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The Cloaked Actress in *Evelina* and *The Wanderer*

BETHANY WONG

According to the *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, Frances Burney was born with an extraordinary theatrical imagination. After a trip to the playhouse, the young Burney would "take the actors off, and compose speeches for their characters; for she could not read them" (2: 168). Despite this gift, in company and with strangers, she was so grave, timid, and silent that she earned the nickname "The Old Lady" by the age of 11. As an adult, she suffered stage fright while performing in Arthur Murphy's *The Way to Keep Him* followed by Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb*. When first discovered onstage, she wrote "how *infinitely*, how *beyond measure* I was terrified at my situation," claiming that "my fright was nearly such as I should have suffered had I made my appearance upon a public Theatre" (*Early Journals and Letters* 2: 239).[1] This did not prevent her from enjoying the "great spirit" and "laughter" that accompanied the conclusion of the night (*EJL* 2: 250). Samuel Johnson, Hester Thrale, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Arthur Murphy, among others, recognized this keen ability to observe and recount theatrical scenes when they urged her to write a play after the impressive reception of *Evelina*. Though her first play, *The Witlings*, was suppressed by Samuel Crisp and Doctor Burney, decades later, Burney boldly defended her most recent theatrical venture, *Love and Fashion*, telling her father, "I have all my life been urged to, & all my life intended, writing a Comedy" (*JL* 4: 394–95).

Building on recent work about celebrity actresses by Laura Engel, Felicity Nussbaum, Gill Perry, and others, I contend Burney's construction of authorial identity recalls the professional actress's skillful negotiation between her public and private personas. Framing my reading of theater in *Evelina* with Frances Abington's portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds and in *The Wanderer* with Elizabeth Farren's prompting at the Richmond House theatricals, I identify what I term a "virtuous theatricality" in Burney's authorship that celebrates her complex appreciation for, and appropriation of, the theater and role playing. The pioneering works of Barbara Darby, Ellen Donkin,

and Margaret Anne Doody have made us attuned to how Burney's career as a playwright was constrained by her relationship with male gatekeepers, mentors, and father figures. Francesca Saggini, Nora Nachumi, and Emily Hodgson Anderson have highlighted the ways that Burney's knowledge of the theater came to structure her novels and affect her depictions of proper women and authentic feeling. All of these readings are important, for, at any given moment, Burney was an enthusiastic audience member, a reluctant actress, a shy celebrity, a dramatic novelist, and a gifted playwright. In this article, I want to examine how these roles manifest creatively in Burney's novels as heroines literally and metaphorically go to the theater to legitimize their virtue before a skeptical male audience, using the self-fashioning strategies of the actress.

The Problem of Being "No Actress"

Burney establishes the problem of the actress in *Evelina* as a problem of public perception. During her entrance into the world, Evelina finds herself cornered by "riotous" and "hallowing" men in the dark walks of Vauxhall, historically a place infamous for sexual encounters (197). They leer and laugh, calling her "the prettiest little actress" (198). These men mistake her for a prostitute, a figure associated with the actress in her willingness to sell herself for money. In conflating on- and off-stage availability, they exhibit the misogynistic underpinnings of the "world as theater" mentality. As a plea to pass, Evelina tries to correct the terrible misunderstanding, "'No,—no,—no,—' I *panted* out, 'I am no actress,—pray let me go,—pray let me pass— '" (198). The moment is emblematic of the narrative as a whole. Evelina is surrounded by people who assume she is an actress, narrowly defined as promiscuous, duplicitous, and false. They will not let her pass without an answer. She cannot say exactly who she is but only cries out what she is not.

Yet no matter how much Evelina denies association with the figure of the actress, Frances Abington looms large in Burney's first novel. Though Abington's name is never mentioned in the text, her presence, to borrow Marvin Carlson's term, "haunts" Burney's novel from the first time Evelina goes to the playhouse.[2] Insisting she has seen "nothing" in the city, Evelina writes to her guardian, Reverend

Villars: "This moment arrived. Just going to Drury-Lane theatre. The celebrated Mr. Garrick performs Ranger" (27). For Evelina, theater functions as the threshold into fashionable life. Later, we hear her ecstatic account of the evening:

> Well may Mr. Garrick be so celebrated, so universally admired—I had not any idea of so great a performer.
>
> Such ease! such vivacity in his manner! such grace in his motions! such fire and meaning in his eyes!—I could hardly believe he had studied a written part, for every word seemed spoke from the impulse of the moment.
>
> His action—at once so graceful and so free!—his voice—so clear, so melodious, yet so wonderfully various in its tones—such animation!—every look *speaks*!
>
> I would have given the world to have had the whole play acted over again. And when he danced—O how I envied Clarinda. I almost wished to have jumped on the stage and joined them. (27–28)

At first glance, Evelina has eyes for only one actor: David Garrick. He performs his role as second nature, erasing all signs of effort, leaving only the "impulse of the moment." Inspired, she wants to become an actress herself, jump on stage, and join him.

