, and a great favourite. Her admiration of her once stately patron is, and has been ever since the morning of her shock in Princess' Place, platonic, but not weakened in the least" (943). Her devotion now is to Mr. Dombey himself, and to his family, rather than to the House of Dombey and Son.

Part of Dickens's critique of the melding of business and domesticity lies precisely in this mercantilization of marriage—exemplified in the conventional reference to the marriage *market*—and especially the existence of this market as the main arena of women's intergenerational training. Dickens focuses most directly on the predominance of this mercenary mentality in the pairings of Edith and Alice and of their respective mothers. Through these two pairings, Dickens makes explicit his comparison of society marriage with prostitution. In case any reader was in danger of missing this point, Dickens has the two pairs meet as if in a mirror: Edith sees "two other figures, which, in the distance, were so like an exaggerated imitation of their own, that Edith stopped" (623). This scene holds no particular importance to the novel's plot; instead, Dickens uses the explicit mirroring of the two pairs to reinforce his social commentary and to expand the parallel characterization of the paired women. The two mothers are "creatures of pure surface who recognize no other value than that of money—of that which can be bought with money and that which can be sold for money, including most infamously their daughters' external beauty" (Klaver 91). In this central scene of meeting, Mrs. Skewton's only thought is to give this impoverished mirror image of herself money. Mrs. Brown's only thought is to extort more based on their similarity: "Sixpence more, my Lady, as a good mother yourself" (624). Meanwhile, Edith and Alice immediately recognize their own similarity as commodities in a marketplace: "'What is it that you have to sell?' said Edith. 'Only this,'

returned the woman [Alice], holding out her wares, without looking at them. 'I sold myself long ago'" (624). Once the pair separates, Alice's "muttered" parting words, though ostensibly directed at Edith, place herself and Edith as part of a collective: "You're a handsome woman, […] but good looks won't save us. And you're a proud woman; but pride won't save us. We had need to know each other when we meet again!" (626). Despite their vastly different social standings, Dickens shows the two women to be essentially interchangeable, part of a larger group of women bought, sold, and traded as commodities and property. The scene is focalized first through Edith, then through Alice, reminding the reader that Dickens's sympathies lie—and he expects his readers' to lie—with the exploited daughters.

On Alice's deathbed, Mrs. Brown voices the similarity of her own actions to those of Mrs. Skewton, asking why only she should be punished by her daughter's death: "What have *I* done, I, what have *I* done worse than her, that only my gal is to lie there fading!" (891; original emphasis). Their actions towards their daughters are the same; the only differences lie in the status and legitimacy of each character. Dickens obliquely answers Mrs. Brown's question in Edith's final scene, when she reappears to tell her story to Florence. Edith begs her stepdaughter to imagine she has died: "When you leave me in this dark room, think that you have left me in the grave. Remember only that I was once, and that I loved you!" (940). Edith desires Florence's memory of her to be that of one who has suffered the punishment required for resisting the system, the punishment Alice has suffered, too. The doubled characters work primarily to emphasize Dickens's parallel between high-society mercenary marriage and prostitution.[5] In Dickens's original plan for the novel, the parallel would have been even more explicit: "Dickens

[5] Many critics have commented on Dickens's obvious parallel here. See for instance Dabney, Morgentaler, Nord, and Welsh. John Gordon makes a comprehensive analysis of the symbolic clues to this link dropped by Dickens throughout the novel.

intended Edith to become Carker's mistress and to die" (Dabney 56). Dickens originally wrote Edith as a fallen woman: she did become Carker's mistress, not merely running away by means of him, but with him. She did fall, instead of merely playing the fallen woman, and she did, necessarily, die. Because she instead performs her fallenness without actually committing adultery, and thus is allowed to survive, Dickens replaces what would have been her conventional scene of death-bed repentance with a split scene. On the one hand, he writes Alice's actual death, complete with her final repentance and her mother's incomprehension; on the other, he writes Edith's scene of reconciliation with Florence.

Edith's acted fallenness places her at the centre of *Dombey and Son* as a theatrical novel.[6] For a text without any explicit mention of the theatre, *Dombey and Son* goes to great lengths to chart the characterization techniques participated in by its characters. In fact, performance forms the basis of much of the novel, and provides a key to the society Dickens depicts. In describing the business world, Dickens delineates the acts necessary to survival through Dombey's associates. Carker emphasizes the necessity of such performance after Dombey's riding accident, as he accuses the other workers of faking their attachment to Dombey for their own advancement, of "all making the same show, all canting the same story, all whining the same professions, all harbouring the same transparent secret" (697). Carker sees in the other workers the same pretense of loyalty and the same hidden hatred of the head of the House as that which he uses to his own advantage. Even Mr. Perch, the seemingly trustworthy messenger, appears in a false character after Dombey's bankruptcy, using his master's fall to his own ends. "Then, in short, would Mr. Perch, a victim to his position, tell all manner of lies; affecting himself to tears

[6] Many critics similarly read Edith as a theatrical character. See for example Amanda Anderson, for whom Edith's performances are intrinsic to her categorization as a fallen woman. Kelly Hager reads Edith as a dramatic rather than a theatrical character, using language reminiscent of Deirdre David's characterization of Fanny Kemble's split influences. Deborah Vlock situates Edith at the centre of what she considers a melodramatically Manichean novel.

by those that were of a moving nature, and really believing that the inventions of yesterday, had, on repetition, a sort of truth about them to-day" (878). He deliberately makes up stories about the fall of the House, exhibiting his own supposed victimhood and sorrow and receiving in exchange drinks from his listening audience.

Mrs. Skewton, Mrs. Brown, Major Bagstock, and even the comparatively minor Cousin Feenix survive the domestic world through similar performances. Needing a town establishment for Edith's wedding to Dombey, for instance, Mrs. Skewton does not merely hire a house in London and staff to run it. Instead, "it being necessary for the credit of the family to make a handsome appearance at such a time, Mrs. Skewton […] clapped into this house a silver-headed butler (who was charged extra on that account, as having the appearance of an ancient family retainer)" (463). The simulated gentility works so well that even the hired butler "begins to think he *is* an old retainer of the family" (490; original emphasis)—begins, that is, to believe in the truth of the role he is paid to enact. On the same occasion, Cousin Feenix, like Mrs. Skewton, appears as a version of himself from "forty years ago" (479), hiding the signs of his age behind a costumed and painted exterior. The narrator emphasizes, as he has already done at some length with Mrs. Skewton, that the performed exterior and the actual person are in fact quite separate individuals: "Cousin Feenix, getting up at half-past seven o'clock or so, is quite another thing from Cousin Feenix got up" (479). The selves these characters present to society result from an eerie combination of daily preparation and nostalgia. In a society which values youth and beauty as signs of marketability, Cousin Feenix and Mrs. Skewton go to great lengths to project the appearance of recapturing their respective pasts.

Dickens draws his reader's attention to the dangerous uses to which this kind of societal performance can be put by writing Carker, the novel's villain, as a consummate actor. Dickens

emphasizes Carker's continual performance—and its social necessity—in one of the character's earliest appearances, referring to him as Dombey's "(of course unconscious) clerk" (196). Carker remains "of course" unaware of the external show he puts on for Mr. Dombey; he consciously appears to be unconscious of his presented character. That Dickens inserts this qualifier parenthetically suggests that it need hardly be mentioned at all, as such performance is, "of course," the norm. Because Carker intends to use this external presentation to rise within the ranks of Dombey and Son and to work his way into the Head's confidence, he creates himself in the image of Mr. Dombey: "The stiffness and nicety of Mr. Carker's dress, and a certain arrogance of manner, either natural to him, or imitated from a pattern not far off, gave great additional effect to his humility" (196). The performance succeeds so completely that Dickens notes his narrator's own inability to discern which elements of Carker's projected character are "real": his respect for Dombey at the expense of all else is described as "a dangerous quality, if real; and a not less dangerous one, if feigned" (196). As we learn at the novel's climax, Carker aims specifically to draw Dombey into his own power, and then to raise himself over his employer. Dickens thus explicitly links performance and self-help—albeit a villainous, underhanded sort of self-help.

In yet another of Dickens's obvious parallels designed to drive the social commentary of his novel home to any reader who may somehow have missed it, Carker shares with Edith both this aptitude for flawless performance and this use of performance for the purposes of self-help. Both drop their respective characterizations only for the reader (and, for very different purposes, Florence Dombey). The reader, in both cases, loses her alignment with the intended audience of the performance and instead is aligned with the performing character. With Edith, this alignment creates a sympathy which her pretense of haughtiness might otherwise deny; in Carker's case,

the readers' access to his motivations enhances the character's innate villainy. In addition, both Carker and Edith often express themselves by way of gestures and facial expressions rather than speech. Carker uses this technique to menace and coerce without committing himself verbally. Meeting Florence, he strengthens his power over her by hinting at Walter's death: "Florence, meeting [Carker's] eyes, *saw, rather than heard* him say, 'There is no news of the ship!'" She is left "confused, frightened, shrinking from him, and not even sure that he had said those words, for *he seemed to have shown them to her in some extraordinary manner through his smile,* instead of uttering them" (386; emphasis added). Carker's menace lies in his attitude and expression, rather than in his words. In conversation with his brother, too, Carker studiously avoids making any kind of committal statement, answering each point of his brother's speech with an "incline" of his head, "as who should say, in answer to some careless small-talk, 'Dear me! Is that the case?'" or a "show" of teeth, "seem[ing] to say, 'Remarkable indeed! You quite surprise me!'" (331). His actions and expressions leave his actual response open to interpretation; while the reader is granted one such interpretation by the narrator, each audience member within the world of the novel might read Carker's actions differently.

Similarly, Dickens describes Edith, in one of her earliest appearances, as "express[ing] in all her elegant form, from head to foot, the same supreme disregard of everything and everybody" (321). While Carker's mannerisms and facial expressions reveal the menace underlying his apparent affability, Edith's body language expresses her profound disdain for society, even as she acts apparently in accordance with its dictates. Her body, like Carker's, speaks more clearly than any of her words: in one such instance, "she merely glanced at [Dombey] again, and again averted her eyes; but she might have spoken for an hour, and

expressed less" (612). Similarly, when she finally leaves Dombey after he denies her initial request that he "let [her] go" (712), the scene proceeds wordlessly.

> She lifted her hand to the tiara of bright jewels radiant on her head, and, plucking it off with a force that dragged and strained her rich black hair with heedless cruelty, and brought it tumbling wildly on her shoulders, cast the gems upon the ground. From each arm, she unclasped a diamond bracelet, flung it down, and trod upon the glittering heap. Without a word, without a shadow on the fire of her bright eye, without abatement of her awful smile, she looked on Mr. Dombey to the last, in moving to the door; and left him. (715)

Dickens uses these symbolic actions—tearing off the jewelry Dombey has given her—to express more about Edith's situation than he could with propriety have otherwise written. Edith is insensible to the pain her pursuit of freedom may cause her: the "heedless cruelty" that brings her hair "tumbling wildly on her shoulders" anticipates the inevitable pain of rejection she will experience as a woman whom society considers fallen. Dickens's language, and the gestures it describes, is necessarily hyperbolic, intended to convey the weightiness of the symbolic message. Sally Ledger stresses that "always in Dickens, melodramatic affect is combined with social or political critique" (4); here, Dickens describes Edith, who stands at the centre of the novel's commentary on the state of the mid-nineteenth-century marriage market, using silent but exaggerated gestures reminiscent of the melodramatic stage.

