

“Jane Austen and Performance: Theater, Memory, and Enculturation”

[In this essay, Daniel O'Quinn examines what Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* reveals about the theatrical culture of her moment. Beginning with a reading of the characters' aborted attempt to perform playwright Elizabeth Inchbald's translation of *Lovers' Vows*, he goes on to interpret Henry Crawford's references to *King Henry VIII* in the context of a 1788 performance in the play by famed actor Sarah Siddons, whose application of her “sincere” acting style transformed the way *Henry VIII* was commonly understood by English audiences. Through the lens of these references, he discusses the relationship of theater to gender, to cultural memory, and to the reproduction of social relations.]

With the exception of a few tantalizing fragments of the *Juvenilia*, Jane Austen, unlike Fanny Burney, did not write plays. However, in recent years, two full-length studies have demonstrated Austen's deep and abiding interest in theatrical representation and theatrical sociability (Byrne 2002, Gay 2002). Numerous critics have felt that the novels share certain representational strategies with the theater and with varying degrees of success have metaphorically deployed the theater as an analytical tool for understanding narrative dynamics (see Litvak 1992). But this metaphorization of the theater comes at a cost. The shift from theater as a lived social and material praxis which takes place in a specific time and place to notions of theatricality strips theater of the very elements which define its operation in the cultural field. For that reason, this essay moves in a fundamentally different direction: it asks not what the theater can tell us about Jane Austen's novels, but rather what Jane Austen's novels can tell us about the theater. The analysis will focus on *Mansfield Park*, not only because it is so explicitly concerned with the theater, but also because so much of the criticism which addresses Austen's theatricality lives and dies on its ability to offer insight into what is at stake in that novel's complex frustration of our readerly desires. *Mansfield Park* is a problem text in the best senses of that term and I will argue that much of the difficulty it poses is integrally related to complex transformations in the lived practice of the theater that ultimately impinge on the question of cultural reception.

Aside from broadening our understanding of cultural production and reproduction, especially among women, recent scholarship on Romantic theater has revolved around three key propositions. First, the social practice of going to the theater underwent a radical change in the early nineteenth century. With the emergence of illegitimate venues, the spatial and social dynamics of playgoing were diversified (see Moody 2000). Second, as a result of the drastic expansion of venues and the diversification of audiences, theatrical practice itself went through a period of extraordinary innovation and experimentation. Whether it be in the realm of set design, acting style, playwrighting, or even management, audiences were confronted with new and often competing representational modes. And finally, despite, or perhaps because of, all this change, theater remained the central popular medium of the era: it constituted the primary locus where representation and sociability came together on a nightly basis. As it had for much of the eighteenth century, the theater operated in the realm of culture much like movies and television do now. It was the only cultural practice which was dealt with on a daily basis in the newspapers. And it provided social and cultural fodder for that all-important Austenian communicative act: conversation. Yet even with a sense of the centrality of theater to Georgian society, it is difficult to write the preceding sentence without immediate qualification, because the question which remains unaddressed, and perhaps unanswerable, for various methodological reasons pertaining to the transience of theatrical and conversational performance, is precisely what theater does to its audience and by extension to a society.

If analysis is confined to London theaters, one can argue that the entire theatrical enterprise is involved in a complex form of autoethnography. Even in productions which appear to have little or nothing to do with everyday life, the audience is summoned into a set of relationships both among themselves and in relation to the play which allow for a continual evaluation and valuation of their lived experience in the metropolis. If we grant that the social experience of theatergoing opens onto a sense of being in a space together at a particular moment in time, then this autoethnographic imperative has the potential to take on a totalizing force when metropolitan culture is exported to the provinces and the colonies. There is ample evidence of such a potential subsumption of local culture in the newspapers. Papers as far away as Bengal regularly reprint reviews of London plays. Since readers in Bengal will not be attending these productions, what is elicited in these reviews is a stance towards representation itself that attempts to replicate the sociability of the metropolitan audience. In short, model forms of sociability which cohere

around acts of representation are here put into motion, much like the stagecoach in volume three of *Mansfield Park*, and the resulting permeation of provincial and colonial society plays a crucial role in the formation of national character.