At the same time, if Garrick sets the standard for great acting by erasing the divide between acting and being, the finest actor of the night is the actress playing Clarinda. She, unlike Garrick, literally disappears into the role to the point where Evelina identifies her by no other name. Whoever Clarinda is, she is a necessary part of Evelina's reaction to the entertainment. She is at once the object of Evelina's envy—whom she wishes she could replace—as well as Evelina's inspiration—the other half of the "them" Evelina wishes she could join onstage. Frances Abington would be the first actress to come to mind for Burney's readers as the most recent Clarinda to play opposite Garrick's Ranger. After her first performance in the role, William Hopkins, Drury Lane's prompter, observes in his diary for May 23, 1776 that she was "very easy and like the Character" (qtd. in Burnim and Highfill 140). The resemblance Hopkins noted would be reflected in *Bell's British Theatre* series in which Abington and Garrick were featured on the frontispiece of *The Suspicious*

Husband for August 28, 1776, after they played the roles for the last time opposite each other on June 1.[3] Evelina's comments imply that, following the actress's example, a woman can become her role through an expert performance.[4]

Abington's omission is more notable when Evelina goes to William Congreve's comedy *Love for Love*. When the fop, Mr. Lovel, asks Evelina pointedly what she thinks about Miss Prue, one of Abington's most celebrated roles, she refuses to comment. The question invites Evelina to admit a resemblance, but instead she responds, "I think—that is, I do not think any thing about her" (83). In her letter, however, Evelina mentions that she is "very much provoked" at Lovel's question (83). Whether she is angry at Lovel's impertinence or the character's behavior remains vague. To answer Lovel's question would be to understand his implication that a woman only pretends to be innocent until given the opportunity to be otherwise. In not thinking anything about Miss Prue, Evelina raises the question of whether or not a skeptic like Lovel would allow her to think about Miss Prue or the actress playing her without forfeiting claims to virtuous transparency.

Burney was familiar with Frances Abington, her roles, and her fame. As a friend of David Garrick, a neighbor of Joshua Reynolds, and a child of Charles Burney, Burney was well versed in the performers and productions of her day. Before the publication of *Evelina,* on March 23, 1775, Burney recounts a celebrity sighting of "the celebrated Actress, Mrs. Abington, walking & alone" on Tavistock Street in which she and her sister followed the famous actress and watched her shop (*EJL* 2: 94). By making references to performances her contemporary readers would associate with Abington but never explicitly identifying her, Burney seems to be purposely forgetting what others were bound to remember. Abington's Pygmalion past—rising from selling flowers and singing on the streets of Covent Garden to being called the "first priestess of the Comic Muse in this country" and an ornament of fashionable society (Kelly vi)—testifies to the transformative power of theater.

James Evans has read the omission of Frances Abington in *Evelina* as an example of Joseph Roach's concept of "surrogation," the process by which culture produces and reproduces itself

through ambivalently performing the past. In his reading, Burney offers herself as a more polite and acceptable replacement for playwright William Congreve and Evelina as a modest substitute for promiscuous actress Frances Abington. According to Evans, "[r]epressing Abington's presence in *Evelina*, then, Burney resisted the perceived threat of the theater and of a theatricalized society to a women's delicacy" (166). This reading reinforces binaries between what Mary Poovey has termed the "proper" woman who writes in private and the promiscuous actress who performs for the public; the virtuous heroine with a rich interior life and the immoral actress who trades on fashionable trinkets and baubles. Underlying Evans's argument is the idea that the novel's rise depends upon the erasure or replacement of the theater.[5] I am interested in how Burney's treatment of actresses implicitly in *Evelina* and explicitly in *The Wanderer* presents a more inclusive and supportive relationship between female actors and authors, theater and novel, and fact and fiction. In not naming specific actresses, Burney demonstrates empathy for them. By considering the history of Abington's Miss Prue portrait and Farren's involvement with the Richmond theatricals, I argue that the allusions to actresses in Burney's novels are not attempts to forget them but to suggest ways that Burney is strategically aligning herself with them.