Like Fanny Kemble, Edith realizes the effectiveness of separating those characters she adopts from her self, as well as the protection such a separation provides to that idea of self. While Edith's performances do have an effect on her—evident particularly in her increased volatility, especially when confronted by Carker—she remains throughout the novel in full

control of each of these characters. The one role she refuses to undertake, however, is that of Mrs. Dombey, the commodified wife Dombey considers so necessary to his business persona. Because Edith proves herself adept in her appearance as an accomplished and biddable lady in Leamington, Dombey assumes that his new purchase will continue to act as he desires. Instead, "the novel indicates that [Edith] sees her husband's drive to possess her as a form of abuse" (Surridge 64). Edith has performed not because this role is what society expects but because she resents having been made to perform at all and hopes to gain more independence through remarriage. She accuses her mother of having "shown and offered and examined and paraded" her "for ten shameful years" (432); to avoid more "parad[ing]" she marries Dombey, who instead only wants to extend the pretense. Once married, "Edith has determined that the only way she can maintain her self-respect is to refuse the role of subservient wife or grateful servant" (Hager 102). In refusing to undertake the role expected of her, however, Edith resigns herself to constantly presenting the kind of haughtiness and unapproachability that will keep Dombey from gaining emotional control over her. Throughout the novel, then—both before and after her marriage—Dickens represents the character's speech, gestures, and expressions as at odds with her true emotions, desires, and thoughts, as she creates a protective character to shield her private self.

Because Dickens grants the reader the ability to see the self through Edith's performances—to see the actor through the character—we are also able to read how these characterizations conflict with her own emotions, the reactions she carefully hides:

> What a stab to her proud heart, to sit there, face to face with [Carker], and have him tendering her false oath at the alter again and again for her acceptance, and pressing it upon her, like the dregs of a sickening cup she could not own her loathing of, or turn

> away from! How shame, remorse, and passion raged within her, when, upright and majestic in her beauty before him, she knew that in her spirit she was down at his feet! (571)

Dickens makes clear Edith's awareness of the false position she holds towards her husband. Her split consciousness—of her own feelings as separate from her apparent position—here makes the necessity of performance more painful, especially when Carker plays deliberately and villainously on this separation of appearance and reality. He takes full advantage of having caught a glimpse of what he considers Edith's true nature, the "passion and struggle" concealed beneath the "scornful air of weariness and lassitude" when she assumes herself to be alone at Leamington (417). Throughout their acquaintance, he reads her underlying "shame, remorse, and passion" and constantly reminds her of them, using this knowledge in his attempt to control her.

At its most extreme, Edith's "air of opposition to herself" (326) takes the form of a separation even of her performing body from her sense of self. These moments of conscious disembodiment appear in "gestures of self-mutilation that spurn the signs of her position" (Waters 50-51). Edith's defiance of bodily pain as she tears off the jewels that mark her as Dombey's possession is one such instance. Earlier, however, she expresses a similar disgust at her own body as evidence of Carker's power over her. When Carker kisses her hand, taking his leave after bringing home the injured Dombey,

> Edith did not withdraw the hand, nor did she strike his fair face with it, despite the flush upon her cheek, the bright light in her eyes, and the dilation of her whole form. But when she was alone in her own room, she struck it on the marble chimney-shelf, so that, at one blow, it was bruised, and bled; and held it from her, near the shining fire, as if she could have thrust it in and burned it. (654-655)

Rodney Stenning Edgecombe reads this moment as Edith attempting "to cauterize the pollution of Mr. Carker's intimacy" (184). Edith's actions, however, also carry a more personalized meaning. She distinguishes her hand as symbolic of that necessary performance which allows Carker to believe in his power over her. She strikes and wishes to destroy not a part of her own body, but rather the disembodied representation of her external characterization.

Dickens draws the reader's attention to this split in Edith's character through his narrator's descriptions. He describes the character, even in her earliest appearances, as "wholly self-possessed," but notes too that she acts "with that remarkable air of opposition to herself already noticed as belonging to her beauty" (326). This association of Edith's overt performance with her beautiful exterior suggests that the act is designed to attract, and so sets off and enhances her natural beauty. Edith, like the narrator, constantly draws attention to this opposition in her own character, expressing scorn not only of the world around her but also of her own actions—scorn which lessens as her shame grows. She criticizes her mother for continuing to perform in private: "'It is surely not worth while, Mama,' said Edith, looking round, 'to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other'" (408). She has seen the authentic self underlying her mother's exterior, and so can no longer be taken in. Edith's scorn of her mother's actions is particularly expressive because that scorn so obviously "light[s] on herself" as well as on her mother (408). This self-awareness makes Edith's performances more painful to her; she is well aware of the falseness of her presented character, and is both scornful of and ashamed by the necessity of sustaining it.

Edith's recognition and manipulation of these layered selves allows her to mislead both Dombey and Carker. Dombey, whose sense of self and interpretation of those around him is limited to the surface, can only see Edith's external presentation. It is this character he

unwittingly claims as his possession, and he appeals to this layer in his attempt to control his second wife. Carker, conversely, easily recognizes Edith's haughtiness as fabricated and can read her underlying shame. He sees the struggle underlying Edith's performances, and, unlike Dombey, attempts to control her through his knowledge of her artificiality rather than through the performed layers themselves. What he cannot see, however, is her innate strength, the self underneath even her shame at the necessity of performance. Edith has all along merely wanted to be free from "parading" for the benefit and amusement of others, recalling Fanny Kemble's aversion to the public spectacle of the stage. This instance of misperception on Carker's part allows Edith to continue hiding her true feelings from him, and so finally to trick him into helping her to freedom.

When they first find themselves alone in France, Carker scolds Edith for what he sees as her continued performance, in language reminiscent of Edith's own scolding of her mother: "Tush, we are alone, and out of everybody's sight and hearing. Do you think to frighten me with these tricks of virtue?" (820). In his view, she continues to present virtue and respectability for the eyes of society; he cannot comprehend her innate virtue, nor that the continued existence of this virtue is the product of a rigid separation of her true self from the selves she has enacted. The strength of Edith's performing self has allowed that private idea of self not only to survive but to maintain its existence separate from the characters she plays. In France, she uses this strength finally to out-manoeuvre Carker, and win her freedom: "If she would have faltered once, for only one half moment, he would have pinioned her; but she was as firm as rock, and her searching eyes never left him. […] He could not look at her, and not be afraid of her. He saw a strength within her that was resistless" (826).

This strength extends to the nature of Edith's final performance. Rather than suffer the ignominy of appearing as Dombey's dutiful wife, she chooses to appear to society as a fallen woman: "I have thrown my fame and good name to the winds! I have resolved to bear the shame that will attach to me – resolved to know that it attaches falsely – that you know it too – and that he does not, never can, and never shall" (826). She has staged her escape so as to leave no doubt in any mind but her own and Carker's that the two have eloped: "For this, I am here alone with you at the dead of night. For this, I have met you here, in a false name, as your wife. For this, I have been seen here by those men, and left here" (826). In ensuring that Carker is the only other individual to know what the world says of her to be false, she escapes his control as she escapes that of her husband. He cannot contradict the world's assessment of her without diminishing his own standing. In the exposure of this final façade—that of fallen woman eloping with Carker—Dickens finally reveals Edith's true self, the actor that has existed beneath her layered characters. Edith's adoption of various characters throughout the novel, then, allow this true self to emerge unscathed, and to escape the kind of society where such performances are necessary.

CHAPTER SIX

"I have been proved not to be myself": Dual Consciousness and Failed Performance in *Armadale*

Like *Dombey and Son*, Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866) intersects the world of male inheritance and the social expectation of men in positions of influence with the off-stage performances adopted by mid-nineteenth-century English women. The novel's extensive prologue works to cement the importance to the story that follows of heredity—of name, of property, of wealth, of character, of morality—and the associated "struggle against heredity" (Kent 64). The plot is conventionally described as too convoluted to summarize, but essentially the narrative turns upon the financial necessity of Allan Wrentmore taking a surname (Armadale) for the purposes of inheritance, and the troubles that occur in the next generation when both his son (alias Ozias Midwinter) and the son of his financial rival inherit the name of Allan Armadale. This financial situation underlies many of the novel's seemingly unrelated events, including the arrival, mid-way through the text, of a femme fatale figure set on a mercenary marriage: Lydia Gwilt. Many of Collins's novels address the interchangeability of identity, but *Armadale* situates this interchangeability within the body of a single woman.[1] Through Lydia—who, like Edith Dombey, anticipates Fanny Kemble in narrating the split between her characters and her self—Collins addresses the kinds of performances adopted by women in mid-nineteenth-century English society.

Lydia Gwilt differs from Edith Dombey in many ways; the primary difference for my analysis comes with the relative failure of Lydia's characterizations. Unlike Edith, Lydia returns

[1] *The Woman in White* (1860), with its substitution of one woman's body for another, is the best-known example. Collins similarly uses the exchange of female bodies as a plot device in *The Dead Secret* (1857) and *The New Magdalen* (1873) but, like *The Woman in White*, these novels substitute one woman for another, rather than performing the substitution of identities within a single character.

to the conventions of the fallen woman narrative into which she is most easily read—repenting and committing suicide to save the man she loves, and whom she has accidentally poisoned—because she fails to control her performances. By not taking account of and allowing for her own emotional development, she loses the dual consciousness necessary to present a successful characterization. This ending does not, however, merely represent Collins's need to wrap his story up succinctly within the space allowed by serial publication. He writes in the appended note that he had "sketched" out the ending well in advance (*Armadale* 817), and, as Sue Lonoff points out, "any reader used to the system of justice that prevails in Victorian fiction can predict her downfall by the middle of the novel" (120). This predictable ending, however, does not make Lydia any less noteworthy as a character—a fascination from which even the author is not exempt. Collins famously wrote to his mother, after writing the end of *Armadale*, that "Miss Gwilt's death quite upset me" (22 April 1866; Baker, *Letters* 2.32-33). Collins's reaction perhaps relates to the use he makes of Lydia as "an accomplice" (Wynne 154), almost as a co-author. A sizeable portion of the novel is narrated not by Collins's third person omniscient narrator, but by way of Lydia's diary and her letters to her mentor and accomplice, Mother Oldershaw. Unlike much of Collins's fiction, which yields many similar examples of characters telling their own stories within a narrative, neither the letters nor the diary are "framed for the reader by the commentary of the omniscient narrator" (Wynne 159). This technique gives the reader unfiltered access to Lydia's own thoughts, granting insight into her creation of the roles she plays.

As in *Dombey and Son*, *Armadale*'s inheritance plot contains an implicit self-help narrative—though, again like *Dombey*, one that does not follow the expected conventions of Smiles's text. Here, Collins stresses the importance of a name—rather than individual character—to one's rise in the world through his focus on the main inheritance plot of the

prologue and through the complex transfer, doubling, and denial of the Armadale name throughout the novel. As we have seen with, for instance, Mrs. Chick in *Dombey*, in *Armadale* the female characters are just as implicated in the narrative of self-help as the men: the importance of being Mrs. Armadale parallels the importance of being Allan Armadale. The female side of the parallel again raises the question of bettering one's position in the world through names: changing the name through marriage rather than by the process of legal inheritance. Mother Oldershaw makes this connection explicit in her first letter to Lydia, in which we first see the two women plotting: "What a chance for you, after all the miseries and the dangers you have gone through, to be mistress of Thorpe-Ambrose, if he lives; to have an income for life, if he dies! Hook him, my poor dear; hook him at any sacrifice" (191). Marriage, in Mother Oldershaw's view, guarantees not only position but also financial control over one's future—both advantages constantly denied to Lydia and which she can achieve, the two women think, only through marriage.