Within the British Isles, this permeation is extremely powerful, but it is important to recognize that this dissemination of cultural materials generated moments not only of ideological alignment, but also of varying levels of resistance (see Kruger 2003, Moody 2007). We know from Austen's biography that she not only saw plays at both legitimate and illegitimate venues in London, but also regularly attended plays in Bath which either repeated, with a difference, successful productions from London, or had a critical relation to this flow of cultural capital (see also Byrne 2002: 29–67). We also know that play texts, reviews, and paratheatrical texts such as theatrical biographies and reminiscences flowed through the proliferating avenues of commercial print culture. Paula Byrne has demonstrated that Austen was an enthusiastic participant in private theatricals (2002: 3–28). In this context, private theatricals constitute an important locus for enquiry not only because one can track this cultural permeation among elites which themselves flowed between town and country, but also because the emergence of commercial patent theaters in provincial centers forces one to reevaluate the relationship between theatrical production and the “audience” in ways that open onto questions of cultural reproduction (see Russell 2007, Rosenfeld 1978).

The Immortality of a Twelvemonth

The most famous engagement with questions of theatrical production in Austen radically limits the question of reception as a social experience. Edmund and Fanny are terrified by how the Bertrams' production of Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* might be received by the neighbors, but the production is famously interrupted before the first full rehearsal. In doing so, the novel both raises the question of how the private theatrical might play in front of an audience and offers an analysis of the experience of being a performer. However, the former question is put aside in favor of a different one, which fragments and isolates reception itself: how does Fanny feel when she watches/participates in the rehearsal of Edmund and Mary's scene? Austen's analysis of Fanny's multiple erotic affiliations in the passage is extraordinary, but the field of meaning is narrow. Fanny's experience as a participant observer is not shared with anyone other than the players (see Nachumi 2001). However rich her emotional and

aesthetic relation to the performance might be, it remains distinct from the complex experience of watching the same scene in the presence of another. And the distinction is precisely that which separates an individual reader's exploration of interiority through the novel and an audience's social exploration of sociability itself on any given evening at the theater. One can easily imagine Austen representing the social scene of performance reception in novelistic discourse—the complex interaction between Anne and Wentworth during the musical performance at Bath's New Assembly Rooms in *Persuasion* is a perfect example—but she chooses to focus on rehearsal. By frustrating the public performance and focalizing our understanding of the rehearsed scenes through Fanny, the reader's attention is drawn away momentarily from the problem of social relations in order to focus on the relationship between performance, performativity, and memory.

Mansfield Park, in its attempt to theorize theater's social operation on and among its audience, narrows the field of enquiry by focusing on Fanny's, and the closely aligned narrator's, reception of fragments of *Lovers' Vows*, which are referred to but never cited in the narrative. It is first and foremost an analytical decision in the strict sense of the term, in that it looks at one element of a larger social problematic. The problem is broken down into manageable parts which will be synthesized at a later point. The reason this is necessary is that the very question of reception is so complex. Austen is remarkably explicit about how this potential performance comes to Mansfield Park. Mr Yates's arrival at the outset of chapter 13 instantiates a compensatory desire for theater:

He came on the wings of disappointment, and with his head full of acting, for it had been a theatrical party; and the play, in which he had borne a part, was within two days of representation, when the sudden death of one of the nearest connections of the family had destroyed the scheme and dispersed the performers. To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford ... which would have immortalized the party for at least a twelvemonth! And being so near, to lose it all, was an injury to be keenly felt, and Mr. Yates could talk of nothing else. Ecclesford and its theater, with its arrangements and dresses, rehearsals and jokes, was his never-failing subject, and to boast of the past his only consolation. (*MP*: 121)

