

Spring 2012

The Lady Showroom: Optical Representations in the Works of Joanna Baillie and Louisa Stuart Costello

Katherine Richards

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THE LADY SHOWROOM OPTICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE WORKS OF
JOANNA BAILLIE AND LOUISA STUART COSTELLO

A Thesis

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

By

Katherine Richards

May 2012

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Katherine Richards

2012

THE LADY SHOWROOM: OPTICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE WORKS OF
JOANNA BAILLIE AND LOUISA STUART COSTELLO

By

Katherine Richards

Approved March 20, 2012

Dr. Laura Engel
Associate Professor of English
(Committee Chair)

Dr. Dan Watkins
Professor of English
(Committee Member)

Dr. James Swindal
Dean, McNulty College and Graduate
School of Liberal Arts

Dr. Greg Barnhisel
Interim Chair, English Department
Associate Professor of English

ABSTRACT

THE LADY SHOWROO: OPTICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE WORKS OF JOANNA BAILLIE AND LOUISA STUART COSTELLO

By

Katherine Richards

May 2012

Thesis supervised by Dr. Laura Engel

Much women's writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries attempts to depict other women visually through textual description, use of optical devices, and discussion of bodies and appearances. This thesis argues that they were trying to see and show other women as a way of understanding themselves and each other by examining intersections between visual culture and text through mirrors, miniatures, and portraits. This thesis demonstrates how these works reflect larger shifts in the optical unconscious of the eighteenth century. I focus on works by Joanna Baillie and Louisa Stuart Costello, who theorize the viewing process in their prose and manipulate the viewing process in their drama and poetry, respectively. By manipulating the gaze these authors show readers new ways of seeing women, and subsequently, themselves, and

seek to make them conscious of their optical unconscious; their works become the optical devices that allow this to happen.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Pam and Milani Richards—without their love and support none of this would have been possible. I would like to thank my mother for showing me what strength means. And I would like to thank my dad, specifically, for pointing to a black and white screen when I was only a child and telling me to “watch how she moves”—without this, I would have never known of a Lady Showroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis, as all projects of this sort, took more effort, strength, and time than I could have ever realized it would. As with any arduous task, I had many people without whom there would be no thesis. Naturally, I would like to start by thanking my director and advisor, Laura Engel, for suggesting I do the thesis; for contributing to the process at every level, from recommending reading and research material to discussing the footnotes; and, perhaps most importantly, for being flexible when I needed. I would also like to thank Dan Watkins for reading and providing helpful suggestions, in addition to being truly encouraging and supportive. However, I owe him the biggest thanks for introducing me to Louisa Stuart Costello. I would like to thank the English Department, staff of the Gumberg Library, and all persons involved in making sure this document was formatted and submitted correctly. Additionally, I would be remiss if I did not thank the many friends, family members, professors, and colleagues who have contributed to this thesis through informal advice and general support. I would like to thank Blake, specifically, for making me laugh despite myself and for reminding me of the deep love of learning.

This thesis, in many ways, has been born out of strife and pain. Without these next three people, it would have never been completed, at least not by a halfway sane person. Thank you to my sweet Glamarys for always listening especially when things are harder than I expect; for making me laugh about my work (and everything else) even when I hate it and making me experience *true joy* even when I think I can't; and for being the steady stream in which I have always sought relief. Thank you to my lovely Donna

for being the true reason why I thought I was capable of this and why I ever think I'm capable of any of it; for reminding of *who I am* and what I love; and for continually letting me drift only to remind me that I can grab the rudder whenever I wish. And last but certainly not least, thank you to my dearest Melissa for countless editing, theorizing, reading, and essential teaching sessions; for understanding me when I can't and hearing me when I don't say anything; and for always exploring the waters *with me* to discover and create worlds neither of us would see without the other—in many ways, this thesis is as much yours as it is mine. And to all three of you: thank you for functioning as the optical devices through which I am able to glimpse Beauty—in this life and all the others.

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Introduction

In Volume 1 of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we are presented with a picture of female friendship through the eyes of Victor Frankenstein, whose story of course is ultimately being told through the voice of Robert Walton. This relationship is between Victor's fiancée, Elizabeth, and her housekeeper Justine. Justine has gone on trial for a murder she did not commit, and Elizabeth is distraught because her friend will hang for this crime. In part of their conversation in Justine's prison cell Elizabeth expresses affection for her in a way that gives us an interesting picture of their relationship. She says, "Oh Justine! Please forgive me for having for one moment distrusted you. Why did you confess? But do not mourn, my dear girl; I will everywhere proclaim your innocence, and force belief. Yet you must die; you, my playfellow, my companion, *my more than sister*. I never can survive so horrible a misfortune" (95, italics mine). Her phrase "my more than sister" expresses a level of affection she is unable to articulate. She is not just her sister; she is not just her friend; she is more than that, and, yet, there is not a word for what that is. She is not just trying to express her affection for her; she is trying to represent her, calling her "playfellow" and "companion," searching for what the word that matches who this person is to her. She is trying to depict her. "My more than sister" represents her search for a linguistic representation of this woman, but the language does not offer a specific word. In this small section, we see the character of Elizabeth attempt to represent a woman she knows and loves, but there are limitations. Moreover, we see the author, Mary Shelley, also attempting to represent this woman through the voice of another woman. However, it is done so at a distance because the story, and this section

specifically, is never told from Elizabeth's point of view. This section is told through Victor, which is told through Robert. So we literally have a female author creating a scene wherein she attempts to represent a woman, through a woman, through a man, through another man. It is as if there are lenses placed on top of this representation. We are not just presented with a female author representing a woman. We are instead given this lensed representation. While Elizabeth is looking for words to describe Justine, it is the author's attempt to represent a woman and allow us to see and visualize this relationship and this woman that makes this section of the novel an attempt to show what cannot be shown. We have what I see as a female author's attempt to visually represent another woman and, by extension, visually represent alternative ways of seeing women.

This section of *Frankenstein* works as an illustration for the types of works I will be examining in this thesis. Mary Shelley, in this section, is doing what several female authors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seek to do: represent women in a way that allows the reader to see them in alternatively. This strategy forces the author to create a visual depiction of women, and in an age where visual art and invention were increasing rapidly, this allows the author to interact with the visual culture. Examining the intersections of text and visual culture is by no means a new practice; however, I would like to examine the ways certain authors were able to use their texts to make people aware of their seeing and change that process. Elizabeth Fay has done something similar in *Fashioning Faces: the Portraitive Mode in British Romanticism*, and it is in this vein in which I wish to proceed. However, before proceeding into Fay's work it is

important to provide a picture of the visual culture and marketplace of the time period on which I will be focusing.