The parallel of male economic and female marital self-help surfaces again immediately following this letter, when Mother Oldershaw shares her plan to ensure Lydia's application is the one accepted for the position of Miss Milroy's governess. "Thanks to my inquiries on the spot, I know Major Milroy to be a poor man; and we will fix the salary you ask at a figure that is sure to tempt him" (200). Here, Collins recalls the story Ozias Midwinter tells the Reverend Brock of his own early life, much of which explicitly follows the conventional progress of the self-help narrative. Having run away from his abusive stepfather, Midwinter joins a strolling tumbler and learns, like Lydia, how to act to stay alive. He eventually takes a job with a miserly bookseller, working his way rapidly up the shop's hierarchy "by the purely commercial process of underselling all [the] competition" (113). Midwinter deliberately underbids for this job both to

secure a roof over his head, and in order to improve himself through easy access to books. Lydia's underbidding for the position of governess similarly ensures her success. Following the conventions of self-help, the two characters both see these intermediary jobs as respective means to the end of raising themselves in the world, rather than as positions for wages.

While Midwinter's past merely provides the basis for his social advancement, Collins's treatment of Lydia fits into his larger consideration of the methods of acting into which women in society are trained from a young age by their mothers (or, in Lydia's case, mother-figures), thus presenting a female inheritance story to balance the novel's focus on male heredity. Miss Milroy typifies this feminine story as she develops into an exemplar of the conventionalities into which women are trained. Lydia's training, though of a very different nature to Miss Milroy's domestic education, similarly instructs her in the business of being a financially-savvy woman as she makes her way upwards through mid-nineteenth-century society.[2] As a young girl working as a model for the Oldershaws she learned to emphasize her beauty; while in service with Miss Blanchard she learned to forge handwriting; and she was trained to cheat, again using her beauty for financial gain, while working as companion to a Russian Baroness. Throughout her life, Lydia has been trained to sell: "Miss Gwilt's story begins […] in the market-place" (*Armadale* 632), and as an adult she "market[s] herself, as once she marketed elixirs and potions as a child. At every critical moment, she is on display" (Maynard 76). The difference between Lydia and women like Miss Milroy is that the latter has been trained only to display herself for the legitimate marriage market; Lydia, as an orphan with no identifiable place in society, must be willing to trade on any market available.

[2] As discussed above, in relation to *Dombey and Son*, the majority of nineteenth-century women are primary trained with a view to marriage. Sarah Bernhardt recalls being told as a young girl, "tu es idiote avec ton sentiment romanesque. Le mariage est une affaire, et il faut le regarder comme une affaire" (95). In *Armadale,* Mother Oldershaw repeatedly stresses this connection between business and marriage.

Like Alice and Edith in *Dombey and Son*, Lydia insists that society is at least partly to blame for her upbringing, and indeed "the details of Gwilt's early life demonstrate that she is a victim of an indifferent, corrupt, and often hypocritical social system" (Boyle 170). Even in her suicide note—that is, at her moment of strongest remorse and self-blame—Lydia questions society's role in the way her life has unfolded. She writes to her unconscious husband to "forget me, my darling, in the love of a better woman than I am. I might, perhaps, have been that better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life before you met with me" (806). Lydia feels even in her moment of sincere repentance that the way she has been treated by and within society has influenced the formation of her character, and has left her few choices other than those suited to the role of the fallen woman, the outcast, and the villainess. In order to take advantage of these choices open to her, Lydia must cultivate her skills as an actress. While the majority of Collins's female characters are unconsciously "actresses vying for husbands in a competitive marriage market" (Hedgecock 153), Lydia consciously acts a series of characters in order to improve her allotted place in society by way of marriage

Throughout the novel Collins emphasizes the fact that, as Pedgift Senior says in the letter that forms the novel's epilogue, the nineteenth century is primarily an age of performance. The lawyer bluntly reminds his son that "we live, Augustus, in an age eminently favourable to the growth of all roguery which is careful enough to keep up appearances" (810). Significantly, Pedgift phrases his assessment of society in a way that emphasizes the agency necessary to acting a part which can only be kept up by way of one's own effort. Collins, through Pedgift, touches on the necessity in social performance of the split consciousness Fanny Kemble relies upon on stage: the duality is necessary to "keep up" external appearances, while not losing sight of the internal self and its aims.

Pedgift's closing emphasis reminds the reader that the convoluted plot, which can at times seem to sacrifice character to action, is essentially a story "*about* character—how it can be falsified, how names do or [do not] match it, how one individual (in disguise) might inhabit several of them in sequence" (Hensley 608; original emphasis). This multivalent reference to "character" reflects mid-nineteenth-century usage of the word, which could refer equally to a role played, an individual written, and "both a *general* or commonly held morality, and also what would seem like its opposite: particularity itself" (Hensley 609; original emphasis). Collins emphasizes the centrality of character—in all these senses—by having others within the novel repeatedly refer to Lydia's personae as her "character[s]" (198, 437). Accurately assessing Lydia's reliance on the distinction between self and character, Pedgift asserts that "the whole of this mystery about Miss Gwilt's true character […] may turn on a question of identity" (490). These opposite yet interchangeable terms—identity and character—together form the centre of Collins's focus on performance.

In his closing letter, Pedgift refers specifically to Mother Oldershaw, who by this final moment in the novel has fully reinvented herself as "the last new Sunday performer of our time" (812). She has "found it to her advantage—everybody in England finds it to their advantage, in some way—to cover the outer side of her character carefully with a smooth varnish of Cant" (706). Collins has already presented this new Mother Oldershaw to the reader upon Lydia's return from Italy, when she meets not her old accomplice but instead "the sudden presentation of Mrs. Oldershaw, in an entirely new character" (706). Lydia of course recognizes this new characterization for what it is—another fraud—and tells Oldershaw to "put your Sunday face in your pocket" (706), to save her new façade for those who might be fooled by the mask. Collins has already insisted, however, that in a world based on successful and convincing performances,

the act of shifting from one character to another has much higher stakes. We have seen Mother Oldershaw switch characters once before, when as part of the plot against Allan she adopts the persona of Lydia's reference. In a letter to Lydia she explains that "the last expiring moments of Mother Oldershaw, of the Toilette Repository, are close at hand; and the birth of Miss Gwilt's respectable reference, Mrs. Mandeville, will take place in a cab in five minutes' time" (263). In order for Mother Oldershaw to play her new character convincingly, she must entirely separate that character from others she has played in the past. Collins heightens this necessity by calling for the "death" of one character and the "birth" of the new.[3]

Collins reminds his readers of Oldershaw's earlier transformation by returning to the language of death and birth immediately after Lydia has seen Mother Oldershaw in her new character. As Lydia leaves, she meets the man formerly known as Dr. Downward, though as we are informed, "Doctor Downward of Pimlico is dead and buried" (709), and has been "revived again at Hampstead" as Dr. Le Doux (710). By using such essential terminology as death and birth to describe the process of characterization here, Collins emphasizes the very serious nature of the formation of character in his presentation of mid-nineteenth-century society. In recalling the potential for error seen in Mother Oldershaw's earlier lapse, Collins warns that Lydia's attempt to meld different layers of identity must fail: she has not achieved the distinct split between characters we see at work in Mother Oldershaw's and Dr. Downward's language of death and birth.

[3] Despite this hyperbolic language and the precautions Mother Oldershaw takes, Collins demonstrates just how easy it is to track an actor between characters: Allan, on his search for Lydia's reference, quite easily ends up at Mother Oldershaw's establishment. Having used Mrs. Mandeville as needed, Mother Oldershaw has evidently returned to her regular life and resurrected her previous character. This return, however, allows Allan and Pedgift to trace the connection between the two characters, a discovery that nearly derails Lydia's entire scheme.

Collins presents Lydia's various adopted characters in relation to her series of schemes for self-advancement, and so they appear to align the character with the conventions of the femme fatale. As Jennifer Hedgecock points out, the act of hiding one's true identity and intentions is intrinsic to this character: "By using the masquerade, the femme fatale attempts to conceal her old identity, the stigma attached to her whole concept of selfhood" (22). Throughout the novel Lydia "consciously, deliberately, uses her beauty to advance her schemes of revenge, fraud, and murder" (Morris 111). She takes advantage both of her natural beauty and of the performances that highlight it, creating a series of identities based on these external characteristics rather than on her true self.[4] Lydia uses these identities "to create a spectacle" through which she attempts to "control […] not only the male gaze but everybody in the novel" (Jung 106). Lydia's aptitude for the art becomes immediately apparent upon her first physical (that is, non-epistolary) appearance in the text. When Armadale first meets Lydia at the Broads, he falls under the influence of her beauty, unaware that she acts specifically to highlight that beauty. He comments to Midwinter shortly after this first meeting that "a governess is a lady who is not rich, […] and a duchess is a lady who is not poor. […] What age do you guess her at, Midwinter? I say, seven or eight and twenty" (357). She is actually none of these things—not a governess, nor a lady, nor a duchess, nor even a woman of "seven or eight and twenty"—and yet she easily persuades Armadale to associate her with all of these characters.

The stakes of Lydia's characterizations, like those of Edith Dombey, are much higher than those seen on the stage. She must conceal the fact of her performances from those with whom she interacts, who are both scene partners and intended audience. As such, the

[4] "She has been an innocent victim, a deserted child, a little maid, a muse, a nun, a teacher, a governess, a piano player, a card player, a swindler, a decoy, a murderer, a prisoner, and a widow. It is quite easy to see that there is no role that Lydia cannot perform" (Hedgecock 37). Lydia's true character, however, remains hidden: protected by and operating underneath this surfeit of identities.

possibilities for disruption are innumerable. For instance, her beauty works to her disadvantage with the jealous Miss and Mrs. Milroy. When playing the role of working governess, then, she chooses to accentuate her patience rather than her beauty: "[Miss Milroy] would try me past all endurance, if I didn't see that I aggravate her by keeping my temper—so of course I keep it" (344). In Lydia's reading of the situation, Miss Milroy will immediately derail Lydia's performance if the governess allows her to do so. This lack of cooperation by an outside individual—and of course in an off-stage situation one can never guarantee the participation of all the characters in the scene—necessitates greater care on the part of the actor, to ensure her characterization does not slip or change. Lydia confronts a similar difficulty when she must interact with Allan during their courtship. She laments in a letter to Mother Oldershaw that "the only difficulty with [Allan] is the difficulty of concealing my own feelings—especially when he turns my dislike of him into downright hatred, by sometimes reminding me of his mother" (343). Lydia expresses the hazards of live performance with an oblivious interlocutor: if Allan becomes aware of her hatred, his reactions to her will necessarily change. In the theatre, where the actors acknowledge the scenario they have entered into, even if the actors are aware of the others' feelings they must still play their roles as written. The actor's own feelings are much less likely to cause an adverse effect in the theatre where everyone commits to creating the same illusion, but will almost certainly do so in the real world when two social actors often work unconsciously to create illusions that are inconsistent, and occasionally counter-productive.[5]

[5] Stella Campbell's experiences working with George Alexander, later in the century, draw a distinct contrast to the hazards of off-stage acting. In her memoir, she recalls that "Mr. Alexander and I rehearsed, only addressing each other in the words of our parts" (94). On one particularly memorable occasion, "Mr. Alexander […] had to look into my face and tell me I was beautiful and that he adored me, or some such words, and one night he said it with such a look in his eyes, as though he would willingly have wrung my neck" (96). While Lydia must keep her hatred of Allan fully hidden in order for her character to have the proper effect, Campbell and Alexander must merely keep their mutual dislike hidden from the audience. Their performances do not noticeably suffer, whatever the personal feelings underlying the passions of their respective characters.

Before the reader sees the depth of Lydia's deception, Collins first presents the character as an anonymous woman. Other characters read her as dangerous and link the coincidence of her repeated appearances, but they cannot ascribe a specific identity to her. Instead, Midwinter and the Reverend Brock repeatedly refer to her merely as "the woman with the red Paisley shawl" (250). She first appears in the prologue as "an orphan girl of barely twelve years old, a marvel of precocious ability, whom Miss Blanchard had taken a romantic fancy to befriend, and whom she had brought away with her from England to be trained as her maid. […] No creature more innately deceitful and more innately pitiless ever walked the earth" (39). Lydia appears first as a nameless, deceitful orphan, without a redeeming quality. This first description of her, however, emphasizes that she acts as "an instrument" who cultivates with "wicked dexterity" (39) not her own but others' villainous schemes.