Mr Yates's theatrical aspirations amount to a desire for momentary fame, specifically in the society columns of the newspaper and in the conversations of "the TON": he seeks the immortality of a twelve-month which is ostensibly guaranteed by theater's place within the social. On the one hand this marks his shallowness, but on the other it also indicates precisely why theater as a social experience was so important. The members of the Bertram household are receptive to his endless stories about failed performance, because they allow for a rehearsal of the social relations which surround theatrical performance. Yates's reminiscences activate a desire among the Bertrams to relate to representation and each other in what amounts to a ritualized performance of sameness, which rehearses the past but nonetheless opens onto an experience of the future—that is, the relationship between Maria and Henry, which tellingly repeats itself in more consequential form late in the novel. By taking up Mr Yates's desire, the members of the household at Mansfield Park imitate the past social practice of the inhabitants of Ecclesford who themselves had imitated key social rituals first experienced many years earlier in London around the first performance of *Lovers' Vows*. Even Edmund's resistance to the play amounts to a replication of past resistances to Kotzebue's original work. This repetition of past social practices amounts to a form of social and cultural dissemination, which relies not only on the repeatability or citationality of the play itself, but also on the citationality of social performance. What the novel recognizes is that this citationality conditions both the past and the future, and thus the *Lovers' Vows* section of the novel becomes not only a site for meditations on memory, but also the proleptic trigger which structures the future of many of the novel's characters.

It is here that the search for an appropriate play is so resonant (see Byrne 2002: 187–200). As the interested parties cast their eyes across the archive of past performances to repeat at Mansfield Park, Austen emphasizes the inextricable relationship between the iterative qualities of social performance and the act of reading. As Tom Bertram or Mr Yates read plays in search of an appropriate fit, one is forced to ask what kind of fit they have in mind. At one level, Tom's decisions are those of any theatrical manager: what script suits the particular strength and size of my company? What performance can I stage in the theatrical space at hand, and, most importantly, what will my audience want to see? The last question proves to be quite strange because it remains completely unclear who is the intended audience of the play. Mrs Bertram and Mrs Norris certainly; neighbors perhaps, but most importantly, near relations including Henry and Mary Crawford, should they choose not to perform in the play. When Tom

decides upon *Lovers' Vows*, the very play whose failure at Ecclesford instantiated the desire for plays at Mansfield Park, it becomes clear that repetition is the name of the game and that the audience for this play is composed precisely of those people who are destined to be in it. Thus Austen takes the autoethnographic imperative of Romantic theater to its logical and ideal conclusion. The manager here chooses a play perfectly suited to his players and his audience because they are one and the same.

Many commentators have noted how the characters in *Mansfield Park* both repeat and modify the roles they take up in the failed production of *Lovers' Vows*.¹ In this light it is important to remember that theatrical success is measured by repetition. It is through repetition that the theatrical experience not only generates capital, but also permeates the social. Could we not argue that one of the key problems for Austen in *Mansfield Park* is that social success—that is, the reproduction of social status, familial wealth, and local power—however transitory, is measured in a similar fashion? This would suggest that Austen's concern with the theater and the social has less to do with the internal dynamics of any particular performance, than with the way these performances repeat and thus consolidate suspect forms of autoethnography. It is important to recognize that these repeated acts of self-consolidation are aligned quite explicitly with all the characters who enthusiastically take up Mr Yates's self-aggrandizing desires. Austen's exploration of this social phenomenon operates on the level of critique, but it is a critique aimed at carving out a different relation to the culture, which always already lays out the terms in which performances will be understood and valued. In other words, could we not argue, as William Galperin does, that Austen is attempting to explore how one has to act on the past in order to generate a different future, but here locate the argument in the repetitive dynamics of performance itself (Galperin 2003: 154–79)?