In terms of painting specifically, at the beginning of the eighteenth century the trend from more rigid society portraits of the Augustan age (Figure 1.) was transitioning into the more realistic “conversation-piece” becoming most associated with William Hogarth (Figure 2) (Piper 132). By the 1730s and 1740s these conversation-pieces were in vogue, and the “art widen[ed] in scope from that of portraiture into dramatic painting” wherein genuine human expression and everyday life are made the subjects of paintings (Piper 133). History paintings, “the most elevated and desirable of the genres,” waned in popularity as images of the individual became increasingly prevalent and sought after (Pointon 38). By the 1780-90s portraiture was at the height of its popularity, taking up 49.36% of the exhibits shown by the Royal Academy in 1784 (Pointon 36). Portraiture took over the visual culture, becoming “one of the greatest opportunities for social mobility of the period” for both the artists and the subject, specifically actresses (Pointon 35). Most popular of these portraitists were Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough (Figure 3). By the end of the eighteenth century portraits had left the walls of grand houses, colleges, and private galleries and entered the less than grand homes and into the hands of less than grand people with the increase in “miniatures, cameos, caricatures, silhouettes, puppetry, and portraiture ceramic ware” (Fay 10).¹

¹ The first plea for a national portrait gallery was not published until 1792 by John Opie and the National Portrait Gallery was not completed until halfway through the nineteenth century (Pointon 26, 66).



Fig. 1. Sir Godfrey Kneller, *The Harvey Family* (1721). Tate Gallery.



Fig. 2 William Hogarth. *Three Ladies in a Grand Interior ('The Broken Fan')*, possibly Catherine Darnley, Duchess of Buckingham with Two Ladies. (1736). Tate Gallery.



Fig. 3 Sir Joshua Reynolds. *The Hon. Mrs. Monckton* (1777-8). Tate Gallery.

Fay poses the idea that the rise in visual material culture, portraiture specifically, was both reflective of and produced a different way of understanding the self. Fay articulates an eighteenth century understanding of the self that “seek[s] out portraiture objects that could reflect the individual ‘I’ back to itself” and reliant on the “desire to be seen acting out one’s own scene” (4). While Romantic thought turned away from materialism and consumerism, its focus on the particulars and individuality both created and reflected a self that understood itself as singular and different--that there was something in the self that was worth reflecting back (Fay 3-6). As a result, the creation of and interaction with portraiture objects becomes an attempt to portray and see the self. However, because of the nature of portraiture objects, which do not always reflect what is seen and can be manipulated, the image of the self can be manipulated. Fay goes on to extend this interaction between the self and the visual into a process of commodification stating,

The increasingly populated world of consumer goods, which entrepreneurs creatively adapted to rising portraiture demands wherever possible, offered many objects in which the self could be too well seen. The possibility that the self was indeed an object, and could be taken as such, created an anxiety I will refer to as “thingification,” an objectification of self that is the underside of portraiture practice. To project your portrait on the world, and find yourself reflected in that world, is quite different from seeing yourself as a portraiture object (7)

Fay argues that in the late eighteenth century the way people understood each other and themselves hinged upon visual representations. Fay connects this understanding to the

rise in caricature and in so doing highlights the possibility of depiction in a society that understands itself visually, saying:

Conceptions of social character were predicated on external forms and patterns, lines that could be limned, contributing to the heady rise of caricature during the last half of the eighteenth century. A satiric genre reflective of social types, caricatures also reflected the very consumers of its visual forms, mirroring the dramatic and literary works that capitalized on such reflexive qualities. These qualities were emphasized by the social dependence on external surfaces for knowing others and on a social structure made vibrant by the friction possible between surfaces, which allowed for greater flexibility within social networks. All of this meant framing the self in terms of one's place, while understanding this place as variable (8)

What I see Fay arguing here is that because there was a dependence upon representations of others and the self in order to understand them there is the possibility to change these understandings by changing the representations. In other words, part of what Fay argues is that people in the late eighteenth century began to desire to see themselves in visual forms and--by extension to know themselves. This desire came out of the increase in visual mediums, such as, "miniatures, cameos, caricatures, silhouettes, puppetry, and portraitive ceramic ware," and further perpetuated it (10). By extension, she argues that this looking for the self opens up the possibility of alternative representations, which means alternative understandings, creating an anxiety. Fay says:

As people began to understand themselves in terms of objects they were

consuming, and to realize that in consumption objects start to accrue and signal controlled meaning, they also worried about becoming commodified objects themselves. There was a sense of being overtaken by ideology rather than being a producer of one's self-image (21)

Fay examines numerous "portraitive practices" that interact with this anxiety, and goes so far as to include literary works that she limits to autobiographies and biographies (6). In this thesis, I would like to posit that many of the modes of thinking, and more specifically seeing, that Fay addresses are dealt with in literary works of drama and poetry as well. Moreover, I would like to expand on Fay's claims by discussing the ways the authors I will examine attempt to change or construct new ways of seeing.

Before going into the specifics of how I see these authors constructing new ways of seeing, I need to define the term that I will use to name that which the authors are interacting with: optical unconscious. In order to articulate how I use this term, I will explain how it derives from Walter Benjamin's understanding and creation of the phrase. In her book *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, Esther Leslie provides a succinct analysis of Benjamin's creation of the term:

Benjamin introduces the term 'optical-unconscious' to describe a mode of perception made visible on celluloid and initiated by cameras. The 'optical-unconscious' details a reciprocity between human (un)consciousness and machinic perception (57)

In other words, the camera is able to interact with the human unconscious and bring out something in a picture of reality that goes unnoticed by the human eye on a conscious level. Benjamin articulates it as such:

A different nature speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye; most different in that in the place of a space interwoven by a person with consciousness is formed a space interwoven by the unconscious. It is already quite common that someone, for example, can give a rough account of how a person walks. But he would not be able to describe their position at the fracture of a moment of stepping out. Photographic aids...unlock this form for him. He discovers the optical-unconscious first of all through it, just as the drive-unconscious is discovered through psychoanalysis. Structural compositions, cell formations, with which technology and medicine deal--all this is more fundamentally allied with the camera than the atmospheric landscape or the emotion-seeped portrait (qtd. in Leslie 57)

It is his final point that I take contention with. Essentially Benjamin argues that the camera, specifically, makes viewers aware of a sub-layer of images, and by extension life, that they would generally miss when looking with their eyes or at any other form of visual representation. The camera, therefore, has the ability to make the viewer aware of another world of seeing they have heretofore been unaware of, providing pictures of instances or moments that generally go unseen on a conscious level, such as the “moment of stepping out.” What I would like to add is that in this period of increased visual production to which Fay refers, portraitive objects functioned like the camera Benjamin

discusses.² In the late eighteenth century, it is the ‘emotion-steeped portrait,’ as Benjamin calls it, which forces the viewer to see the optical-unconscious, or to make them conscious of it. If we keep in mind this idea of looking for the self in these portraitive objects in connection with the increase in both output and variety of visual mediums, what we find are people bombarded with new and varied forms of visual representations, new and varied forms of visual depictions of themselves.