She next appears as "a neatly-dressed woman, wearing a gown and bonnet of black silk and a red Paisley shawl" (81). Here too she exists as an anonymous but villainous figure, though, in contrast to her first appearance, she now works on her own initiative. She reappears to extort money from Mrs. Armadale and chooses to keep her own name hidden: Mrs. Armadale tells Brock that "the name I knew her by […] would be of no use to you. She has been married since then—she told me so herself," and she "refuse[s] to tell" her married name (83). In a novel that has to this point emphasized the importance of names, we know that this *lack* of a name will prove significant. And indeed this exchange becomes ironic when the reader recognizes that Lydia has discarded her married name as too easily recognizable. The name Mrs. Armadale knew Lydia by is precisely the name that would have helped Brock protect Allan against her. Finally, Lydia—still unnamed—appears on a river steamer "neatly dressed in black silk, with a red Paisley shawl over her shoulders" (92). Here, again, she acts on her own initiative,

"persist[ing] in giving a name which was on the face of it a false one; in telling a commonplace story, which was manifestly an invention; and in refusing to the last to furnish any clue to her friends" (94). Having been caught in an incontrovertibly criminal act—attempted suicide—Lydia saves herself by falsifying both her name and her story. While Arthur Blanchard's death after rescuing Lydia from the river is certainly accidental, Lydia's actions leading to that death are deliberate and self-interested.

In each instance, Lydia is recognized and identified solely on the basis of her external appearance—specifically, her clothing. Mother Oldershaw draws this circumstance to the reader's attention when she wonders how Brock could possibly have recognized Lydia in the Gardens: "I was a little puzzled (considering you had your veil down on both those occasions, and your veil down also when we were in the Gardens,) at *his* recognizing *you*" (252; original emphasis). Brock recognizes Lydia by her external trappings, her costume, not by her body, voice, or face. The reader knows—since Collins has already related this meeting from Brock's perspective—that he has in fact recognized her shawl (250). By this point in the novel, as Jessica Maynard notes, the "black silk dress and red Paisley shawl [have] become a means of identification" (68).

While, as Laurence Talairach-Vielmas points out, Lydia's facility with costuming marks "the possibility of shifting from one identity to another with just a change of clothes" (54), her specific costume choice marks far deeper issues. Lydia's primary aim is to create a projected or external identity, separate from her private self, as a means of securing her autonomy and independence: "For Lydia, the veil signifies the freedom to conceal and manipulate her identity, to block the detective's gaze" (Pal-Lapinski 107). When leaving Thorpe-Ambrose, Lydia explains this use of the veil to her landlady: "One meets such rude men occasionally in the

railway […]. And though I dress quietly, my hair is so very remarkable" (559). The veil provides a layer of protection from the outside, potentially controlling, gaze. Immediately following this explanation, we see Lydia explicitly using the veil to hide a lapse in her characterization: "I caught myself laughing once or twice much louder than I ought—and long before we got to London I thought it desirable to put my face in hiding by pulling down my veil" (589). Lydia finds a sense of safety behind the screen of her costume, which both hides her acting self and enhances the self she presents.

Collins uses the specificity of Lydia's first costume, however, to emphasize more than just the freedom granted by the ability to hide one's face. Lydia's Paisley shawl is not only immediately identifiable to other characters within the novel: contemporary readers would have read in its material particular class associations. In the mid-nineteenth century, cashmere shawls from India became a popular accessory amongst those who could afford such a luxury. Women with less financial freedom, however, would "purchase cheaper imitations manufactured at Norwich or Paisley, which were widely known as 'imitation India shawls' or sometimes simply as 'Paisley' shawls" (Choudhury 819). Lydia's shawl, then, plays an intrinsic part in her carefully-crafted appearance of gentility, situating her firmly in the class of ladies who are aware of the shawl's connotations but cannot afford a real cashmere. That Brock and Midwinter recognize the shawl as of the imitation variety suggests that the two men are capable of reading other such markers of imitation correctly. That both men are, in fact, fooled by Lydia indicates, then, the skill of her performance.

Lydia's immediately recognizable shawl clearly marks her pursuit of upward social mobility. In the relative anonymity provided by increasingly urban centres in the mid-nineteenth century, "identity was defined by external symbols such as clothing" (Aidnow 9). The visible

exterior, through such imitations as the Paisley shawl, allows the character access to a different class. In Lydia's case, the Paisley shawl with all its associations is necessary to her characterization of a lady in diminished circumstances, seeking work as a governess. In relating her story to his father, the younger Bashwood remarks that Lydia's own family background remains indistinct and ultimately untraceable: "She may be the daughter of a duke, or the daughter of a costermonger. The circumstances may be highly romantic, or utterly commonplace" (633). However uncertain her actual origins, Lydia's immediate and verifiable circumstance is that of a woman with no family, who intends to masquerade as a woman of higher status. Collins casually draws the reader's attention to the invasive danger of Lydia's plots merely by describing her initial costume choice.

Of course, Lydia uses this identification of her self with her costume to her own advantage: Lydia and Mother Oldershaw thus conspire to trick Brock, allowing their plan against Armadale to progress. They allow the Reverend his first glimpse of the face inside the costume after substituting the actor portraying "Miss Gwilt," the character who has been identified by the gown, veil, and shawl, replacing Lydia's physical presence with that of Oldershaw's housemaid. Mother Oldershaw summarizes the purpose of this substitution in a letter to Lydia: "I want him to see the housemaid's face under circumstances which will persuade him that it is *your* face" (261; original emphasis). Even if the substitution fails to appease Brock's suspicions entirely, "he will warn young Armadale to be careful *of a woman like my housemaid, and not of a woman like you*" (262; original emphasis). Lydia will then be free to pursue the original plan against Allan, without fear of interference from those who associate the villainess of the prologue with black silk and Paisley.

The crux of this deception comes in Book the Second, Chapter X, titled "The Housemaid's Face" (322), which follows immediately upon Lydia's first physical entrance into the text. Brock writes to Midwinter of the newly arrived governess: "take the first opportunity you can get of seeing her, and ask yourself if her face does, or does not, answer certain plain questions […]. Test her by her features, which no circumstances can change" (331). He refers, of course, to the housemaid's face and features, which they think belong both to the woman with the Paisley shawl and to the new governess. Given the centrality to the narrative of cosmetics and masks, this attempt to recognize Lydia by her face is destined to fail. Faces, like names, are anything but reliable. In making this substitution, however, Mother Oldershaw and Lydia split Lydia into two physically separate women—a split that becomes intrinsic to the continuation of their plot against Allan. The success of Lydia's performance here relies on her physical embodiment of Kemble's dual consciousness. Midwinter remarks incredulously, "the woman whom he had seen at the mere, and the woman whom Mr. Brock had identified in London, were not one, but Two" (337), acknowledging the literal separation of the new governess from the woman in the black silk and Paisley shawl. This absolute separation, of course, is Lydia's and Mother Oldershaw's aim; Lydia marks its success by writing triumphantly, "*I have been proved not to be myself*" (343; original emphasis).

Significantly, Collins does not preface Lydia's entrance with a description of her actions after substituting the housemaid's face for her own. Thus, when Miss Milroy's governess appears in the novel, the reader, like Midwinter, is placed in the position of seeing one character and needing to compare her to the expected character. We too receive the housemaid's face first, as Midwinter compares the written description of the housemaid with the physical appearance of Lydia in front of him. As such, Collins identifies and describes Lydia by what she is *not*:

Midwinter gives the written description of the housemaid's hair, forehead, eyes, and so on, followed by the obvious contrast of each feature in the woman before him (334-335). The only "clear impression" Lydia produces—both on Midwinter and, because of the manner in which Collins presents Lydia's reappearance here, on the reader—is the "discovery of the astounding contradiction that her face offered, in one feature after another, to the description in Mr. Brock's letter" (336-337). Lydia herself remains "vague and misty—a dim consciousness of a tall, elegant woman, and of kind words, modestly and gracefully spoken" (337). By describing Lydia as an opposition and an absence, Collins leaves space for her character to be built by her actions in the coming pages.

A large part of Lydia's performance rests on her natural beauty: beauty she emphatically refuses to enhance by the use of cosmetics. Both Collins in *Armadale* and Dickens in *Dombey and Son* highlight the idea that "for women cosmetics raised the specter of the aging female body as a paradox: in need of restoration according to the advertising, but simultaneously in danger of courting ridicule for attempting that restoration" (Niles 68). Mother Oldershaw draws on this contradiction and the innate insecurity it provides to run her successful business; Edith and Lydia prove that able acting can easily bridge the perceived gap between age and beauty without the help of cosmetics; Dickens's Mrs. Skewton and Collins's Mrs. Milroy demonstrate the grotesque absurdity of the woman made up to appear significantly younger than her years. Collins describes in detail the monstrosity of Mrs. Milroy's façade:

> Her head, from which the greater part of the hair had fallen off, would have been less shocking to see than the hideously youthful wig, by which she tried to hide the loss. No deterioration of her complexion, no wrinkling of her skin, could have been so dreadful to

> look at as the rouge that lay thick on her cheeks, and the white enamel plastered on her forehead. (372-373)

Despite this vivid illustration, Collins allows Mrs. Milroy to keep her cosmetic façade on even in front of his readers. We see only the "crack[s]" in her "white enamel" (*Armadale* 382, 392). In both novels, cosmetic usage, dressing youthfully, and other related elements of social fraud, are all accepted ways of pretending to be younger than one really is, and are for the most part so obvious that they can pose no possible danger to society. In both *Dombey* and *Armadale*, the ridiculous is safe; natural beauty is the realm of the femme fatale.

Much of the threatening sensation in *Armadale* comes from the shadowy and amorphous background figure of Mother Oldershaw. She rarely appears physically in the novel—and only after her apparent rebirth as a fanatical society preacher. Mother Oldershaw in many ways stands at the centre of the novel's vastly convoluted web of plots: she was responsible for selling Lydia to Miss Blanchard as a child, without which sale the actions of the first generation may have been vastly different. She takes an active stance against the second generation as well, encouraging and lending assistance to Lydia in her scheme to marry Allan. Collins based the "Restorer-General of the dilapidated heads and faces of the female sex" (*Armadale* 651) on Madame Rachel Leverson. This mid-century beautician sold "cosmetics and beauty treatments at outrageous prices" from her shop in New Bond Street, but was also tried for blackmail (C. Peters xiv). Madame Rachel, like Mother Oldershaw, seamlessly links the criminal underworld with the legitimate business of creating new faces for society women. Mother Oldershaw's primary interest lies in the presentation of false faces to society—by way of fraud as well as by way of cosmetics. In her first letter to Lydia, she combines these two areas, pairing the question of Lydia's age with her potential influence on Allan.

> The question is—not whether you were five-and-thirty last birthday; we will own the dreadful truth and say you were—but whether you do look, or don't look, your real age. My opinion on this matter ought to be, and is, one of the best opinions in London. I have had twenty years' experience among our charming sex in making up battered old faces and worn-out old figures to look like new—and I say positively you don't look a day over thirty, if as much. If you will follow my advice about dressing, and use one or two of my applications privately, I guarantee to put you back three years more. (191)

Lydia's response, however, comes in a firm post script: "Keep your odious powders and paints and washes for the spotted shoulders of your customers; not one of them shall touch my skin, I promise you" (193-194). Even at "the ripe age of thirty-five" (*Spectator* 9 June 1866), Lydia has no need to rely on a mask of cosmetics. Her skill is in acting, in layering a new identity on top of her body, not in decorating that body externally to project the image of a new identity. "In Lydia's refusal of these 'odious powders and paints,' Collins offers the most frightening vision of Lydia's body—one that does not need cosmetics in order to appear what it is *not*: young" (Niles 89; original emphasis). Creating a character is both more intricate and involved, and more convincing and reliable than merely painting one's face.