The Actress with Two Faces

To move away from a conceptual model in which the novel and the female author compete against the theater and the actress for primacy, we must consider that Abington herself had a nuanced understanding of what it meant to perform before a skeptical audience. This is exemplified in the display history of her portraits. Though fans recognized Abington for playing Congreve's character, Miss Prue, contrary to popular belief, Reynolds did not exhibit *Mrs. Abington as Miss Prue* at the Royal Academy in 1771.[6] In fact, the provocative image was not widely known or disseminated until 1822, years after the actress's death.[7] Instead, based on eyewitness reports of the exhibit and promotional advertising, Reynolds sent a more modest portrait to the exhibition, simply listed as "Mrs. Abington."[8] The contrast between these two images is stark.[9] In *Miss Prue*, which

currently accompanies Abington's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and features on the cover of the *Longman Anthology of British Literature*, Abington boldly faces the viewer as she leans over a chair back with her left thumb resting provocatively on her lower lip. In the words of Gill Perry, examining how the visual imagery of Georgian actresses helped professionalize the theater and the consumption of fine art, Abington appears "ambiguously coquettish" (119). *Mrs. Abington*, on the other hand, presents a chaste view of Abington. Pearls adorn her hair. Her elegant white satin cloak and white gloves emphasize her status as a proper woman.[10] Not only is she looking away from her audience, she seems to have forgotten that an audience exists. She embodies virtuous theatricality.

In "The Bagatelle: a poem" from the *Public Advertiser* in 1771, an anonymous poet plays on this discrepancy between what is seen in *Mrs. Abington* versus what is known about the sitter. What results is not an endorsement or rejection of the actress, but rather a commentary on how selves are made, presented, and marketed. The poem begins with the narrator "stupidly perplex'd" and abandoned by his "vagrant Muse" ("Bagatelle" 10, 4). Looking for a distraction, he ventures to Pall Mall and steps in to view the pictures:

> When lo, on Abington my Eyes,
> Were riveted with great Suprize;
> And I was much inclin'd to chide,
> The Man who dar'd,
> A Form so elegant to hide. (34–38)

He complains that the artist has "hid" or cloaked Abington's "elegant" form from view, referring not only to the literal cloak Abington wears but also to the idea that the actress is not fully legible to the viewer. Suddenly, the narrator finds himself face to face with Thalia, an allusion to Abington's embodiment of the comic muse in Garrick's *Jubilee* and in Reynolds' *Mrs Abington as the Comic Muse*. She invites the narrator to comment on the "muffle" in the portrait before enlightening him as to "her Design" (42, 45). Curiously, Thalia neither refers to herself as Abington nor claims the first-person "I" throughout her account of the portrait composition. Instead, the ambiguous pronouns in "The Bagatelle" show the actress playing among her roles as comic muse, portrait sitter, professional

performer, and fashion icon. In this vein, she recounts the details of her sittings with Reynolds:

> Know then, my Pupil,—artful Gipsy!
> With Praise and Adoration tipsy,
> Has been inform'd by Lover, candid,
> Nature in her, cou'd ne'er be mended,
> And doubting lest his Art shou'd fail,
> Reynolds she cry'd!
> Hide me good Reynolds in a Veil
> A Veil—no, no—I did but Joke,
> Change it at once into a Cloak. (48–56)

Given the number of Abingtons who exist in this poem—the portrait, Thalia, and the sitter—we witness a professional woman who expertly plays many parts. The portrait emerges as a result of a debate about physical and metaphorical veils and cloaks. Since nature "cou'd ne'er be mended" in her, she cannot fully trust Reynolds's artistic skill to do her justice. Though she may confidently "mimic" in the gallery for all to see, when it comes to her portrait, she insists on both appearing unveiled in her own character and limiting access to that same character through a cloak. The narrator notes that Reynolds accepts these terms as he realizes that "Beauties least expos'd to View / Are gaz'd a[t] like a Comet" (74–75). In this formation, the cloak functions as an invitation for the viewer to gaze more intently. By raising curiosity about the subject and causing viewers to pause, the object meant to conceal manages to newly reveal aspects of the sitter (as well as her painter) to the viewer.