While portraiture had been around for centuries by the late-eighteenth century, there had never been so many portraits made so widely available. The proliferation of miniatures made it possible for most people to carry around with them at least one pocket-size picture of themselves or someone they cared about. The cameo turned the face of woman into jewelry to be bought and ogled at, and the silhouette put a rendering of the self into most households as did ceramic-ware. The human face, the face of the ubiquitous self, was not just more widespread and accessible than ever--it was everywhere. As a result, there were more opportunities for people to look for themselves in portraitive objects. There were never ending opportunities to view the self, or the reflection as the case may be, in ways that had been missed. The silhouette, for instance, forced the viewer to look at an angle of the face, the side, that generally goes unnoticed or is certainly not focused on in real life, or in visual mediums. The miniature has a similar effect, forcing the viewer to look at the face or the body in smaller form, which

² It should be made clear that I am not claiming that portraiture and photography function on the same physical or visual principles. I am not claiming that portrait painting is like taking a picture with a camera, specifically in terms of Benjamin’s focus on the mechanical production and reproduction the camera is capable of. Rather, I am claiming that within their respective time periods these two visual mediums have similar effects in terms of this concept of the optical unconscious.

emphasizes proportion and general likeness rather than exact resemblance, again forcing the viewer to notice aspects of the portrait that they would have perhaps missed in a different format. On the most basic level this proliferation of new visual mediums forced viewers to look at the rendering, in whatever form, look at themselves, or whomever was the subject, and ask the question, “is that really what I look like?” or say, “I never noticed that her hands were so small.” Some of that would have been of course attributed to misrepresentation; however, even those portraitive objects dubbed as inaccurate would influence the overall understanding of the image of the self. If we keep in mind what Fay argues, the discrepancies and insights provided by a portraitive object therefore become alterations in the understanding of the self and how the self is perceived. In other words, the portraitive object has the ability to present something to viewers that forces them to automatically alter how they see themselves by providing them with a glimpse of themselves and others that they had perhaps missed, offering a glimpse of a “moment” as Benjamin calls it. These discrepancies and insights would automatically, on the most basic level, produce the question, “what else have I not seen?” And there at its simplest level is what Benjamin claims the camera does: offer glimpses that force the viewer to wonder what else they have missed. This wonder is the realization that there is a separate world of viewing we are not conscious of but that happens and influences our understanding of the image nonetheless. This is what Benjamin calls the optical unconscious and claims is specific to the camera, and while the instances of someone seeing the optical unconscious may be more prevalent with images produced by a camera, the portraitive objects of the 18th century also had this effect. I would argue that

it is not the exact nature or construction of the visual medium that allows it to give the viewer a glimpse of the optical unconscious; rather, it is the prevalence and repetition of it.

In the following chapters I will use the term optical-unconscious to refer to the world of seeing that the viewer is unaware of but is made aware of through various optical representations and devices created by the authors. Both Joanna Baillie and Louisa Stuart Costello allow us to see the optical unconscious; however, they both participate in and interact with visual culture in different ways. Baillie for all that we know did not formally participate in the visual culture by contributing artwork or invention. She participated in the visual culture as a playwright by writing scripts that would be performed and seen on the stage. Specifically, Baillie's stage directions, which are particularly detailed, create specific scenes to be viewed by audiences. This is the case with any playwright; however, if we focus on her detailed stage directions in combination with the theorizing of playwriting she does in the *Introductory Discourse* (1798) which was released first and functions as the theorization behind her *Plays on the Passions*, which is a multi-volume collection of plays addressing the various passions, was released in installments, and includes the play I will be discussing, *Orra*. In the *Introductory Discourse* we find that she emphasizes how things look and the way perception and viewing effects the audience member, or man in general. It is interesting that in terms of actual performance Baillie's plays were not successful. *De Monfort* played at Drury Lane for eight nights in 1800, and some of her plays ran in Scottish theaters, but outside of that the plays were not professionally performed (Duthie 38). In

her seminal study of Baillie's drama, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers*, Catherine Burroughs attributes this lack of theatre success partially to Baillie's retheorization of theater construction and the purpose of drama. She claims that while Baillie desired for her plays to be performed, she also was "in search of an alternative mode of staging to those that already existed for showing forth the legitimate drama in London theaters" (Burroughs 87). Baillie's desire for a different kind of theater supports my claim that she was interested in a new kind of seeing, or at least questioning what can be shown. Her plays, if viewed at all, were viewed in small spaces or in the minds of the reader not the eyes of the audience of the member. However, Baillie clearly wrote her plays in order to be performed, and as such there is a disconnect between what she wanted the audience to see and what they would have actually been able to see. In this way, we see Baillie struggle to show that which even the theatre itself does not allow her to show. While Baillie does not overtly participate in the visual culture through artwork, she does challenge the ways of seeing provided by the theater and she is clearly engaging with the visual culture with purpose on a conscious level.

In my chapter on Baillie I examine how she manipulates the viewing process in her play *Orra*. In this chapter I start by looking at Baillie's theorization of theater, and what I will claim to be her theorization of seeing, in her *Introductory Discourse*. Based on this desire to look that she establishes, I examine the play of *Orra*, and claim that the play asks us to change our viewing process and see from Orra's perspective. Specifically, I focus on a particular monologue wherein Baillie employs a stage direction, having Orra

look through a show-glass. I examine this monologue in conjunction with the two material cultural definitions of this optical device, and how this stage direction redirects the viewing of the audience to look into Orra's utopia.

The epilogue centers on Baillie's play *Witchcraft* and the character she presents to the audience but never shows them. This character is performed through other characters/actresses. By examining this performance and taking a closer look at the theories of seeing in the *Introductory Discourse* in connection with contemporary performance theorists, I claim that the play makes the audience aware of their desire to see what cannot be shown. The play emphasizes this desire ultimately allowing the audience to realize the inability of the stage to actually show the feminine body, and that it is only through a woman's own autonomous possession and representation of her body that the feminine subject can be seen.