Throughout the novel Lydia, like Kemble, remains constantly aware of her own actions, and of the effect the external self she presents has on those around her. Collins describes these performances not only from the outside, through the omniscient narrator, but also from Lydia's own perspective, through her diary. In these instances, we can see that Lydia tailors each characterization to have the maximum effect on her intended audience. For much of the novel, however, we are limited in our access to Lydia's thoughts and feelings, accessing them only

through the filter of her performed façade, as related by Collins's narrator. One of the later instances of this lack of insight comes when Midwinter has just returned to Thorpe-Ambrose: "His heart beat fast; he looked at her as she dropped into a chair and put her handkerchief to her eyes. For one moment he hesitated—the next, he snatched up his knapsack from the floor, and left her precipitately, without a backward look, or a parting word" (468). Collins focalizes this moment through Midwinter, leaving the reader with no question of his feelings; Lydia, however, remains just as hidden to the reader as she is to Midwinter, aligning the reader with her intended audience. Jenny Bourne Taylor points out that Lydia's personal history in fact "remains concealed from the reader for most of the story" (168-169). Though the reader has been granted some insight into how and why Lydia plays her various roles, we are only allowed to learn the story of her past through the younger Bashwood's relation of it to his father. Even then, the story is limited to the publicly-known facts; the truth of Lydia's past remains a mystery. The sympathy generated by the apparent candour of the first-person diary, then, remains tempered by this concurrent lack of knowledge.

When Lydia returns to her diary after her marriage she no longer grants the reader full access to her thoughts, plans, and motivations. In preparing to poison Allan in Italy, she writes: "I had a few minutes of thought with myself, which I don't choose to put into words, even in these secret pages" (676). She keeps aspects of her self, of her plots, and of her thoughts hidden even from her diary, which until this point has stood as a fairly faithful recording of her feelings, in contrast to the narrated parts of the novel, which record only her performances. This full separation of selves—without even the mediation of the diary entries—results in the removal of the reader from her privileged position. After having had access to Lydia's thoughts and feelings for such a large portion of the story, however, the reader retains enough knowledge not to be

fooled. Unlike the uninformed audience within the novel, we know precisely what Lydia chooses not to write here.

Lydia spends much of the novel, then, in the position of successful performer, creating an obvious external characterization, as Collins literalizes in the episode of the housemaid's face. The portions of the story told through the perspective of Lydia's diary, however, suggest alternative motivations. Apart from the obvious access to both sides of Lydia's character—performed and performing—not granted to the other characters, the diary also allows Collins to develop Lydia beyond the two-dimensional villainess or femme fatale. The character who emerges in the diary entries is both more fully developed and more sympathetic. In moments when, for instance, Lydia asks her diary, "Am I handsome enough, today?" (515), or decides that "I must go and ask my glass how I look" (593), we see the uncertainty that underlies each act.[6] As Mother Oldershaw's presence in the novel constantly reminds the reader, for a woman of Lydia's age to rely on her natural beauty is nearly absurd. Despite her outward confidence in her theatrical powers, Lydia remains well aware of the dangers that await a woman who begins to look her age.

The sympathetic nature of the split character Collins develops through the inclusion of Lydia's diary emerges in brief moments, unrelated to any of the schemes or plots of the novel, when Lydia expresses her own need to perform. For Lydia, this is a way to escape the daily reality of her situation as a woman with no acceptable place in mid-nineteenth-century society. The escapism that underlies her laudanum addiction also surfaces in her use of music—"I must go and *forget myself* at the piano" (515; emphasis added)—and in her constant reinvention of

[6] We might recall here Fanny Kemble's similar uncertainty over the characterizations she describes as "uneven in themselves and perfectly unequal with each other, never complete as a whole, however striking in occasional parts" (*Record* 2.14).

herself. Her performances not only help her to live, but also preserve her ability to do so; all three (music, laudanum, and acting) take her out of herself, and through this escapism allow her to cope with the world.

While for Lydia the duality of playing a part can be a way to "forget" herself, to remove herself from the everyday reality of her own situation, this forgetfulness can also lead to an accompanying loss of the reasoning that underlies her performances. While Edith Dombey's true feeling for Florence makes her façade of haughty nonchalance both easier and more necessary, Lydia's love for Midwinter disrupts what has been a fairly successful series of characterizations. Pedgift Senior—the only character not to be taken in by Lydia's façade—describes his work prosecuting female criminals as an exercise merely in finding "the weak point in the story told by any one of them" (443). This singular weak point, Pedgift insists, immediately brings out "the genuine woman, in full possession of all her resources, with a neat little lie that exactly suited the circumstances of the case" (443)—a lie in which, of course, the lawyer can then catch her. In Lydia's case, this "weak point" lies in her love for Midwinter. The "neat little lie" that leads to her downfall is much more complex than those in Pedgift's reminiscences, but nevertheless leads to the same disastrous end.

Both narrators, the omniscient narrator and the writer of the embedded diary, obscure the cause—and fail to anticipate the effects—of these lapses. Lydia's love for Midwinter is one of the few things she feels unable to record in her diary, even once she recognizes the existence of the emotion. She deliberately stops herself from confiding her feelings: she can only say that Midwinter is a man "whom—well, whom I *might* have loved once, before I was the woman I am now" (511; original emphasis). When Lydia leads Armadale's spy out of the town and accidentally meets Midwinter, she expresses "the first signs of agitation she had shown yet"

(459). Here, the narrator notes the disruption in Lydia's performance when she sees Midwinter, but says no more. Lydia falters in this instance because of her surprise at seeing Midwinter without having been able first to prepare herself. We have seen her ability to improvise interactions at a moment's notice, as she has just done with her haughtiness to the spy for instance, and so her inability to do so here is telling.

Lydia does recognize that Midwinter has had some effect on her, though she cannot confess the nature of that effect. On the train to London, just after she has agreed to marry Midwinter, she wonders, "What *can* be the secret of this man's hold on me? How is it that he alters me so that I hardly know myself again?" (593; original emphasis). Lydia has spent so many years creating and selling her own characters without the least susceptibility to outside influences that now she cannot comprehend her vulnerability. Once the two are reunited in London, his influence over her grows. At one point she confesses to her diary that she "was within a hair's breadth of turning traitor to myself. I was on the very point of crying out to him, 'Lies! all lies! I'm a fiend in human shape!'" (594), betraying both the character she has presented to him as well as the self protected by that character. Finally, Lydia's control over her own performance vanishes altogether when she confesses, "I feel as if I had lost myself—lost myself, I mean, in *him*" (615; original emphasis). The love Lydia feels begins to overshadow everything else in importance, even her financial plots, disrupting both her character and the progression that character is meant to follow.

As Lydia loses both the will and the ability to carry on her carefully-planned performances, the reader must work harder to differentiate between truth and artifice. In both Lydia's diary and the third-person narration Collins blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction in describing events. In the scene when the two meet outside the town as Midwinter returns, for

instance, Lydia asks Midwinter for the "support" of his arm as her "'little stock of courage is quite exhausted.' She took his arm and clung close to it. The woman who had tyrannized over Mr. Bashwood was gone, and the woman who had tossed the spy's hat into the pool was gone. A timid, shrinking, interesting creature filled the fair skin, and trembled on the symmetrical limbs of Miss Gwilt" (460). Superficially, she acts this moment of weakness, this "timid, shrinking" version of her self, in order to elicit Midwinter's sympathy with her as the victim of Allan's spy. This new role, however, follows immediately from the moment in which the narrator first shows Lydia's performance to falter. The reader, then, must wonder whether the "timid, shrinking, interesting creature" is a creation for the purposes of her original scheme, or is instead a true reflection of her own feeling. Neither Collins nor Lydia provides a concrete reading of this moment: Collins, for the purposes of suspense, Lydia because she cannot recognize the failure of her performance, much less the cause of that failure.

Collins draws our attention to this failure of Lydia's dual consciousness by once again literalizing her split self: "I was startled just now by a shadow on the wall. It was only after a moment or two that I mustered sense enough to notice where the candle was, and to see that the shadow was my own" (531). As in the episode of the housemaid's face, Collins explicitly describes the two separate aspects of Lydia's self: here, as self and shadow rather than as self and physical other. Similarly, Collins approaches Lydia's full loss of control through a sequence of moments when she loses control over elements of her performance. her hands twice act as if of their own accord. Sitting with Midwinter outside the town, she comments incredulously that "my hand lifted itself somehow, and my fingers twined themselves softly in his hair" (504). Later, when writing in her diary, she questions her control over what she has written: "I see my own hand while I write the words—and I ask myself whether it is really the hand of Lydia Gwilt!"

(616). These moments of disembodiment recall the similar moment in Kemble's recollection of her stage debut when she unconsciously removes the train of her dress from "Juliet's feet" (*Record* 2.10). Kemble's professional inexperience excuses her lack of immediate awareness of and control over the duality necessary to successful acting. Lydia, however, has been engaging in public performance since she was a child and knows precisely what elements are necessary to elicit the desired effect on her audience. Here, her lack of awareness reflects her sudden lack of control: her body acts in cooperation with her actual feelings for Midwinter, rather than in expression of the feelings of her role.

Lydia's characterization fails because she cannot recognize that it is no longer an act. As Jenny Bourne Taylor writes, "Lydia gains power when she is not what she appears to be, and loses it when she becomes subjected to her own desire for Midwinter, when she wants to fill the role that she had been able to manipulate as a masquerade" (168). What she feels matches what she has intended to act, collapsing her studiously crafted duality. Lydia, in falling in love with Midwinter, removes the necessary separation of performing and performed selves and becomes, essentially, the character she acts. At first, Lydia explicitly denies the truth of this feeling, wondering "whether there was a time once when I might have loved *him*?" (465; original emphasis), and thinking distantly of "the time when he might have possessed himself of my love" in return for his own (504). Even as her plot against Allan reaches its climax after her return to London, she fails to recognize the influence of her repressed feelings: "I wrote to Midwinter to-day, to keep up appearances. When the letter was done, I fell into wretchedly low spirits—I can't imagine why" (701). She tries to return to her original intentions, and cannot understand her inability to do so.

Crucially, when Lydia tries to carry out the final stages of her scheme, she begins to lose her ability to act. Throughout the novel, Lydia's main talents lie in making herself appear much younger than she is and in using her beauty to beguile. Once she leaves Midwinter, she loses these skills and with them the ability to carry out her original plot—a plot which, after all, rests primarily on her appearance, and only secondly on the coincidence of names. As Lydia reaches the final stages of her plan against Allan, Collins traces the effect on her face of this lost ability to sustain her characterization. Twice he describes her, in words that diametrically oppose everything we have seen of the character, as "white and still, and haggard and old" (757, 787). Through much of the second half of the novel, Lydia has been unable to lie directly to Midwinter's face—another illustration of the disruptive potential of her true feelings (500, 726). Now, dressed in widow's weeds and in mourning for another man, she comes face to face with her husband and must deny their relationship, "in tones *unnaturally* hard and *unnaturally* clear" (757; emphasis added), or give up her plots entirely.[7] When speaking these fatal words, "she never lifted her eyes from the ground […]. When she had done, the last vestige of colour in her cheeks faded out" (757). Again, she cannot meet Midwinter's gaze while telling a falsehood. Because of this failure, and the accompanying loss of her beauty, the renunciation is unconvincing. The character achieves the desired immediate effect—Bashwood believes that Lydia is not married to Midwinter—but the toll this performance takes on Lydia as an actor is so extreme as to lead first to the immediate loss of her beauty, then to Midwinter's suspicion, and finally to her death.