This would help to explain why so much of the representation of the Bertrams' private theatricals revolves around problems of memory, precisely the faculty that, as Mieke Bal states, “concerns the past and happens in the present. Thus it can stand for the complex relationship between cultural analysis and history. The elements of present and past in memory are what specifically distinguish performance and performativity” (Bal 2002: 183). Before exploring the theoretical implications of this assertion, let's think about how pervasive the question of memory is to the production of *Lovers' Vows*. Mr Rushworth, the ridiculous manifestation of mindless Tory tradition,

1 Byrne's reading of *Lovers' Vows* (2002: 149–76) is the most detailed analysis of both the play and the casting.

is overwhelmed by the task of remembering his “two and forty speeches” (*MP*: 139). No matter how hard he rehearses he cannot get his lines and this is not simply because he cannot retain them, but rather because he cannot let go of who he is. In order to remember his part he has to forget who he is, and thus momentarily replace one version of the past—his life—with another—his experience of reading and rereading a script—in order to perform in the present. Now Rushworth may not know who he is to begin with, but his inability to remember is intimately tied to Maria’s remarkable ability to forget her engagement and her predilection to forget again and again every time she rehearses with Henry Crawford. Paradoxically, the excessive repetition of forgetting, which characterizes the almost constant rehearsal of Maria and Henry, not only drives their relationship, but also ensures that Mr Rushworth will never get his lines. He has too much to lose in this memory game.

Every performance in the novel generates identities that have iterative elements. For example, playing Anhalt inscribes Edmund in a history that he may not realize is his own, *and* his performance in the role instantiates a futurity in which he is already located. Both Austen and Mary Crawford recognize that casting Edmund in the role of Anhalt is not a distortion of his character, but a revelation that Edmund and Fanny cannot bear. The theater puts Edmund’s relation to his past into question and thus his inconstant response to it is perfectly apposite, because his relation to tradition is itself vexed. He both resists and succumbs to performance, because his job, both within the story as the second-born son destined for the clergy, and within the narrative as the mediator between generations, is essentially that of the historian who legitimates the hollow narratives which consolidate the power of landed figures as different as Rushworth and his father. His job is to forget through endless repetition all of the possibilities set in motion not only by Mary and Henry Crawford, but also by the aborted play. And yet it is precisely these possibilities—desire, adultery, fashionable sociability—that are memorialized by the novel. Austen’s most trenchant critique turns on the fact that it is Edmund, not Tom, who oversees the permeation of the dynamics of the play throughout the rest of the plot. He is the one who, because of his interlaced heterosexual and homosexual desires, keeps the Crawfords in play and thus stage-manages, in spite of himself, the denouement he will be called upon to officially forget. Mr Rushworth can’t perform his lines because he has to constantly be reminded of who he is; Edmund can’t but perform his lines because his narrative function requires that he constantly forget himself and where he came from. This is why they both need Fanny.

They both come to Fanny to rehearse because of her strange relationship to the story of landed power. Her biological family, having been ejected from the realm of elite sociability because her mother did not replicate its social and sexual script, exists adjacent to the world of *Mansfield Park* as its constitutive outside. Their explicit ties to the navy specify precisely what maintains the material conditions necessary for the social replication described above. If we understand theater as a particularly visible locus for this kind of social reproduction, then it makes sense that Fanny remains outside the play as an audience member and yet is continually called upon to assist with the act of memory required for the performance to unfold in the present. She is called upon to secure both ends of the process of social replication: she is folded, against her wishes, into both the origin and end point of the play. In spite of the fact that she consents to read the part in rehearsal, she refuses the call to act, and this gives us a very clear sense of Fanny's future in the novel. She is ultimately unable to help Rushworth or Edmund or Mary forget sufficiently to remember their lines, *and* she remembers the unperformed play too well to forget for a second how all the characters unconsciously repeat their roles throughout the story.