Louisa Stuart Costello, on the other hand, does overtly interact with the visual culture through the contribution of her artwork. The archival research needed to find and document Costello's miniatures is yet to be done, and, as a result, we must discuss her miniatures only in terms of the theoretical.³ However, while we do not have the

³ I have found that the National Portrait Gallery holds an engraving of Lady Augusta Gordon-Hallyburton, better known as Lady Augusta Kennedy-Erskine, or the daughter of William IV and Mrs. Dorothy Jordan (see Fig. 4). I am lead to believe that this engraving may be based on a miniature done by Costello. Engravings were typically done from preexisting portraits or miniatures. And out of the 65 engravings the National Portrait Gallery holds for this particular engraver, Thomas Dean, only six do not list the original portraitist. This engraving of Lady Augusta being one of them. This engraving was published in 1833. According to *The Royal Academy of Arts: Complete Dictionary of Contributors Vol. 2* Costello showed a miniature entitled "Lady Augusta Gordon and child" in 1837, and in 1838 she showed a miniature entitled "William Henry Kennedy Erskine, son of Lady Augusta Gordon," confirming that her Lady Augusta is the same as Lady Augusta Kennedy-Erskine. Moreover, the engraving by Thomas Dean is not just of Lady Augusts but also features a small child, as does Costello's miniature according to the title.

miniatures themselves, we do have many examples of her work as an engraver and an illustrator of texts.⁴ One of the works discussed here, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen*, is “illustrated with her own engravings from portraits in the Duke of Devonshire’s collection” (Blain 240) (Figures 4,5,6). Because of their size and portability the engravings in the volume seem like miniatures, they mimic their functions. Miniatures were at the height of popularity at the end of the eighteenth century and their prevalence continued well into the nineteenth century: Queen Victoria preferred them to photographs (Fay 119).

While I cannot prove that his engraving is based on her miniature, there is at least enough evidence for speculation.

⁴ A beautiful example of her illustrations can be found in *The Rose Garden of Persia* (1815).



Fig. 4. Thomas Anthony Dean, Engraver. *Millicent Ann Mary Kennedy-Erskine; Lady Augusta Kennedy-Erskine* (1833). National Portrait Gallery.



Fig. 5 *Frances, Duchess of Richmond*, Illustration from *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen Volume 1*



Fig. 6 *Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke*. Illustration from *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen Volume I*



Fig. 7 *Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke, and Montgomery*. Illustration from
Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen Volume 2

When Costello would have been creating miniatures they were more common and immensely popular. They were the common man's version of the portrait, infiltrating into the minds and eyes of the masses and "had entered the public imaginary" (Fay 119). The miniature was small enough to be worn as jewelry and often was, carried in a pocket, or hung in cabinets (Fay 119). Its size and portability created a new way of seeing, an intimate and tangible way of seeing. Rather than lofty, elite bodies locked in frames on the walls of galleries and great homes, they had personal, touchable bodies tucked into bodices and lingered over night stands. The miniature created a seeing of the body and the subject that hinged on privacy and desire for "mine." However, there is also a power that goes along with the popular visual medium. The availability of miniatures made them more accessible than portraits. Therefore, the self and the body became more accessible, creating an odd paradox of possession by other and possession by the self. To be able to carry around a miniature display of oneself or another adds an element of accessibility and distance but also an element of autonomy, movement, and flexibility. The self was no longer forever stationed, if successful enough, on a wall; rather, the self was able to move and circulate--able to change positions. The miniature adds intimacy but also agency in viewing, and accessibility but also freedom. Costello was making these miniatures and very successfully. She is not just participating in but expanding the commodification of the self and the personal other. She is promoting this intimate agency and accessible freedom in her creation of miniatures. The promotion and expansion of this type of viewing is echoed in her written theorization of viewing as well, specifically

in terms of the image of woman. While we do not know if Costello focused on women specifically in her miniatures, we do see her attempt to give her reader miniatures of women in *Memoirs*. In that work, as in her poetry, we are presented with images, or miniatures of women exhibiting control and possession of their bodies and the same type of power and freedom that would have been felt when a delicate frame containing the most familiar face rested in the palm of a woman's hand.

In the chapter dealing with Costello's work, I focus on how she manipulates the viewing process through her poetry and examine how she overtly theorizes that manipulation in her *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen*. Her manipulation of the viewing process ultimately allows the reader see a power in portrayals of the feminine body that they might otherwise miss. These portrayals, in the poems, focus on women who are in mourning, commit suicide, and defy their roles in society. Costello writes the poems in a way that forces the reader to see these as powerful depictions of autonomous feminine bodies, and makes them aware of the viewing process that created this interpretation. She puts words to this process in *Memoirs*, and I examine how her use of the "avatar" articulates what she does in these poems, and how she understands the viewing of the feminine body in general. I argue that she presents a theory of an avatar, which creates an after-image in our minds that changes how we view subsequent feminine bodies, all of which we see in the poems I examine.

Both Baillie and Costello make the reader, or audience, conscious of their optical unconscious in order to construct alternate images of femininity. They, ultimately, interact with the visual culture by presenting us with new optical devices through their

texts. The texts themselves become the optical devices through which we view feminine bodies. And in that viewing, we are able to see aspects of the femininity that are there but that we miss in our every day looking. By manipulating where our eyes go and what we look at, these authors prompt us to look not just at the walls portrait gallery of women but to look at the living showroom all around.