[7] Although Lydia, in her diary, comments earlier on "how unnatural all this would be, if it was written in a book!" (684), this is Collins's first explicit description of his heroine's performances as anything other than natural and convincing.

Collins's emphasis on the changes to his character's face are particularly jarring, given Lydia's previous insistence that her face remain natural—that is, clear of cosmetics. This sudden loss of her beauty, then, follows inevitably from her lack of ability to perform, as she has used theatrical technique as if instead of makeup. Throughout the novel, Lydia has challenged the conventional belief that an individual's moral state must inevitably be legible on her body: "Lydia's body does not signify as 'old and ugly' in the moment when it would most clearly affirm her criminality […]; only when she renounces the love of her husband does her body reflect the social expectations of it" (Niles 90). In losing control of the dual consciousness that allows for successful performance, Lydia slips inevitably back into the conventional plot of the fallen or villainous woman. Her suicide, then, marks both the inevitable end of a woman whose life has been constructed from a series of acted characters, and the inevitable consequence of a failure to perform.

Even more overtly than we have seen in the last chapter, Lydia Gwilt's interchangeable identities recall nineteenth-century discussions of the relationship between an actress's private identity and the characters she plays on stage. Writing specifically of women's experience under nineteenth-century marriage laws, Lenora Ledwon notes that "self is a slippery thing, needing a terrible effort of will to maintain" (20). Both Edith Dombey and Lydia Gwilt exemplify this "effort of will" necessary to maintain a stable sense of self: in both novels this "effort" takes the form of constantly evolving characterizations, continually adapted by way of the "slipperiness" of the nineteenth-century woman's identity, but always kept separate from the private self. The relative success or failure of both performances is measured against the conventional fallen woman plot, explaining why readings of the two characters so often confine them within these set narrative structures. Edith succeeds—that is, she does not die as one would expect of a fallen

woman character. She goes into exile, but of her own volition and in full control of her future. Lydia, in contrast, commits suicide—carrying out the final stage of the fallen-woman plot—because she fails to control her performance. By not taking account of and allowing for her own emotional involvement, she loses the dual consciousness necessary to successfully perform a character.

EPILOGUE

Self-Making through Silence

Like Lucy Snowe, actress, novelist, campaigner, and playwright Elizabeth Robins uses strategic silences in her writing to simultaneously mask and highlight her acts of self-making. Like Lydia Gwilt, Robins rehearses her acts of identity creation in extensive, and extensively crafted, diary entries. Like Fanny Kemble and Marie Bancroft, Robins ruthlessly curated her own archive, destroying letters, cutting pages from notebooks, and obliterating names, locations, and significant words and passages. Like Edith Dombey, Robins spent much of her life being told she should rely on men—and using men to achieve her own goals. Like Bianca Pazzi, Robins moved to London to make her way as an actress, where she struggled to support her family through her earnings. Like Stella Campbell, she achieved success in—and became easily identifiable with—strong characters of questionable morality. Like Betha Durant, Robins had a complicated relationship with her family, working tirelessly to support her mother and brothers, while dealing with their casually expressed anti-theatricality. And like Magdalen Vanstone, Robins made full use of her artistic talents in seeking, shaping, and maintaining her desired off-stage identity.

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, Robins epitomizes the necessity of performing a character off the stage as well as on. In her overtly autobiographical fiction, in her two memoirs—*Both Sides of the Curtain* (1940) and the unpublished "Wither and How"—and in the vast archive she curated, Robins narrates many distinct selves, always editing out anything which might hint at a singular identity.[1] In doing so,

[1] Robins' papers, which form a collection of nearly one hundred linear feet of material, were acquired by New York University in 1964. The papers remained uncatalogued until the mid-1980s, because of a clause Robins included in her will, stipulating "that nothing should be touched for thirty years" (Gates, *Robins* 263). Elizabeth M. Bonapfel

Robins adapts her own on-stage performance technique to her off-stage acts of self-making. Her stage career coincided with the rise of Naturalism on the London stage and she is primarily known for her association with Ibsen and the movement away from the commercial theatre. In developing her acting theory through her Ibsen roles, Robins relied on long, significant, character-building pauses and evocative silences. These silences and significant pauses reappear in her writing as she creates for posterity her desired off-stage character.

Born in Kentucky early in the American Civil War, Robins was never meant to be an actress, an author, or a campaigner for women's suffrage. One of seven children, she was primarily raised by her paternal grandmother in Zanesville, Ohio: her mother was institutionalized for an unidentified mental illness not long after the birth of her youngest child, and Robins' father experimented with a variety of careers which took him away from his family. Charles Robins intended his eldest daughter to train as a doctor, or at the very least to attend university, but she saw a career on the stage as "the ideal University" ("Wither" 1.4).[2] Though she had no theatrical background, Robins had from an early age been captivated by the theatre: she arranged family theatricals, took part in school productions and recitations, and carefully collected memorabilia from performances she attended.[3] Robins' father remained staunchly opposed to the idea of a professional stage career for his daughter, but in 1880 Robins borrowed money from her mother and left for New York, where she soon secured an engagement in Edwin Booth's company. She worked here, and later on tour with James O'Neill, under a variety of stage names, first appearing under her own name in June of 1883.

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notes that, as well as chronicling Robins' life in excruciating detail, the extensive collection "bears witness to the everyday life and business of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatre" (110).

[2] Throughout this epilogue, "Wither and How" will be referenced by folder and folio number. Other documents from the Fales collection will be identified by series, subseries, box, folder, and folio numbers.

[3] On Robins' life, especially her acting and writing careers, see published biographies by Gates and John, and Cima's unpublished dissertation.

After touring throughout the United States, in 1883 Robins accepted an engagement with the Boston Museum company where she played, in her recollection, "nearly three hundred parts" over the next two years (*Ibsen* 12). Here, too, she met the actor George Parks, whom she would marry after what appears from her papers to have been a remarkably one-sided courtship.[4] The secrecy of the January 1885 ceremony not only reflected her unwillingness to marry and her family's lack of approval, but also highlighted her own professional concerns: when the marriage became known, Robins' engagement with the Museum company was unceremoniously terminated. She returned to touring, seeing her new husband only sporadically. Throughout the two years of their marriage, Parks constantly pressured Robins to leave the stage, becoming increasingly threatening until finally committing suicide in May 1887. His note explicitly placed the blame for his unhappiness on her professional success, and positioned himself as an impediment to her career: "I will not stand in your light any longer" (qtd. in John 39). Suddenly widowed, Robins decided to take up the offer of a friend to travel to Norway once her touring commitments were fulfilled for the season. During her brief stopover in London, Robins met with enough encouragement from established theatrical and literary figures to convince her to stay in the city, declining a potentially lucrative contract with Augustin Daly in New York. Though she never became a naturalized British citizen or took steps to forfeit her American citizenship, Robins considered England her home from this point until her death in 1952.

While academic interest in Robins is increasing, she is generally treated as one of a group of pioneering Ibsen actresses in the 1890s, or in relation to her later work as an author associated

[4] Robins repeatedly insisted she would never marry, telling both Parks and her grandmother, "*I do not intend ever to marry*. I have *always* said so and unlike most girls have *meant it*" (letter to Jane Hussey Robins, 10 December 1883; qtd. in Gates, *Robins* 15; original emphasis). Robins' aversion to marriage stemmed primarily from her reluctance to have children, itself the product of her fear of inherited mental illness. Her most overtly autobiographical novel, *The Open Question* (1898), centres around a similar fear, and posits suicide as the only means of escaping the inevitability of inherited disease.

with the campaign for British women's suffrage. Marija Reiff, for instance, addresses Robins through the actress's use of "her art and her fame to promote women's causes" (249). Elaine Showalter and Sue Thomas similarly position Robins amongst the New Women writers of the 1890s and as part of this early focus on feminist causes.[5] Robins' 1907 play, *Votes for Women!*, is often included in anthologies or treatments of suffrage drama.[6] Her enduring legacy as an Ibsen actress began soon after her death, when Sybil Thorndike recalled her as "a great pioneer of the theatre" (23), whose main contribution to the English stage had been "introducing into this country the plays of Henrik Ibsen" (24). More recently, scholars such as Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner have recognized Robins as "instrumental in translating Ibsen's plays into English," as well as in her work as an actress and manager (207).[7]

Robins' first years in London were spent developing what would come to be the two primary streams of her creative life: trying to find meaningful acting work, and writing to pay the bills. After her unremarkable London debut as Mrs. Errol in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Opéra Comique, 17 January 1889) she proceeded through a series of equally unremarkable roles in melodrama and sentimental comedy, as well as her only English Shakespearean experience, as Portia with Frank Benson's company in Exeter. Robins turned to writing out of financial necessity to supplement her sporadic stage earnings, initially writing under the ambiguous pseudonym, C. E. Raimond. In her memoirs, Robins explains this decision as explicitly taken to hide her gender, thus avoiding some of the criticism with which women's writing often met: "I had published […] under the pseudonym C. E. Raimond (hoping I might be

[5] Showalter argues that Robins was an intrinsic member of the group of women writers who, at the end of the nineteenth century, "were beginning to work out a theory of women's literature" (26). Thomas notes in introducing her own study of Robins as a New Woman writer that "Robins […] is usually either ignored or positioned as […] against the New Woman on the strength largely of *George Mandeville's Husband* [1894]" ("New Woman" 124).
[6] See, for instance, Chapman and Mills, Gates, "*Votes*," and Harman.
[7] See also Corbett, "Identities," Powell, "Future," and Wiley.

mistaken for a man)" (*Curtain* 22). Also at work, however, was the necessity of keeping her acting and writing identities separate. Unlike Kemble, Robins did not explicitly privilege one over the other, but she did think that the roles she was associated with might colour reception of her writing. Specifically, as Gates points out, Robins "did not want her fiction labeled 'Ibsenish'" (*Robins* 58). At the same time, Robins thought any fiction known to have been written by an actress might be treated dismissively by the public.[8] In her later account of her friendship with Henry James, Robins recalls holding at the time "the justified conviction that an actress would find fair treatment from Press and public only through strict anonymity" (*Friendship* 173). In 1902, Robins left the stage to devote herself more fully to writing and, later, to political campaigning.

Robins' association with Ibsen did more than colour critical reception of her writing or make her an influential suffrage campaigner.[9] She also formulated her performance theory primarily through her roles in Ibsen's drama. Jan McDonald cites "intelligence" as one of the significant "requirement[s] for an actor in the 'New Drama' […]. The plays of Ibsen, [Bernard] Shaw, and [Harley Granville] Barker present difficult concepts, often in difficult language" (136). Countless reviews of and reactions to Robins' performances emphasize this intelligence.[10] Stella Campbell, for example, in her memoir, recalls Robins as "the first intellectual [she] had met on the stage" and goes on to characterize her Hilda in Ibsen's *The Master Builder* as "the

[8] In a recent study of the existence of a gender gap for contemporary novelists, Carol Drinkwater notes that, even in 2019, she often comes up against "the prejudices of 'actress-turned-author', as though actresses are less intelligent, less erudite" (Kean 14).

[9] Actresses were instrumental to the suffrage campaign, not only as speakers and campaigners but also in the transferable skills of the stage. Members of the Actresses' Franchise League, formed in 1908, provided training in rhetoric and elocution to inexperienced platform speakers, for instance, and used their skills in makeup and costuming to craft disguises for prisoners on temporary release under the terms of the Cat and Mouse Act (1913). For the association of the suffrage campaign with the stage, see Holledge, Miller, *Actress*, and Paxton.