Challenging the difference between nature and artifice, in "The Bagatelle," Abington identifies the self as a theatrical role. The imagined conversation where Reynolds invites the actress to don a mask doubles as a commentary on the problem of acting before others:

> Goddess, what think you of a Mask?
> Those Eyes wou'd shine with double Lustre.
> With Pocket Glass she 'gain to adjust her,
> "Call'd up a Look," and told Carmine,
> The Idea in itself was fine:
> But through Disguise she should be known,

Therefore in Propria Person,
For once, she wou'd amuse the Town. (104–11)

Insisting that "through disguise she should be known," Abington argues that to appear as herself would be more of a disguise than if she appeared in character. This message is reinforced in the *London Magazine*'s engraving and biography of Frances Abington from March 1771, which served to advertise the portrait of *Mrs Abington* prior to the opening of the Royal Academy Exhibition. The engraved image shows the actress in the same cloak but smilingly facing the audience at an angle (as opposed to the full facing of the *Miss Prue* portrait). Like the staged conversation with the actress in front of her portrait in "The Bagatelle," this anonymously written account highlights Abington's adeptness at playing to an audience. Against what viewers would have known about Abington's checkered past, the biography reinforces her modesty and chastity. Using the language of fiction and the rehabilitated novel after Samuel Richardson's *Pamela,* the author of the article consistently refers to Abington as "our heroine" and ends with a rousing defense of Abington's private life, which is "so strictly under the guidance of circumspection and decorum" that only "malice and envy" in her critics can produce the "daily but fruitless efforts to descry some reproachable part in her conduct" (*London Magazine* 117). In other words, despite Abington's public reputation for sexual availability, the author of the memoir, like the painter and engraver of *Mrs Abington*, argues that the respectable Abington is "no actress" by *Evelina*'s gentlemen's standards.

The many faces of Abington—Clarinda, Miss Prue, Thalia, and Mrs. Abington, to name a few in *Evelina*—give us new ways to consider Burney's and Evelina's struggles to identify as women who can act rather than only be acted upon by others. This in part explains Evelina's fraught relationship with her maternal inheritance as represented by her theatrical grandmother, Madame Duval, and her absent mother, Caroline Belmont. Duval's sudden appearance renders Evelina "amazed, frightened, and unspeakably shocked" before she sinks "more dead than alive" into Mrs. Mirvan's arms (*Evelina* 53). Immediately, Evelina tells Villars that she wants to draw a "veil" over the "cruel" scene, invoking Abington's protective

cloaks and veils to shield herself from public view (53). As Margaret Anne Doody and Emily Allen have noted, Madame Duval reminds us that Evelina was born into the theater. In the words of Doody, Madame Duval possesses "all the traditional larger-than-life qualities of the stage dame" (50). Allen points out that Duval's "overt performativity" makes her "the exception that proves the rule" in a novel where "Nature supposedly reigns supreme" (Allen 44). Abington's self-fashioning makes sense of Evelina's attempts to both divorce herself from and yet feel compassion for Madame Duval. During Captain Mirvan's cruel joke that lands the distressed, angry, and frightened Duval in a ditch, Evelina is accosted by Willoughby and cries, "pray leave me, pray go to the relief of Madame Duval,—I cannot bear that she should be treated with indignity" (147). This response anticipates Evelina's response in Vauxhall when, once again faced with a theatrical problem, she cries, "For Heaven's sake, Gentlemen, let me pass!" followed by "I am no actress—pray let me go—pray let me pass" (197, 198). In light of her family connections, Evelina's refusal to speak openly about the actress at *Love for Love* now seems a necessary step for self-preservation. Even the open claim, "I am no actress" becomes a challenge not to actresses, but to the audience members like Captain Mirvan and Willoughby who would reduce the meaning of "actress" to a sexual plaything rather than a skillful artist.

Following Abington's claim in "The Bagatelle" that it will amuse the town best if she appears "in propria persona," we see how the explicit attention to female absence in *Evelina* highlights a desire for female presence and acknowledgement in Evelina's final recognition scene with her father, John Belmont, when she is mistaken for her mother. The letter Evelina carries from Caroline Belmont encourages this confusion. Caroline writes hoping that Evelina's "resemblance of the wretched Caroline" brings back the memory not just of her but of "the image" of her (339). When Sir John finally sees Evelina, it is difficult to know whom he sees: "My God! does Caroline Evelyn still live!" (372). He calls her the "image of my long-lost Caroline," and in a strange conflation of mother and daughter exclaims, "I see thou art her child! she lives—she breathes—she is present to my view!" (372). Sir John's recognition

forces Evelina to perform both as herself and as her mother. She has come to him to escape performance, to find her proper role and classification in society, but finds that the boundaries between being and seeming are unavoidably porous. Regardless of her intention, she must first play the wife—"never was likeness more striking!—the eye,—the face,—the form"—before she can be acknowledged as the daughter—"Oh my child, my child!" (385). In exposing the act of naming as a theatrical act, Sir John ensures that Evelina's entrance into the world ends where it begins: in the theater.