Chapter 1

Looking In and Through the “Show-Glass”: Optical Representation of a Feminist Utopia in Joanna Baillie’s *Orra*

At the end of *Orra* the titular character screams, “The living and the dead, together are / in horrid neighbourhood...See! from all points they come...Back! Back!-- They close upon us.--Oh! the void / Of hollow unball’d sockets staring grimly,” (153-154). We follow this character, who is fascinated by Gothic stories and driven by the passion of fear, into the deep cave of madness we find her in at the end, where she screams these lines as part of a larger monologue. At the end of the play, when she says these lines, *Orra* has completely crossed over into madness and is unable to see the world as it actually is. *Orra* is seen as mad if we read the play from the perspective of the other characters; however, there are subversive passages and performances throughout the play that allow us to read the play from *Orra*’s perspective, and she is, after all, who the play is named for. In this chapter, I pose the possibility of reading the play in terms of what Joanna Baillie lays out in her *Introductory Discourse* in terms of sympathetic curiosity, specifically its visual aspects. Baillie’s understanding of seeing in the *Introductory Discourse* influences our reading of her plays, and in *Orra* specifically, our reading of the character’s demise. Baillie is redirecting our gaze to not just look at *Orra*, but to see things through *her* eyes, from her point of view. She redirects our gaze most overtly by using a specific stage direction that focuses on an optical device. This stage direction comes in the middle of a monologue of *Orra*’s fairly early on in the play. By discussing the way this specific optical device functioned in the late eighteenth century-early

nineteenth centuries' optical unconscious, this chapter claims that Baillie uses the optical device to create a feminist utopia, which Orra ultimately is able to become part of by the end of the play. And as a result, the final lines wherein Orra sees those around her as not having eyes but rather "hollow unball'd sockets" still possessing the power to "[stare] grimly" represent not her descent into madness, but her ability to see the unseen and by extension the play's ability to show what cannot be shown.

The *Introductory Discourse* theorizes what Baillie seeks to do in her *Plays on the Passions* and outlines the way she understands seeing, both inside and outside the theater. Baillie's seeing hinges on the notion of sympathetic curiosity: that we are each interested in the lives and personalities of those around us.⁵ Baillie claims that there is an innate desire within the human breast to truly know the people around her on a level that we can never seem to reach. The *Introductory Discourse* is probably one of Baillie's most discussed works in modern criticism and is considered "the most thorough exposition of her theory of drama" (Burwick 49).⁶ I would like to focus on two rather disparate arguments about the work. In an article that focuses on the type of theatre Baillie creates, Barbara Judson argues that sympathetic curiosity is "a speculative fiction that defines moral feeling as a secondary development growing out of a primary passion for spectatorship, particularly a lust to view human suffering" (50). In an article that

⁵ Sympathy was a major developing concept in the eighteenth century discussed by philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, Johann Gottfried Herder, Immanuel Kant. Christine Colon discusses some of the connections between Baillie and these philosophers in *Joanna Baillie: the Art of Moral Influence* (2009).

⁶ In addition to the criticism I discuss here, The *Introductory Discourse* is discussed in terms of morality in *Joanna Baillie: The Art of Moral Influence*, Catherine Burroughs' *Closet Stages*, Victoria Myers' "Joanna Baillie's theatre of cruelty," Frederick Bruwick's "Joanna Baillie, Matthew Baillie, and the pathology of the passions," Alan Richardson's "A neural theatre: Joanna Baillie's 'Plays on the Passions,'" and Jeffrey Cox's "Staging Baillie."

discusses the *Introductory Discourse* in terms of consumerism, Andrea Henderson claims:

Baillie's conception of the passions though founded on a rejection of earlier forms of fashionable consumerism, is organized according to the logic of a contemporary form of consumerism, one that centers on the subtle and intellectual pleasures of collecting...I demonstrate that Baillie's aesthetic, like the popular aesthetic of the picturesque, not only reflects contemporary consumer tastes but also promotes a modern consumerist form of desire--one that focuses on the pleasures of acquisition as well as those of possession (199)

What is implicit in both of these arguments is that sympathetic curiosity is rooted in the impulse to look and view the most private and personal emotions of human life. Baillie is overtly theorizing how we view plays, and by extension how we view in general. Judson calls it the "passion of spectatorship" and Henderson calls it "consumerism"--it is both of these. Baillie is theorizing our viewing process both inside and outside the theatre.

Sympathetic curiosity is rooted in the desire to see ourselves in others, and in explaining it Baillie states, "Into whatever scenes the novelist may conduct us, what objects soever he may present to our view, still is our attention most sensibly awake to every touch faithful to nature; still are we upon the watch for every thing that speaks to us of ourselves" (79). It is also rooted in the desire to see most personal and private of others asking us, "If invisible, would we not follow him into his lonely haunts, into his closet, into the midnight silence of his chamber?" (Baillie 73). However, despite this desire, two facts always remain true: we can never completely see ourselves in another and we can

never see someone entirely alone. We can never be both present and absent in the mirror. What we desire to see is what we are unable to see. In other words, Baillie recognizes and theorizes the desire to see what cannot be seen, and her task in writing these plays is to instruct that “passion for spectatorship” by making the invisible visible. In *Orra* specifically, this means seeing the world from Orra’s perspective and seeing ourselves as her. This changes the way we see the play, and allows us to see the feminist utopia Orra creates for herself and her attempt to show us, the audience.

Much scholarship has been devoted to defining the feminist utopia, and some of which deals directly with the feminist utopia and Joanna Baillie.⁷ In this chapter, I will rely on Marjean Purinton’s definition in “Utopianism and Joanna Baillie: Feminist Utopianism and Female Sexuality in Joanna Baillie’s Comedies” and expand on it. In elaborating on the definitions Regina Hewitt and Lucy Sargisson, Purinton defines a utopia as a “conceptual space in which present social conditions can be criticized” (Purinton par 1). Furthermore, a feminist utopia “seeks to create new conceptual spaces in which radically different ways of *being* can be imagined and in which distributions of power, including sexual power, can be conceived...they have a radically subversive potential” (Purinton par 2; italics mine). She goes on to say, “A feminist utopia creates and operates inside a new place or space that had previously appeared inconceivable so as to posit the possibility of different social, sexual, and symbolic relations...[and] seeks fundamental paradigm shifts in the consciousness of the present so that social

⁷ Regina Hewitt discusses the intersection between “utopia” and Baillie’s approach to her works in her article “Utopianism and Joanna Baillie: A Preface to Converging Revolutions.” And in her article, “Joanna Baillie’s Ectopian Comedies” she discusses the connections between utopias and ecocritical studies in Baillie’s comedies.

transformation can occur” (Purinton par 2). Purinton connects these definitions with the female body and sexuality in Joanna Baillie’s comedies, and I would like to connect them to the representation of the female body and femininity in *Orra*. It is in Orra’s rejection of the feminine roles forced upon her and her embrace of the imaginary that we find these “new conceptual spaces...[of] radically different ways of being.”