[10] John notes that "the British press tended to collapse actresses into two types, the sexual and the intellectual. Known to spurn sexual advances, Elizabeth was unproblematically slotted into the latter category" (62).

most intellectually comprehensive piece of work [she] had ever seen" (65-66). Part of Robins' intellectual effect developed from her studious approach to creating her characters. Like Kemble, Robins attributed the success of a character to the actress's control of the details of that performance, "consciously directing her body, her words, her expression, and the business of her part" ("Theatre and Special," qtd. in Cima, "Robins" 132). Unlike Kemble, whose dual consciousness focused on the actress's awareness of the physical details of her circumstance on stage, Robins' conscious focus was on the details of characterization, on the specific elements of the part she intended to present to her audience. To this end, in preparing for a role she "carefully orchestrated her words and movements, numbering even her laughs and planning careful, almost mesmeric, eye contact" (John 66). This studious, intellectual approach created a natural effect on stage. Ibsen's plays both demanded and fostered a very specific kind of acting, one which was substantially removed from any of the modes which had been conventional on the earlier nineteenth-century stage.[11] "No declamation! No theatricalities! No grand mannerisms!" the playwright wrote to an actress undertaking one of his roles (qtd. in Meyer 569). As Robins does, he advocates "observ[ing] the life that is going on around you, and present[ing] a *real and living* human being" (qtd. in Meyer 569; emphasis added).

Naturalism, particularly the version associated with Ibsen's drama, expands the dual consciousness theorized by Kemble and often recognized as intrinsic to performance. The chronological organization of Ibsen's plays relies on the actors to relate any necessary back story

[11] The natural effect required by Ibsen's drama developed clearly out of many of these earlier conventions. Indeed, Jan McDonald traces the roots of English Naturalism to the Bancroft's cup-and-saucer realism at the Prince of Wales' (129). Naturalism, like Realism (see Chapter One, above), is a highly contentious term. As James Woodfield points out, "the two terms tend to be interchangeable, particularly in the writings of commentators contemporary with the movement[s]" (22). As with realism, the quality of "naturalism" is "a conditional and continually changing criterion" (Innes 4), which depends largely on the tastes and expectations of a given historical period. Dan Rebellato defines Naturalism in a late-nineteenth-century context as a "European movement […] marked by a realistic representation of contemporary life, in acting, writing, and mise-en-scène, with an emphasis on revealing the darker corners of social experience not usually acknowledged in bourgeois society" (418).

or past events, often entirely without recourse to a verbal summary or lengthy provision of information to the audience. As such, Ibsen actors need a *triple* consciousness: to be aware of self and character, but under the rubric of "character" to present to the audience the duality of the character herself. Many of Ibsen's creations, that is, present themselves in a very particular way to the other characters within the world of the play: the actor must present this aspect of the role as well as the psychological depths which she deliberately keeps from others within the drama. The actress Janet Suzman, treating Hedda Gabler specifically, divides this element of the actor's triple consciousness into progressive layers: "Not only must the actress present Hedda, whose inner scenario is awfully strong, but Hedda herself must present Hedda Gabler's outer scenario, which is equally strong" (129). Suzman goes on to specify that each layer of characterization has an intended recipient: "the former is for the audience so they can identify with her dilemma, the latter for the other characters so they may be confounded by it, and thus bring themselves as characters to fruition" (129).[12]

Robins traces the element of Ibsen's writing she most appreciated to this necessity of acting a double character. In *Ibsen and the Actress*, Robins expounds on the collaborative nature of Ibsen's works, the openness of his roles—particularly the women's roles—to input from the actor. In Robins' experience, Ibsen treated the actor "as fellow-creator," and so left "some of his greatest effects to be made by the actor" (*Ibsen* 53). This collaboration, in turn, allowed Ibsen actresses some freedom from the more conventional control of the stage by the actor-manager.[13]

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[12] Cima notes that Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hedda Gabler* at the Stockholm Royal Dramatic Theatre (June 1968) literalized this duality by using a split stage. In doing so, the production "separated the public and the private Hedda, thereby encouraging the actor to play these fictive actions separately" (*Performing Women* 45). Cima suggests that Bergman's choice limits the psychological realism of the performance, based as this psychology is in Hedda's duality, her "motivation within her private melodrama and her action in the realistic play of which she is a part" (*Performing Women* 45).

[13] Indeed, many actor-managers turned up their noses at Ibsen's plays, calling them women's drama, and complaining of a lack of parts for themselves (Peters, *Shaw* 77).

When Robins and Marion Lea were preparing the English stage premiere of *Hedda Gabler*, she recalls in "Wither and How," they deliberately followed Ibsen's cue. They meticulously dictated scenic design and blocking where it could be made to adhere to Ibsen's own directions, but otherwise "made a great merit of leaving a margin for the actors themselves to move freely in – just so they didn't contradict Ibsen" ("Wither" 5.95).[14]

Notwithstanding these hints of and gestures towards the intellectual work which goes into each of her performances, Robins, like Stella Campbell, does not explicitly narrate her performance theory in her memoirs. In a letter to Florence Bell from Brighton postmarked 8 October 1892, however, she writes of her art as a "disease" (MSS 002.7.194.9 f. 5). Robins opens the letter by aligning herself with the character she has been playing in Brighton: "I've been rather Hedda-ish the last few days [and] not very Lisa-like at all" (f. 4 verso). While this statement retains an element of dual (or triple) consciousness, Robins goes on to chronicle the physical effects of this association: effects which suggest a marked opposition to the out-of-body experience of Kemble's dual consciousness or even the triple consciousness necessitated by Ibsen. "I tore my finger in the 3rd Act on a nail," she writes;

> I never knew it till the blood poured down. Now do you mean to tell me this is a state of health? It may pass for Art but it[']s perillously [sic] near *disease*! A kind of extasis – if I were a nun I sh[d] see visions I suppose. I think it[']s some kind of nervous *disease* that descends upon one with the grasp of such a part. (ff. 5 and verso; original emphasis).

Robins' absorption into the character comes with very real physical consequences, the kind of physical consequences Kemble guards against through dual consciousness. Finally, she characterizes her state as one of "possess[ion] – some mocking half-pathetic demon gets into me

[14] Thomas Postlewait notes that Ibsen was among the first playwrights to include such extensive and detailed information on staging (*Prophet* 72-74).

[and] whirls me along without help or hindrance from me" (f. 5 verso). Robins implies here that in playing Hedda she enters fully into the character, losing consciousness of her self: and the physical injury she suffers supports the implication.

This narration of her entire absorption into the character she plays, to the extent that she "know[s] quite well [she is] not E.R. anymore than the Queen Victoria" (f. 5 verso), stands in distinct contrast to the way she writes of Hedda in her memoirs and in *Ibsen and the Actress*. In these later, reflective texts, Robins writes of Hedda as a separate creature, as if she had thoughts, agency, and meaning in her own right. Revising Edmund Gosse's initial translation, for instance, Robins works specifically to find Hedda's original meaning, rather than the meaning of Ibsen's Norwegian text ("Wither" 5.103). Directly contrasting the letter's suggestion of possession, Robins describes the process of revising Gosse's translation as if she writes herself into the part ("Wither" 5.12). As she writes her own translation, that is, Robins discovers the intersection of Hedda's meaning and her own; this intersection becomes the basis of the character she will play on stage. The process of characterization, then, echoes the collaboration between playwright and actor Robins theorizes as intrinsic to Ibsen's appeal. Far from suggesting possession or illness, Robins' published theory of characterization posits an intersection, a co-dependence, and a moment of productive collaboration.

The apparent discontinuity between the theory of characterization Robins suggests in her private letter and the theory she fabricates for public consumption illuminates the implied strategy of her writings. In the self-making she practices through her published work, Robins maintains a distance between her writing self and the self she creates. She heightens this sense of distance by discussing Hedda as if she were a separate creature, with agency and the ability to ascribe meaning to the words that form her play. In the theory of characterization Robins

includes in her memoirs, acting a character creates a 'not-I' in the same way that writing, here, creates another "E.R." On the one hand, this ascription of a 'not-I' identity to the on-stage character and to the created self of memoir emphasizes Robins' use of the self-making project in her memoirs to protect her own privacy. On the other hand, Robins' comparison of herself to a nun experiencing visions links this possession to something experienced only by extraordinary, unique individuals. In many of the political speeches collected in *Way Stations* (1913) Robins notes that "the Exceptional Woman is one of our chief obstacles" (70; see also 14, 53, and 347-348). Conventional focus on the extraordinary, that is, erases the common woman's experience. While she may have thought, in her private writing and in the immediate aftermath of performance, that she—and she alone—was being possessed by Hedda, and thus was "Exceptional," by the time she comes to write her memoirs for publication, her thinking has turned toward the universal and away from the individual.[15] If, as Robins makes a point of noting in her memoirs, "Hedda is all of us" (*Ibsen* 18), the character is, in fact, a universal experience, an Everywoman. Robins' shift, then, from narrating her process of characterization as possession to narrating it as a collaborative act between women, echoes the shift in her thinking over the three decades that separate the two periods of writing.

The detail of Robins' writings stems from her extensive use of her own diaries.[16] She makes this debt clear throughout her memoirs, constantly quoting from or referencing her daily records. Robins does, however, consider noting a telling gap for the years directly at the centre of

[15] Similarly, Robins published one of her last works, *Ancilla's Share* (1924), anonymously specifically to ensure that her writing would "be heard as the voice, not of one but of many" (*Ancilla* xlv).
[16] W.L. Courtney identifies this authorial use of a personal record as a particularly "feminine" method of writing. Courtney suggests that "the beginning of a woman's work is generally the writing of a personal diary" (xiii). These personal reflections then "colour all that she writes" (xiii), in contrast, in Courtney's reading, to the "wise impartiality towards all his puppets" of a male author (xii). Judy Simons, similarly, reads the diary as a "female form" which women writers use both in "drawing on it as substance for their own public writing and retaining it as a mechanism in their own lives in its traditional role as therapy, consolation and a means of expression of their own divided sensibility" (15).

this narrative. In one of the drafts of "Wither and How," Robins has first edited and then entirely crossed out the following passage (I provide the edited version): "The bound diaries with their gaps, and blank pages etc. come altogether to an end with 1890. There are only loose leaves covering part of '91 and '92. The first entry in 1891 is Jan. 12th – once more to be for me a land- or, rather, a time-mark" ("Wither" 4.90). The next draft cuts this statement down to a mere marker of the year and the significance of the day: "1891 began with recording the anniversary of my marriage. January 12th was, in a minor way, to be once more a land or rather a time-mark" ("Wither" 4.76). Throughout the memoir Robins implies the truth of her self-presentation through its basis in her daily records. In omitting this admission of a lack of source material for a period in the years covered by the memoirs, she continues to claim the authority of immediacy granted by her use of her diary entries, even in recounting events for which she has no contemporary record.

Robins also, however, notes in "Wither and How" the failure of both diary and memory, hinting—as she does not do in the published *Both Sides of the Curtain*—at the potential unreliability of some of her text. The memoir and diary both chronicle in highly euphemistic terms the events that led to Robins and her brother Vernon leaving their lodgings at Culworth Street, but Robins notes in "Wither and How" that "the diary, intermittent here, does not tell, and I have no recollection of our goodbye to Culworth Street" (4.65). The silence necessitated by a lack of memory and the lack of a contemporary recording of the event marks how dependant Robins is throughout her memoirs on the diary record of events that occurred long ago. In drawing attention to such instances in which an absence of both evidence and memory forces her to skip over an event or occurrence, however, Robins also subtly suggests that every event she relates fully in her memoirs *does* have this documentary or factual basis. Noting the moments

when she cannot truthfully relate an event in detail, that is, implies the truth inherent in all the other details and events presented in the memoirs.