As an analyst of how theater permeates society, Fanny understands that the issue is ultimately tied to the complex problem of memory and its precarious relation to subjectivity. As she states to Mary Crawford during their first meeting after Sir Thomas shuts down the play and burns every copy of Inchbald's script,

There seems something more speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any of our intelligences. The memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient: at others, so bewildered and so weak; and at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond controul! We are, to be sure, a miracle every way—but our powers of recollecting and of forgetting, do seem peculiarly past finding out. (*MP*: 209)

Austen's representation of Mary Crawford's response is telling: "Miss Crawford, untouched and inattentive, had nothing to say; and Fanny, perceiving it, brought back her own mind to what she thought must interest" (*MP*: 209). Fanny goes on to praise Mrs Grant's gardening, until finally Mary Crawford states what the reader and Fanny already know: "To say the truth ... I am something like the Doge at the court of Lewis XIV; and may declare that I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it" (*MP*: 209–10). Fanny's attention to how memory operates in the social praxis of putting on

Lovers' Vows uncovers a theoretical problematic at the heart of social and cultural reproduction that is inextricably tied to memory. Mary Crawford does not accept the premise, or rather, it does not interest her, because it is precisely what most threatens her narcissism. When she states that her pleasure at Mansfield Park lies, like the Venetian magistrate at Versailles in Voltaire's *Louis XIV*, in "seeing herself there," she indicates that what most interests her about social performance is that it can operate like a mirror and endlessly present herself back to herself. In the face of the precariousness and volatility of memory, Mary attempts to close the autoethnographic loop which defines theatrical practice such that the audience and the players are all conjoined in a phantasmatic sameness. And hence she is not interested in the implicit heterogeneity of reception, or those around her, except as they can be reconstituted as mirrors for her self.

The Constancy of Siddons

The second part of Austen's analysis of theater's permeation of social relations comes later in the third volume of the novel, and in this case she focuses on the question of reception in a much more expanded temporal field. I am referring to Henry Crawford's reading of sections of *King Henry VIII* and Austen's careful rendering of the effect of his performance on Fanny and Edmund. Significantly, the choice of plays is Fanny's, but her reading of Cardinal Wolsey's speech in Act III, scene ii is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Edmund and Henry. The speech comes after the discovery of Wolsey's deception and gives expression not only to his fall from power, but also to his pride. Like the congruence of roles between novelistic characters and dramatis personae in *Lovers' Vows*, there is a certain aptness to Henry's mastery of this speech: he is, in effect, performing in a mirror. But the situation is far more complex. Fanny, one could argue, is conducting an analysis of Henry's duplicity before he arrives in the room. The Shakespearean text is a site for thought. More importantly, Henry proves himself a master of all the roles in the play:

The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell, all were given in turn; for with the happiest knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing, he could always light, at will, on the best scene, or the best speeches of each; and whether it were dignity or pride, or tenderness or remorse, or whatever it were to be expressed, he could do it all with equal beauty.—It was truly dramatic—His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her

again; nay, perhaps with greater enjoyment, for it came unexpectedly, and with no such drawback as she had been used to suffer in seeing him on the stage with Miss Bertram. (*MP*: 337)

Henry's virtuosity has historical effects: it reminds her of his earlier rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows*, only it is repetition with a difference, because it does not replicate the social relations which so overdetermined her reception of Inchbald's play. In the context of what has previously been stated about memory as mediation, how do we understand the "unexpected" quality of Fanny's pleasure? It would appear that somehow in this scene of reading the transmission of culture ruptures the temporal continuum and speaks in a way distinct from its initial historical context.

I think the answer lies in the choice of theatrical text. Samuel Johnson, arguably Austen's favorite author, argued that "pomp is not the only merit of this play. The meek sorrows and virtuous distresses of Catherine have furnished some scenes which may be justly remembered among the greatest efforts of tragedy. But the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Catherine" (Johnson 1959: 152). It was with the backing of this opinion that Sarah Siddons took up the role of Katherine in 1788 and fundamentally altered the production history of the play. Prior to Siddons's performance in the role, the productions paid little attention to the suffering Queen and focused instead on spectacle and the homosocial rivalry among the male characters. Siddons's powerful performance of the Queen's marital resignation reoriented the play such that it became, henceforward, an exploration of the perils of normative femininity.