1. *Orra’s World*

Orra was written as Baillie’s articulation of the passion of fear, which she outlines in her Preface to the play. This fear is rooted in Orra’s love of Gothic storytelling, and it is her obsession with these stories and inability to separate them from reality that presumably leads to her madness. It is this process in the plot that is generally discussed in criticism.⁸ I argue that rather than focus on what makes Orra go mad in the end, we focus on what that madness represents. Julie Carlson makes an interesting and insightful connection between ghosting and *Orra* creating a more sympathetic reading claiming that “*Orra* does not simply dramatize the inherent theatricality of ghosts but stages the come-back of ghosts in ways that are open to otherness. This way lies madness for Orra but also political critique and poetic forms of hauntological justice for her viewers” (Carlson 208). While this chapter does not focus on ghosting or hauntology, I mention Carlson because she posits that the madness of Orra offers more than just the end of a tragedy or a moral lesson.⁹ Orra’s madness is a place where possibility can be

⁸ I am referring specifically to William Brewer’s article in which he argues that her descent into madness actually creates a “dystopian nightmare” (Brewer par. 10).

⁹ It should be noted that Melissa Wehler makes a similar claim that Orra’s madness is actually a position of strength not failure or an undoing of the feminist positions she takes earlier in the play in her article “Revising Ophelia: Representing Madwomen in Joanna Baillie’s *Orra* and *Witchcraft*.”

read. For this chapter, that manifests not as “political critique” but as spaces of feminine alternatives and ways of seeing.

We can see these spaces of feminine alternatives throughout the play but most predominately in Orra’s imagination. Because she has been placed in a situation where her only hope of leaving her guardian is through marriage, her alternative spaces function as domestic alternatives. We see this in a specific scene where Orra’s maids tell her a story and more overtly in a monologue where Orra imagines a fairy bower. The monologue comes before the storytelling scene and contains the optical device that Baillie uses to redirect the audience’s gaze. However, in order to contextualize the monologue I will briefly discuss the storytelling scene.

It is in this scene that Orra imagines her life if she had complete autonomy, and that autonomy allows for “otherness” in the form of sexuality. The picture she creates consists primarily of playfulness and contentment that is rooted in freedom. Orra and her maids begin by emphasizing the fact that it will be different because they are imagining how it would be in *Orra’s* castle. Cathrina says, “How we should spend our time, when in *your* castle / *You* shall maintain *your* state in ancient splendour, / With all *your* vassals round *you*” (102, 2.2; italics mine). Alice and Cathrina remind Orra that she was imagining how things would be if she were able to exert her will and use her wealth freely. Orra goes on to more explicitly articulate just what she and her court would do focusing primarily on the “playful” elements declaring, “Music we’ll have; and oft / The blick’ring dance upon our oaken floors...Solemn, and grave, and cloister’d, and demure / We shall not be” (102, 2.2). Alice responds, aptly with “We’ll do whate’er we list” (102,

2.2). She imagines a place in which they are quite literally able to have whatever sort of fun they like. She goes on to describe other forms of merriment and “Ev’ry season / Shall have its suited pastime” (102, 2.2). Orra ends her description with a very specific picture that epitomizes what she desires in this utopia, “by the crackling fire / We’ll hold our little, snug, domestic court / Plying our work with song and tale between” (103, 2.2). Orra imagines a happy world where the women are free to do what they want and make a home for each other--they are in control of themselves. It is at this point that Cathrina reminds her that there will be stories, which Orra always wants to hear, and so she tells her one. It is in the description of this storytelling that the imaginings of singing and dancing are extended to a level of alternative sexuality.

It is after this depiction of the “domestic court” that Cathrina tells Orra a story, which is easy to read as a love scene because of all of the intense physical and erotic description. Orra has just been imagining a world in which women are not hindered by external forces, specifically men, in any way, and there is no real transition between what she imagines and the real world. Thus, the storytelling scene becomes part of the imagined domestic court in which women are surrounded by women. It is easy to imagine that the stories she so desperately desires to hear represent a type of sex that is not allowed outside of the utopia, their “domestic court.” I do not think this is the only reading that can be done of the “storytelling,” nor do I think her utopias *center* around female sex; I *do* think that there is no reason why her utopias do *not* include it, and there is no legitimate reason why the storytelling cannot be read as a love scene. Baillie’s play makes it possible but not central, which makes it even more subversive because there is a

freedom in it. They are able to have a lovers' relationship but they do not have to--they have the freedom to choose--this is really what Baillie's utopia presents.

The description of Orra's reaction to the stories is extremely physical and while this can be interpreted as foreshadowing of her later madness, it can also be read as accentuating the sexual. Part of this comes from the fact that Alice, who does not tell the story, cannot understand the pleasure Orra receives in the storytelling, and in her questioning she makes Orra the other. Alice not only questions her about it, but she specifically uses the physical reaction Orra has to help frame her question. She says, "What pleasure is there, lady, when thy hand, / Cold as the valley's ice, with hasty grasp / *Seizes on her who speaks*, while thy shrunk form / Cow'ring and shivering stands with keen turn'd ear / To catch what follows of the pausing tale?" (2.2; italics mine). Alice is unable to comprehend the pleasure in this physical response and in her attempt to, if it is a legitimate attempt at all, understand makes Orra have to articulate that which is inarticulable: where and why pleasure comes. Accordingly, Orra does not really make an attempt at explaining; instead, she essentially repeats part of Alice's description and says, "there is a pleasure in it" (2.2). Alice presses her asking again, "Sayst thou indeed there is a pleasure in it?"; as if to say, "Are you quite certain it is pleasure you experience?" (2.2). At this accusation, that perhaps she has misunderstood her own passions, Orra replies, "Yea, when the cold blood shoots through every vein: / When every pore upon my shrunken skin / A knotted knoll becomes, and to mine ears / Strange inward sounds awake, and to mine eyes / Rush stranger tears, *there is a joy in fear*" (2.2; italics mine). Then a stage direction interjects, and Baillie steps in to direct: "Catching hold of

Cathrina” (2.2). Alice uses the physical description to question and make Orra doubt the pleasure she experiences, and Orra reclaims that physical description by heightening it and then emphatically restating that it is the very physical reaction, which Alice does not understand, that causes her pleasure and creates a joy in fear. There is a degree to which, like true pleasure, it cannot be explained. The stage direction which directs her to then cling to Cathrina further emphasizes this experience. She does not move away from either one of them, nor does she retreat from the story itself. Orra is so confident in her pleasure that she emphasizes the physical experience Alice articulates, and to display this confidence she clings to Cathrina, the storyteller. It is the physical description that makes this scene so visual. The reader cannot help but picture the “cold blood shoot[ing] through every vein” and “every pore upon [her] shrunken skin” and because of this Baillie has created an image the reader would have otherwise not seen. She has allowed us to see both the self-pleasure and shared pleasure Orra receives from Cathrina’s storytelling.¹⁰ Additionally, after the build up of the image created by the physical description, the stage direction serves as the final thrust of the action and its completion thereof. The physical description used in such detail that is exchanged between Alice and Orra allows the reader to hear a conversation that would otherwise be missed and that would not be able to take place: a heterosexual woman questioning the pleasure of sex between women.