Robins similarly uses her diaries as source texts for her fiction, which is often more closely autobiographical than her memoirs. *Votes for Women!*, and the novel adaptation, *The Convert* (1907), for example, are faithful representations of Robins' own conversion to the suffrage cause. *The Open Question* (1898) more obliquely follows the author's experiences, clearly drawing on Robins' fears of inherited illness. The most overt examples are her two unpublished theatrical novels. "Theodora, or The Pilgrimage" follows nearly exactly Robins' early experiences on the New York stage, including very specific anecdotes from her own life. "The Coming Woman," though unfinished, clearly narrativizes Robins' own views of the actor-manager's domination of the London stage. Its title, which refers to the Robins-based protagonist, comes from a conversation Robins had with her dresser in 1890. In "Wither and How" she recalls that "'Mrs. Hannam (dresser) tells me she overheard some people coming out of the Theatre last night say "Miss Robins is the best artist there. She's the coming woman." Dear lord, how long I am about it'" ("Wither" 4.29). Both texts, like the theatrical novels addressed in Chapter Two, focus on the development of the protagonist's stage career, emphasizing throughout her purity in the face of the potential immorality of the stage and her steadfast devotion to her chosen career in the face of disapproval of her family, friends, and society more generally. In both "Theodora" and "The Coming Woman" the central Robins-based figure creates a place for herself in society by means of her stage career.

In an intriguing shift of the theatrical novel trope, the contrasted pair at the centre of "The Coming Woman," Katherine Fleet and Della Stanley, are both actresses. Fleet, the respectable ingenue, is one of the society ladies who, by the end of the nineteenth century, had begun to

make their way onto the stage. Stanley, based on Stella Campbell, appears less than respectable, as befits the stereotypical actress figure. The unfinished novel, however, implies that Stanley's immorality is merely an act, recalling Dickens's and Collins's respective depictions of supposedly immoral performing women, discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Reflecting a conventional fascination with the actress figure, Fleet is drawn to Stanley seemingly against her own will, and disregarding the more experienced actress's own warnings: "'don't mind anything I say – I'm a savage. […] It's no good though, you won't be able to stand me'" (MSS 002.7.195.15 f. 23). Like Jewsbury and Marryat, Robins emphasizes the contrast between the two central female characters. But in writing both society lady and irreverent "savage" as working actresses, Robins takes the commentary of the earlier theatrical novels further, shrinking even more drastically the expected separation of stage and society.

The connection between fiction and autobiography is central to Robins' practice; both on stage and in writing, she constantly exploits the messy permeability of the boundaries between fiction and fact, and leaves deliberate gaps or silences in which this permeability might be exploited. Robins recalls in her published memoirs a conversation with Henry Irving, which in turn reminds her of an earlier conversation with Edwin Booth: both men advocate for what they call "repose" as the cornerstone of good acting (189). In her diary entry for Wednesday 5 December 1888, she ends her recording of a similar conversation with Genevieve Ward with the succinct comment, "The value of 'Pause'" (MSS 002.1.a.2A.12 f. 158). She did incorporate this advice into her own performances, as evidenced by the sheer number of times the word "Pause" is pencilled into her scripts and prompt copies.[17] In doing so, she adapts the reliance on significant gesture of the earlier nineteenth-century stage. Joanna Townsend notes that, in the

[17] One *Hedda Gabler* prompt copy held in the Fales collection, for example, has ten instances of "pause" pencilled in for various characters, in addition to those already indicated in the stage directions (MSS 002.8.b.205.4).

various *Hedda Gabler* promptbooks, Robins "demonstrates the ways in which she combined word and action, setting the movements of her body alongside and against the spoken text in order to represent the conflicts within the character of Hedda" (107). While earlier generations of actor relied on gesture, on the speaking body, to fill vast playhouses and to ensure the emotional arc of their characterizations reached each audience member, Robins here uses specifically chosen moments of gestural language to elaborate on the characterization available through the text. In the triple consciousness demanded by Ibsen's work, Robins' carefully chosen gestures and other non-verbal elements of her performance work to "communicate a truth to the audience which cannot be seen by the society within the play" (Townsend 110). The silences which punctuate the playtext, that is, are put to use in service of the emotional characterization central to Ibsen's work.

In Robins' writings we get a sense of just how important this act of pausing, this insertion of the significant silence, is to her technique. As perhaps the most extreme example, in Robins' archive there is a piece of unpublished and uncirculated writing titled, in the archive finding aid, "Statement about the accuracy of Elizabeth Robins' account of herself," dated 16 March 1895. The piece formed part of the will Robins created when ill during the influenza outbreak of 1895 (Gates, *Robins* 84), and sets out in great detail her reliance on collaboration to create the many versions of her off-stage self. The majority of the actresses who publish autobiographical accounts claim, or at least imply, that their respective memoirs are the absolute truth. Robins, in contrast, writes:

> I think I must leave a brief record behind me for the enlightenment of the people who care for me, to the effect that it is my firm and well-considered opinion that any account of the way I have spent my life must be more misleading than true. This is especially the

> case with my own accounts. […] I must content myself with trying to warn my relations and my friends that they will not find me or any explanation of me in any one's description or in any letter or diary of my own. I have partly deliberately and partly unconsciously 'cooked my accounts'. (MSS 002.1.c.13.2 f. 1)

Robins, throughout her life, knowingly participates in a highly-fictionalized form of self-making. As such, her self-making project, taken as a whole, most closely resembles that of Lydia Gwilt: Collins's division of his novel into third-person narration and first-person diary entries, as argued in Chapter Six, emphasizes the division between Gwilt's two selves. What this narrative choice does is allow Gwilt's story an air of fact, of authority granted by her act of recording her day-to-day life and then returning to that record. As Robins does in her memoirs, Gwilt continually reminds the reader that she is recording events in order to return to them later, that she does not trust her memory and that the diary has a better claim to reliability. Piya Pal-Lapinski notes that Gwilt's diary "provide[s] evidence of [her] ability to construct [her] own narrative [and] manipulate events" in the retelling of them (111). Robins, too, relies on this kind of textual construction and manipulation to create a version of her self. Robins and Gwilt alike overtly present fictionalized selves to the world, and draw attention to that fact through their own writing.

Robins goes on to suggest that she has practiced this deliberate evasion of the truth in her writing—including in her letters and diaries—primarily "in the direction of making my acquaintances think I am happy and prosperous when in fact I am not either" (MSS 002.1.c.13.2 f. 2). What does remain in her diaries, however, is often far from optimistic, leaving the question of what she actually did in editing her archival account of herself. This editing certainly does exist: pages are torn out, sentences are either scribbled over or meticulously cut from the rest of a

page. She annotates entries and even, at points, clarifies references. Some edits reflect her ongoing work to curate her own archive, such as an 1888 letter from Oscar Wilde, where she has later pencilled on the back of the accompanying envelope, "Where is the other page or was there another?" (Add MS 81692). Similarly, as she goes over her papers she makes notes to facilitate later readers. On the opening flyleaf of her first 1888 diary, for example, appear two addresses written sideways in pencil. She has later annotated each: "this was my friend, Nina Cutter" and "her brother" (MSS 002.1.a.2a.9). The resulting archive is both "literally and figuratively […] multilayered" (Moessner and Gates x): in some files one can peel off layers of pinned-on paper to reveal passages that have been edited out or re-written.[18] John speculates that Robins "only ever revealed as much as she wanted to divulge" (182). What she does reveal, we can infer, is that which she has chosen to "divulge." What remains in her archive—and the facts which surface in her fiction—Robins has very deliberately allowed to survive, even if the purpose, in some instances, is deliberately to mislead. As Robins herself states, "to posterity the biography is indeed the life" (*Ancilla* 62). The textual version of the self, that is, stands in the place of that self after death. Robins deliberately crafts her biography to create the self—the "life"—she chooses to have remembered.

In her writing, Robins claims to maintain a deliberate silence in regards to her true self; instead, she fictionalizes, she hints at possible truths, she puts her words and experiences into the mouths of fictional characters, taunting her readers to—to borrow one of her own novel titles—*Come and Find Me*. Robins' reliance on silence in her writing also, however, parallels the significant pauses through which she builds her on-stage characters. In lauding the openness to

[18] Robins' notoriously indecipherable handwriting also contributes to the inaccessibility of some of her archive. In re-visiting her diary for September 1888 to January 1889, Robins has written in pencil above a word, "illegible?" (MSS 002.1.A.2A.12 f. 120), clearly marking the difficulties even Robins herself has in deciphering her own writing.

collaboration written into Ibsen's texts, Robins suggests that the "Pause" implied in the writing allows the actress to build character through telling looks and gestures. But such silences also allow the audience to insert themselves and their own stories and situations onto the stage, leading to such moments as the often-repeated "Hedda is all of us" anecdote (*Ibsen* 18). Significantly, such silences work in opposite ways on and off the stage: on stage, the pause builds character, draws the audience in, contributes to the illusion that the actress *is* a given character rather than (merely) acting her. In writing the deliberate silence, the elided event or reaction, the obvious absence serves to maintain a gap of non-disclosure, between the writing self and the reading audience.

Robins combines the two aspects of her technique most overtly in her 1893 play, *Alan's Wife*. She cowrote the piece with Florence Bell (though the two women steadfastly maintained their anonymity), and in its two Independent Theatre Society matinee performances, Robins played Jean Creyke, the titular character. The play begins with Jean expounding on the virtues of her perfect husband. When Alan Creyke is killed by an accident at the works, his previously perfect body mangled nearly beyond recognition, the shock leads to the premature birth of Jean's baby. Scene Two ties the baby's physical disability directly to Jean having seen her husband's mangled body, and ends with Jean smothering the child. The third scene shows various figures of authority trying to uncover the reason behind Jean's actions, reasons she refuses to reveal. As presented on stage, Robins' character would not have spoken in the third scene until her final monologue, in which she emphatically justifies her actions before being led off to await execution. In the published version of the play, however, Robins and Bell include Jean's thoughts in response to the spoken lines of the other characters. The text specifies: "Jean's sentences are given as a stage direction of what she is silently to convey" (*Alan's Wife* 23).

While the performed version would rely heavily on the actress's abilities in significant gesture, the published version equates speech and thought, giving equal emphasis to, and locating equal effect in, each.

In *Alan's Wife*, Jean's silence allows Robins and Bell to adapt more conventional methods of portraying heightened emotion on the nineteenth-century stage. Because Robins was responsible both for performing these silences and, in part, for translating them into text for publication, they provide a sense of just how expressive she intended the language of her silent body to be. Lines such as "Jean: (*silent – shakes her head*) No, I am not afraid" (23) work to "translate [Jean's] emotions into what appear to be lines of dialogue" (Diamond 84), while at the same time repeatedly indicating that her only expression comes through silence. As Renata Kobbetts Miller notes, conventional modes of expression—especially those based in verbal language—are "inadequate for communicating Jean's experience to an audience" ("Robins" 2). The heightened expression of emotional experience available through speaking gesture allows Robins, as Jean, to convey onstage a woman's experience which verbal language could not encapsulate. By including in the published version a linguistic translation of Jean's gestural and embodied representation of her emotions, Robins and Bell both "highlight […] Jean's refusal to speak" and situate this emphatic refusal as the "defiant [act] of a woman who *chooses* silence" (Gates, *Robins* 66; original emphasis). As we have seen in Chapter Five with Edith Dombey's deliberate choice of silence as a distancing tactic, Jean protects herself by not speaking her true feelings and motivations.

In conclusion, Robins' acts of self-making perfectly encapsulate the ways in which women in the nineteenth century might use the techniques of the stage in creating and presenting viable off-stage selves while protecting a private self: she "cooks her accounts" in creating a

separate character for herself just as she narrates Hedda Gabler as if she were a separate individual. Hedda, in reality, is what the actress makes of her on the stage; Robins, in reality, is what the actress writes of herself. Through her silences, on stage and in writing, Robins forms a character that is at once open to and, implicitly, immune to interpretation at the hands of her audience and reader. Her silences posit endless interpretations, all the while keeping the "true" interpretation—her true self—only a vague speculation. For Robins as for the other actresses, both historical and fictional, addressed in this dissertation, the speaking silence of theatrical self-making provides the benefits of self-help typically allowed only to men.

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