In light of the shrewd mediation between Abington's private and public faces, Burney's and Evelina's explicit and implicit claims at being "no actress" participate in a larger conversation across media about what kind of metaphorical cloaks and masks are necessary for women to thrive in a social world that has already decided what they can say and do. Like Abington's cloak, Burney's anonymous authorship not only raises curiosity and interest about the hiddenness of the subject but also stems from a worldview that the self must be performed before others.[11] As Gina Campbell observes, "[d]isguising [Burney's] writerly desire is the cost of her pact with the critics, in which she agrees that in the expectation of being read by gentlemen, she writes like a lady" (582). Similarly, Doody observes, Evelina's name invites a number of anagrams: "Evelina Anville is 'Eve in a Veil'—Woman not known, Woman obscured. But her name is also 'Elle in Alive'—Woman persisting in living" (40). Like Abington in "The Bagatelle," Evelina has many names throughout the novel yet neither gives herself a surname nor allows anyone else to give her one in the final letter, leaving the question of woman's status open. Evelina may claim that "all is over" and that her "fate is decided" (406), but the fact that her fate is also linked to that of her author and the actress suggests that woman is still veiled and cloaked from being fully or truly known.

Authorizing the Actress in *The Wanderer*

Writing for the *Quarterly Review*, John Wilson Croker famously accused *The Wanderer* of having "the identical features of Evelina—but of Evelina grown old … the eyes are there, but they are dim; the cheek, but it is furrowed; the lips, but they are withered"

(125–26). Such critical comments linking the body of the artist to her work require a return to the actress's defensive strategies for controlling her image. Burney's final novel makes explicit what *Evelina* could only imply about the ways authors and heroines imitate the actress, donning the right mask for the right audience. Anticipating Croker's disparaging remarks about aging female artists, *The Wanderer* turns to Abington's comic successor, Elizabeth Farren, in a private theatrical episode that celebrates the heroine's ability to act truly and the novelist's ability to write theatrically. Ghosted by the great performances of Abington and Farren, Burney's Juliet plays the role of Lady Townly in John Vanbrugh and Colley Cibber's *The Provoked Husband*. Unlike Evelina who successfully avoids the stage, Juliet is forced into revealing thespian talent. In *The Wanderer*, Burney makes no apologies about the close relationship between the theater and the novel. In the midst of the performance, the narrator inserts a bold commentary arguing that an author and an actor—and by extension, Burney, Juliet, and Farren—share the same goal: to "give life and meaning to every phrase" and practice and "ingenuity which beguiles the audience into an illusion, which, for the current moment, inspires the sympathy due to reality" (*Wanderer* 95).

The fact that Juliet's ascension to the stage begins with the role of prompter invites the reader to see these two integral parts on an acting continuum. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, prompters had duties resembling a modern stage manager's. Standing on the left side ("prompt side"), they cued not only the actors but also the lighting and the scene changes. According to playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, they were "the cornerstone of the building," with duties ranging from copying and distributing parts, to orchestrating rehearsals, to reading for absent performers (qtd. in Stern 274). Since their prompt books were those printed for the bookseller, there was a degree to which prompters "owned" the play.

It had been this sense of invisible power that inspired the writer, Aaron Hill, to adopt the prompter as an authorial persona. In the first issue of his periodical, *The Prompter* (12 November 1734), the narrator relates how he went to the theater one day and was struck by "an humble but useful officer standing in a corner

and attentively perusing a book which lay before him" (Hill and Popple 1). This mysterious figure turns out to be the prompter. The narrator marvels that this prompter "never forsook his post but, like a general in the field, had many *aides de camp* about him, whom he dispatched with his orders" and despite not seeming to command, has all his instructions "punctually complied with" (1). Moreover, "in the modest character of an adviser," he controlled "the whole management and direction of that little common wealth" (1). This unacknowledged master of theater becomes the model for Hill's critical voice and a part of Juliet's theatrical education.