Summarizing much of the contemporary response to Siddons's performance in the role, Hugh Richmond demonstrates that her understated performance of noble suffering amounted to a kind of protonaturalism. As he states:

Siddons was not noted for a sophisticated histrionic technique, but for a compelling authenticity of personality which can only be called "sincere" in the same subjective spirit as the modern Method. There was no way that other performers could avoid attuning their acting to the intensity of her interpretations. (Richmond 1994: 51)

In other words, Siddons's performance of sincerity demanded similar styles of performance from the other players, thus her intervention in the role reoriented the entire representational paradigm. Significantly, contemporaries recognized that the effect of sincerity blurred

the line between player and role; here is Thomas Campbell: “there is a strong resemblance between the historical heroine and her illustrious representative. They were both benevolent, great, simple, and straightforward in their integrity; strong and pure, but not prompt in intellect; both religiously humble, yet punctiliously proud” (cited in Richmond 1994: 148).

Siddons’s proto-naturalism is both an example of the power of a player to significantly intervene in the cultural and social field, and a historical mystification of the notion of “sincerity” itself, which has been central to much of the criticism of *Mansfield Park* (see especially Trilling 1965: 206–30). After all, the equation of player and role implies that the social is traversed by representational effects whose impact is not only tangible, but also mobile.

The transportability of something as seemingly rooted as “sincerity” is crucial for Austen, because it goes right to the heart of the process of enculturation and social reproduction that animates much of *Mansfield Park*. In the scene of reading, Austen carefully records Fanny and Edmund’s affective relation to Henry’s remarkable ability to become the roles he is representing. When asked to account for his facility in the roles, Henry attributes his acting skill to the fact that he

once saw Henry the 8th acted.—Or I have heard of it from someone who did—I am not certain which. But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is part of an Englishman’s constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct.—No man of any brain can open at a good part of one of his plays, without falling into the flow of his meaning immediately. (*MP*: 338)

The uncertainty as to whether he saw the play or not is significant, because it suggests that the cultural transmission of Siddons’s reorientation of the play is not simply a matter of private experience but rather of cultural memory. But Henry is mistaken about how one comes to know Shakespeare. Despite his initial recognition of the way performance history impinges on identity, Henry tries to argue that there is something in the Shakespearean text which effectively reads itself. The shift in production history instantiated by Siddons’s reinterpretation of Katherine is ample evidence contrary to this position. It was through Siddons’s agency that new meaning was generated, and Henry’s suggestion that this is somehow attributable to a spectral Shakespeare amounts not only to an erasure of Siddons’s cultural labor, but also to a mystification of theatrical reception. And

that combination of erasure and mystification, here tellingly figured as an act of forgetting, has the notable effect of canceling Siddons's cultural agency. This perfectly captures Henry's misogyny, but more importantly demonstrates how a cultural event elicits—and has elicited—ongoing acts of resistance.

The Theatrical Reader

Henry appears to have forgotten about Siddons, but his performance, like that of her coperformers, is attuned to the intensity of her past performance. Fanny did not see Siddons, but the model of femininity propagated by her performances is so much a part of cultural memory that Fanny aspires to its combination of constancy, sincerity, and subjection. In other words, Austen plays out the effect of Siddons's performative intervention by showing the enactment of its cultural and social reproduction. Her key recognition is that her readers share this cultural memory and thus have the potential to be hailed, in the act of reading, into a critique of the entire process. Austen's silent invocation of Siddons's enactment of sincere femininity, like other silences in the novel, has the curious effect of demanding that the reader actively reconstitute that which is forgotten and in so doing replicate the very intervention encoded in Siddons's earlier performance.¹ And with that reenactment, the reader can observe the dynamics of enculturation and social reproduction.