This scene allows us to see how deep Orra’s desire for an alternative, or her utopia, truly goes. This scene is also read or performed after Baillie has used the optical

¹⁰ It is interesting at this point to remember that *Orra* was never actually performed***

device to redirect our gaze to look from Orra's perspective. In other words, because of its position in the play and what it focuses on, the scene is not to be read as just an elaborate story-telling or conjuring of fear. Rather, it is to be read from Orra's perspective; wherein, the imagined domestic court is as close to real as she can get, and figurative storytelling can be read as a literal love scene because she is not interested in the literal. It is not what she desires, which we see most overtly in her monologue about the fairy bower.

This scene happens in the courtyard of a garden and actually interrupts the time Orra was spending with her maids as several of the men come out to join them. It is when Orra is pressed on her position of marriage in which she talks of an impossible "partnership" that she says what she truly desires in the literal world: "I would, without another's leave, / Improve the low condition of my peasants / and cherish them in peace" (99, 2.1). She states that she wants autonomy and the desire to act and do good without the permission of another. However, she knows that she cannot have this in the literal world, and so she begins a figurative imagining. The fairy bowers are initially represented figuratively in the first half of the monologue, and then Orra allows them to become literal for her. Painting her alternative picture Orra says:

In short, I would, without another's leave,
Improve the low conditions of my peasants,
And cherish them in peace. E'en now, methinks,
Each little cottage of my native vale
Swells out its earthen sides, up-heaves its roof,
Like to a hillock mov'd by lab'ring mole,
And with green trail-weeds clamb'ring up its walls,
Roses and ev'ry gay and fragrant plant,
Before my fancy, stands a fairy bower:
Ay, and within it too do faeries dwell.

Orra begins using practical, realistic images and language to depict her domestic desire. She merely wants to oversee the land and its people. But this, she recognizes, cannot happen "without another's leave." She cannot be unmarried and have the sort of independence and agency she wants. And if she gets married, she will lose her independence entirely. Orra recognizes her pragmatic vision cannot exist. As a result, her practical language cannot sustain the description.

She must use more fanciful language in order to continue depicting her alternative picture. This starts slowly with her idealization of the houses themselves telling us that they are covered in "green trail-weeds," "roses," and "ev'ry gay and fragrant plant." These are not just peasants' cottages, they are perfect cottages. Her descriptive language is what allows her to see her alternative. She uses language to allow her to not just see an idealized state but another world entirely. She says, "Before my *fancy*, stands, a fairy bower: / Ay, and within it too do faeries dwell." The use of the word "fancy" indicates that she is leaving practical language and moving towards more creative or figurative language.¹¹ She acknowledges that she has moved from her pragmatic desire into *absolute fantasy*.

¹¹ In the eighteenth century, particularly in the Romantic period, there was a larger discussion about fancy in relation to imagination and the differences between the two. The most prominent being Coleridge's discussion of the two in *Biographia Literaria*, wherein he most basically defines fancy as the mental faculty employed to produce interest, not imagination. In *Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, Jonathan Wordsworth discusses the overlaps between Teten's understanding of fancy and Coleridge's, stating, "fancy, is an ordinary thinking process that necessarily follows the initial perception" and that Coleridge sees it as having "no inevitable part to play" (Gravill 26). I am not focusing on the implications of the word "fancy" on our understanding of the monologue, but acknowledge its importance in eighteenth century thought. In terms of how it functions here, it stands as the device by which Orra is able to begin her thought process. One could argue that this word choice further supports the claim that she is telling us of her vision of a utopia because rather than require the power of imagination, Orra's seeing of

And it is at this moment that a stage direction interrupts the monologue and breaks it in half, which is both sudden and startling. This stage direction contains the optical device and its effect is best achieved when seen in context with the monologue just as it is presented in the play:

In short, I would, without another's leave,
Improve the low conditions of my peasants,
And cherish them in peace. E'en now, methinks,
Each little cottage of my native vale
Swells out its earthen sides, up-heaves its roof,
Like to a hillock mov'd by lab'ring mole,
And with green trail-weeds clamb'ring up its walls,
Roses and ev'ry gay and fragrant plant,
Before my fancy, stands a fairy bower:
Ay, and within it too do faeries dwell.

[Looking playfully through her fingers like a show-glass.

Peep through its wreathed window, if indeed,
The flowers grow not too close, and there within
Thou'lt see some half a dozen rosy brats
Eating from wooden bowls their dainty milk;--
Those are my mountain elves. Seest thou not
Their very forms distinctly? (2.1)

This stage direction is jarring and breaks up the text visually, indicating to the reader that it is a vital part of the monologue. Interestingly, Baillie, who is known for her rather extensive stage directions at the beginning of scenes, does not place this at the beginning of the scene or even the monologue. If she had done so, the *director* or *actress* would have been able to determine when exactly Orra is to make these gestures. Rather, Baillie places it right in the middle of the monologue because *she* is using it for something specific. She is using this stage direction to make us, the audience, look at something, to

this world is so real, that merely requires a reaction to seeing it, or fancy, almost like a dictation of the picture in front of her rather than an imagining.

change our perspective. She has created an optical device. We are forced to watch the actress playing Orra make some sort of gesture that mimics looking in a show-glass. Moreover, we are not just watching her figuratively use an optical device; we are invited to look with her. We see this most explicitly in the line that directly follows the stage direction in which Orra tells the people around her, and by extension the audience, to “Peep through its wreathed window”--directing us to look into whatever it is she is holding, to look where she is looking. Before examining the nuances of optical manipulation happening in this performed action it makes sense to put it in the context of what she is showing us.

2. *What She Shows Us*

Through this whole monologue Orra is responding to the question of what kind of marriage she wants, or what kind of life she desires. In her response, we find that she envisions a world where she is allowed to do as she pleases “without another’s leave,” and her vision loses its touch with reality and turns into complete imagination. It is here that we find her picture of the feminist utopia. She paints us a picture of a world she wishes could exist—writing a story that cannot be. In her book, *Joanna Baillie and the Art of Moral Influence*, Christine Colon conducts many insightful analyses of *Orra*, which I would like to engage with here. She discusses how Baillie creates playwrights in some of her plays, which highlight the difficulties and dangers of manipulating people’s emotions through playwriting (Colon 77-79). She sees *Orra* as being one of these plays and points to Rudigere and Theobald as the playwrights (Colon 77-79). However, I think that in this scene more than any other, we see Orra being the playwright and setting the

stage for her imaginary world. Before Orra uses the show-glass she has already started imagining her alternative world describing how the world in which she is able to “improve the low conditions of [her] peasants” is in a “fairy bower” where “faeries do dwell.” Then in order to fully imagine what she is seeing and to show the audience she holds up a show-glass in which we are shown the actual world of the fairy bower.