Soon after arriving in England, Juliet finds herself in the midst of preparations for a private production of *The Provoked Husband*. Elinor Joddrell, the director, summons Juliet to the drawing room, insisting that the group is "in the utmost confusion for want of a prompter, not a soul, except Miss Arbe, knowing a word, or a cue of any part but his own" (*Wanderer* 78). Juliet, still only known as "the stranger," desires to be excused but is soon forced downstairs to the theatrical group and assumes the role of prompter (79). At first, "the constraint of her forced attendance, and the insurmountable awkwardness of her situation, made all exertion difficult, and her tones were so languid, and her pronunciation was so inarticulate" she nearly loses her position (80). This changes as she gradually forgets herself and commits to serving the production. The more everyone else becomes "absorbed in his part and himself," the more a prompter must correct "the confusion of not understanding what next was to be done" (80). Everyone looks to Juliet for direction and, filling a need, she rises to the challenge. Her "feeble and monotonous" voice becomes "clear and penetrating" (80). Her talent blossoms as she becomes able to express with the "nicest discrimination" every character, effortlessly moving "from tones of softest sensibility, to those of archest humour; and from reasoning severity, to those of uncultured rusticity" (80). Such versatility and skill draw the attention of Albert Harleigh, Juliet's future husband, as well as other prominent audience members. Only a true actress could play so many parts so well.

Juliet's reluctance to participate in the private theatrical resembles Burney's own fear of appearing as an actress before an

audience. The idea that every woman is at heart an actress haunted Burney throughout her life and intensified after the successful reception of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. In 1787, during her court years, she records an awkward night sitting in the Royal box, watching Elizabeth Farren deliver the epilogue to Thomas Holcroft's *Seduction*. Amidst the compliments paid to prominent female writers of the day, she shuddered to hear, "Let sweet Cecilia gain your just applause, / Whose every passion yields to Reason's Laws" (*CJL* 2: 123).[12] Burney's mortification at the allusion to her successful second novel, *Cecilia,* was severe: "To hear, wholly unprepared & unsuspicious, such lines in a Theatre,—seated in a Royal Box,—& with the whole Royal family & their suite immediately opposite me,—was it not a singular circumstance?" (*CJL* 2: 123). Rather than acquitting an innocent bystander, Burney adopts the position of her worst critics and sees a culpable performer who invites the spotlight. She goes from focusing on the play to immediately feeling "so astonished, & so ashamed of my public situation, that I was almost ready *to take to my Heels & run*,—for it seemed as if I were there purposely,—in that conspicuous place,— / 'To sit attentive to my own applause—'" (*CJL* 2: 124). In this scenario, the actress, the author of the epilogue, and the audience conspire against the unwitting Burney. With all eyes on her, from the King to the attendants, she wants to leave the theater, but her words suggest she does not know how. In her horror, she adapts Alexander Pope's description of Cato in Joseph Addison's play of the same name.[13] Though she comes as a spectator, she quotes Pope about a play to exonerate herself from theatrical accusation. It would seem that only way out of theater is through it.

Burney's encounter with Farren contextualizes Juliet's theatrical journey with the struggles of real-life actresses, Frances Abington and Elizabeth Farren, to secure their places in high society. In *The Wanderer*, the fair Incognita playing the role of Lady Townly resembles what Peter Thomson describes as the "tall, slim, blue-eyed and fine-featured" Farren in more than beauty (15). At the time Burney saw her, Farren was both acting professionally and supervising the Richmond theatricals. The royal family attended the performances. Farren's lover, the Earl of Derby, an avid amateur actor, lobbied with the Duke of Richmond to hire Farren as their

prompter.[14] Farren's elegance and grace, enabling her to specialize in playing genteel roles such as Lady Teazle and Lady Townly onstage, came as additional recommendations. Unlike other theatricals at the time, the Richmond House performances had no professional actors in the cast. Farren, who, like Abington, doubled as a fashionable socialite, was tasked with coaching the amateurs. According to Sybil Rosenfeld, "Farren's niche" was built next to the stage to aid her in her duties (35). It had a seat so that she could sit and prompt, but she preferred to stand, conscious of her privileged position amongst her social betters. Given that Farren was the only consistent professional in the group, it is surprising that she never appeared on stage and refused to break character as prompter. Farren's social caution recalls the portraits of Frances Abington as well as the situation with Juliet. Like Abington and Farren, Juliet navigates between her skill as an actress and her private reputation. Never wanting to assume any authority she does not have, she errs on the side of modesty, aware of her precarious role in the family.