It is around this act of readerly observation that I believe Austen synthesizes her analysis of theater's permeation of social relations. With the expectation that readers will bring their cultural memory to bear on the scene of reading, Austen calls for a historical reader. The fact that she calls for a memory of the cultural medium that is, by its very nature, transient is important because she wants to highlight not only how representation inheres in and propagates through social relations, but also how understanding this process requires a relation to memory that is fundamentally more self-reflective and complex than that presented by Fanny. Fanny's relation to history—whether it be the history of the slave trade or of the theater—is largely mediated through books and she generally fails to elicit knowledge from conventional ethnographic informants—those who have seen slavery or the theater such as Sir Thomas, Tom, or Henry—or Edmund for that matter. As we have already seen, these men have too much of a stake in forgetting to be of much use.

1 See Pascoe (1997: 12–32) for a bracing discussion of Siddons's place in the cultural memory of Romanticism.

So Austen, by her very reticence, activates the cultural memory of her readers throughout her treatment of *Lovers' Vows* and *King Henry VIII*. The choice of materials is crucial, for she puts into play two productions connected to two of the most notable women of the theater in the years immediately prior to the composition of the novel. At the very least, *Mansfield Park* requires that the reader remember who Inchbald and Siddons were and recollect their relationship to the reproduction of social and cultural value. This is particularly important when we consider that both Inchbald's adaptation of Kotzebue and Siddons's performance as Katherine are explicitly connected to the hypostatization of "sincerity" as a fundamental trait of British national character. William Galperin has shown this to be the case in his analysis of Inchbald's treatment of Englishness in *Lovers' Vows* (Galperin 2003: 170–3). And even Siddons's contemporaries—James Boaden and Thomas Campbell foremost amongst them—recognized that her performance not only constituted a subtle reading of *King Henry VIII*, but also ensured that it would be mobilized as a prescriptive formula for nineteenth-century notions of femininity (see Richmond 1994: 36–54). Galperin and Siddons do what I believe is required to understand Austen's intervention: they read the act of reading as a process that acts on both the past and the future simultaneously. In other words, they remember in the terms suggested by Bal above.

But this relationship to memory is different than that presented in the novel. As Bal's insight pertains to the theater, it involves the evaluation and reconstitution of moments in theatrical culture as part of a self-reflective analysis of social reproduction. This historical objective ruptures the autoethnographic imperative of Romantic theater, or at least opens the loop so that autoethnography can become a productive rather than a reproductive practice. That this requires a shift out of the realm of the theater into the representational practice of the novel may be an indication of the power of performance to replicate what Arjun Appadurai refers to as the *ethnoscape*, but it may also suggest why Austen left playwrighting for the juvenilia (Appadurai 1996: 33–4). I think there is ample evidence in *Mansfield Park* that she recognized the potential for theatrical culture to manufacture tradition and regulate social relations, but one can also argue that theater in that novel is a perilous place for women, not only in the way that Lord Kenyon might suggest, but also in the way that Henry Crawford's erasure of Siddons's art and Sir Thomas's destruction of every copy of Inchbald's play demonstrates. Despite its integral place in the historical and cultural fabric of the nation, women's agency—whether they are players, writers, or readers—is

easily forgotten by the homosocial dynamics of national culture. Perhaps the transience of agency necessitates the materiality of print no less than the desire for Austen's novels to reconstitute the effect of feminine autonomy. At the very least, this would help to explain why *Mansfield Park* is less satisfying, but, in my opinion, more valuable than say *Pride and Prejudice*. The later novel underscores the power of forgetting and fully demands that the reader remember that which they may not have known—that is, the ideological forces that reproduce the means of social and cultural production.

(2009)

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1 This article originally appeared in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Blackwell, 2009), where all references were compiled into one bibliography for the full volume. This list has been modified to include only references relevant to material reprinted here.

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