Juliet's journey from prompter to copyist to actress in the private theater foreshadows the future role playing necessary to protect her identity and her loved ones. What the audience experiences as "the highest refinement of [Juliet's] acting" is not playing. Instead, theater offers Juliet, now known as "Ellis," a safe opportunity to be transparent about her fraught situation as a fugitive in England. Instead of "art, that strove to be displayed," Juliet draws on nature, creating a link, in the words of Emily Hodgson Anderson, "between theatricality and emotional depth" (8). Fiction enables a true self to emerge. Juliet, upon overcoming her crippling stage fright, turns her "feeble" performance into a masterpiece. With increasing courage, her performance acquires a "wholly new character":

> it seemed the essence of gay intelligence, of well bred animation, and of lively variety… Her voice modulated into all the changes that vivacity, carelessness, pride, pleasure, indifference, or alarm demanded. Every feature of her face spoke her discrimination of every word; while the spirit which gave a charm to the whole, was chastened by a taste the most correct; and while though modest she was never aukward; though frightened, never ungraceful.

(*Wanderer* 94)

Inspired, Juliet becomes inspirational. Though she acquired the script "mechanically because unwillingly," during the performance, she acquires a new vitality (90). Her motions and features speak. With such an acting partner, Harleigh cannot "fail to speak his part with sense and feeling" but is too absorbed in Juliet to perform more than adequately (95). According to the narrator, Juliet has achieved the kind of great acting that "beguiles the audience into an illusion, which, for the current moment, inspires the sympathy due to reality" (95). The night of the performance she possesses "that skill which brings forth on the very instant, all the effect which, to the closet reader, an author can hope to produce from reflection" (95). In linking Juliet's acting to writing, the narrator brings theater and novel together. A great actress, like a great author, has the power to redefine reality through her art.

When Juliet becomes an actress, we realize the extent to which the narrator has been prompting the episode and, by extension, the novel all along. The narrator ensures Juliet's ability to act authentically, to be an actress with two faces, without compromising her reputation. As a liminal figure, the narrator occupies the consciousness of actress and audience simultaneously. This enables the text to preserve the mystery of Juliet's origins but also secure her claim to be virtuous despite contrary appearances. The two-in-one effect, of being out and in Juliet's mind and therefore an audience member as well as an actress, captures the equivocal status of the virtuous woman acting on stage. The narrator allows Juliet to be most sincere when most theatrical, telling the reader "that which was regarded as the highest refinement of [Juliet's] acting, was a certain air of inquietude" derived from "her own disturbance" rather than "deep research into the latent subjects of uneasiness belonging to the situation of Lady Townly" (*Wanderer* 95).

Paradoxically, the space of the theater provides Juliet with an opportunity to say what she means. The audience sees a brilliantly moving performance of a theatrical part, but Juliet uses the role to act what she truly feels. This combination of real experience and theatrical talent ensures that for the audience, "the play seemed soon to have no other object than Lady Townly" (94). In the audience and

on stage, with Juliet and watching Juliet, the narrator ensures that the heroine acts naturally for the reader while the audience debates whether origins of her excellence are the "result of practice and instruction, or a sudden emanation of general genius" (95). When Juliet takes to the stage, the narrator remains offstage to direct the production.

This phenomenon of blurring reality and fiction from Juliet and the narrator recalls Evelina's first raptures at seeing David Garrick and Frances Abington in *The Suspicious Husband*. In *The Wanderer*, the presence of the prompter and the prominence of her book cultivates the ties between actress and author. Building on the idea of the actress with two faces, the figure of the actress as prompter illustrates the virtuous theatricality implicit in Burney's view of gendered authorship. As with the portraits of Abington and the private theatricals of Farren, Burney chooses her part according to her audience. Burney's failure to name either Farren or Abington gives her an actress's freedom to range across identities and names. The secret cornerstone of the theater, she appears in the "modest" and "humble" guise of *The Prompter*, no. 1 (Hill and Popple 2). She is the one who, "without ever appearing on the Stage [herself], has some Influence over every thing, that is transacted upon it" (2). She is a deeply literary character, one who "presumes nothing upon [her] own capacity" but has recourse to a written script from which she never deviates (2). No one can accuse Burney of "*talking without Book*" for in this case, she is the author (2). With a legacy and identity tied to her written work, she lives between her invented characters and real-life personas. Unlike an actor who knows only his individual lines, she instructs based on an understanding of the whole production. In turn, her novels invite readers to the theater, not only to the literal performances in playhouses and fine houses but also to the imaginative acts of empathizing with her characters, who function as masks and cloaks for the reader. While the first act featured Abington, Farren, and Burney's displays of virtuous theatricality, the last act belongs to us, the readers, tasked with interpreting the words and images these professional women left behind.

NOTES

[1] Hereafter, Burney's *Early Journals and Letters* will be cited as *EJL*, her *Journals and Letters* as *JL*, and her *Court Journals and Letters* as *CJL*.

[2] For Carlson, theater "is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection" (2).

[3] Given that Hannah Pritchard played the role of Clarinda opposite Garrick's Ranger more than Abington, Bell's image testifies to Abington's marketable celebrity at the time of publication rather than to a specific performance or scene.

[4] This claim comes in light of Felicity Nussbaum's contention in *Rival Queens*: "'It has been said again and again,' Allardyce Nicoll reminds us, 'that the eighteenth century was an age, not of the author, but of the actor.' The eighteenth century might be labeled more accurately, I suggest, the age of *women* in the theater and especially the age of the *actress*" (6).

[5] Similarly, Emily Allen has identified an allegory of genre in *Evelina* whereby Evelina represents the stable interiority of the novel that must "purge itself of the theatrical taint" embodied by her grandmother, Madame Duval, the English waiting maid turned rich French widow (65). For the full argument of how theater and novel compete for primacy in the print marketplace, see Allen.

[6] This idea is reflected in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity* on page 190. However, Mark Hallett proves it is likely Reynolds sent his painting, "Mrs Abington," based on written descriptions of the exhibition. See Hallett, "Experiments in Serial Portraiture" 80.

[7] According to Tim Clayton, "it was essential for an ambitious artist such as Reynolds, who wished to win international fame, to

get his paintings published in print form," supporting the idea that if Reynolds had indeed exhibited "Mrs Abington as Miss Prue" that the image would have been disseminated to the public in as many forms as possible (49). Instead of appearing at the Royal Exhibition, the Prue portrait, according to Hallett, was likely designed to be admired in private by one of Abington's admirers. At the same time, if Reynolds kept it for himself, there is a chance that Burney might have seen it since he was a close neighbor at Leicester Fields.

[8] According to Angus Trumble, writing for the Yale Center of British Art, *Mrs Abington* and *Miss Prue* were only two of the at least half a dozen portraits Reynolds did of the actress in 1771.

[9] James Evans, assuming that the Prue portrait was the one exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1771, identifies this suppression as a deliberate "act of forgetting" from Burney. However, if we consider that a different image of Abington was displayed, it necessarily changes the stories critics can tell about Burney, Abington, and *Evelina.*

[10] In 1771, the Royal Academy (founded in 1769) was still relatively new. According to Hallett, Reynolds was aware that the presence of the actress—with the "suggestion that their profession encouraged indecorous forms of behavior and improper levels of sexual freedom"—could potentially "undermine the presidential dignity of his exhibited portraits" despite being crowd pleasers (*Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* 393). After 1780, however, the tide changed and Reynolds began sending more portraits of actresses to the Exhibition.

[11] As Mark Vareschi aptly notes, most of the novels published by and for circulating libraries in the 1770s were anonymous so that "[w]hat is remarkable about *Evelina*'s anonymity is the lengths to which the novel draws attention to its anonymity…. Such attention to anonymity, against the norms of the circulating library novel, seems to be in tension with Burney's stated claims to limited ambition and modesty and indicates the difficulty of ascribing motive to Burney in order to understand Evelina's anonymity" (1153).

[12] Editor Stewart Cooke notes that Frances Burney misquotes the lines, but it is also possible that Farren misremembers or revises

the lines. The printed play text reads, "And oft let soft Cecilia win your praise; / While Reason guides the clue, in Fancy's maze" (*CJL* 2: 123). The fact that we cannot know for sure who made the error reinforces the connection between the female author, Burney, and the actress, Farren.

[13] Pope's actual lines in *Epistle to Arbuthnot* read, "Like Cato, give his little Senate laws, / And sit attentive to his own applause; / While Wits and Templers ev'ry sentence raise, / And wonder with a foolish face of praise" (209–12).

[14] Though Farren was close with the married Derby, according to Peter Thomson writing for the *ODNB*, there was allegedly "no verifiable impropriety in their constancy." When Derby's wife died, Farren married him and retired from acting. The fact that she maintained her virtuous reputation despite Derby's early protection around 1785 is evidenced by the Queen's request that Farren be in Princess Charlotte's wedding procession in 1797.

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