After the interjection of the stage direction, the monologue continues into the second half of the description of her alternative picture. However, now Orra has moved from just figurative optical representation to literal optical representation. Now, in her mind, she has a literal optical device to look into and see her fairy bower. She tells us to look in with her, inviting us to

Peep through its wreathed window, if indeed,
The flowers grow not too close, and there within
Thou'lt see some half a dozen rosy brats
Eating from wooden bowls their dainty milk;--
Those are my mountain elves. Seest thou not
Their very forms distinctly?

Now, her alternative picture has come into clear focus and we are given a world in which faeries thrive and produce "mountain elves." Knowing the realistic vision of taking care of her peasants cannot happen, Orra creates a world of mythical creatures in order to show us the world she desires. Orra does not just stop at the mere *existence* of a fairy bower, but she goes on to describe it in some detail, and it is here that we see her utopia never specifies gender or sex and, yet, is fruitful. She creates a world in which gender is never specified and everyone is an androgynous mythical creature; yet, they are able to reproduce. She says, “Ay and within it too do fairies dwell” directly after calling it a fairy

bower, as if she is affirming to her audience that it *is* possible for life to thrive here. In other words, she does not just paint a shell of a utopia, she imagines the lives of those within it as well. She extends this by saying that within the houses there are “half a dozen rosy brats / Eating from wooden bowls their dainty milk-- / Those are my mountain elves” (2.1). The phrase “half a dozen rosy brats” connotes the image of a litter of animals or a bundle of eggs, both images representing fertility and reproduction. “Rosy brats” in particular reminds the reader of children and this phrase taken out of context could very well be applied to any child in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, the image of these imaginary children drinking “dainty milk” connoting fertile femininity from round “wooden bowls” connotes the image of nursing. Thus far, Orra has created a picture of feminine fertility and motherhood, which really does not seem like anything out of the ordinary. At this point, she has created a picture of healthy, vibrant, well-fed and well-mothered children existing in the fairy bower, where “fairies do dwell.” She then extends the image and makes the children “[her] mountain elves” (2.1). She has tricked the reader by leading them to believe that normal children came from the fairies, and instead they are elves. So she presents the image of faeries creating and caring for an entirely different and equally magical species: elves. The gender of an elf, unless specified, was not typically considered to be incredibly important. Elves instead were creatures who had magical powers and tended to be mischievous, much like faeries. In other words, Orra is focusing on their mystical nature, their other-worldliness. In her utopia, gender is not specified; it is not the focus. Here is where she becomes subversive.

Rather than try to reappropriate the terms the patriarchal society uses and reclaim her subjectivity, Orra *remakes* subjectivity altogether.¹² She creates a *new* subject. Rather than differentiate from the portrait presented to her, she envisions an entirely different portrait that is centered around a world in which faeries live in happiness and have lots of elf children: where the traditional role of women is able to exist without a focus on gender and sex. This expands on Christine Colon's analysis of *Orra* wherein she argues that the play "reveals[s]...the struggle of a woman caught in the domestic sphere" (129). I would like to expand on that and claim that not only does the play reveal these struggles, but Orra seeks to create an alternative to this domestic sphere, to the traditional roles of femininity. She is rejecting the gendered parameters of the society in which she lives where she is perpetually the object of affection, of betrothal, of description, in the painting, and, instead, she is envisioning a world in which subject and object are not dependent upon gender. Moreover, this world is successful because it is a picture of fertility, growth, and fecundity. This is the same vision, or utopia, that is expanded upon in the storytelling scene, as aforementioned. However, in this scene, unlike that one the performance overtly directs the audience to view the utopia. It is because Baillie so overtly redirects the gaze to show us Orra's perspective that it is necessary to deeply examine the implications of the performance this stage direction would have produced. In order to picture that, we must start by picturing a show-glass.

¹² Diane Hoeveler's article "Joanna Baillie and the Gothic Body: Reading Extremities in *Orra* and *De Monfort*" presents somewhat of a counterargument to this point claiming that Orra is the place of the abject. However, as I have argued, it is her ability to create an alternative space that allows her to not lose her subjectivity and, instead, remake it.

3. *The Show-Glass As Mirror*

The first definition of a show-glass is a looking glass, mirror, or “magical mirror” (*OED*). Because Orra “look[s] through her fingers” it can be assumed that the show-glass is a hand mirror and not a floor length, or larger, mirror. In this case, the performed action would have been the actress playing Orra speaking the monologue and as she finishes the line, “and within it too do faeries dwell,” she stretches out her arm and holds up her hand mimicking the act of looking at herself in a hand mirror. It is her hand that allows the optical device to exist; this device allows her to see an imagined reflection. As a result, the fairy bower comes out of the world around her and is viewed from both the audience’s perception of the “show-glass” and Orra’s. And because Orra tells them what it is in the show-glass they are forced to see it with her. In this way, the audience views this other world that Orra creates that is both new and perfect. In addition to that, by examining the nature of the show-glass itself we can uncover a more complicated reading done by the audience.

Because Orra prompts the audience to pretend that the show-glass is what allows them to see her other world, they are forced to momentarily accept the show-glass as real. They are forced to accept this *mirror*, or magical mirror, as real. Having done so, they would not only see the “rosy brats” and “mountain elves” but because it is a mirror it reflects and shows them their own image. Because Orra prompts them to pretend it is real, they see themselves in her alternative world. The device may still be figurative for the audience, but her final question of “Seest thou not their very forms distinctly?” prompts the audience to momentarily see it as a literal optical device, a literal optical

representation. Therefore, the image itself, the faeries, the elves, the perfection, and their own reflection, while figurative, become momentarily literal.

To Orra the show-glass is never figurative it is always literal. Her hand is not pretending to be the show-glass it *is* the show-glass. She looks into the show-glass and sees the world she wishes could exist. What I believe is particularly interesting about the world she imagines is that it is *peopled* by mythical characters. Additionally, her description of elf children, produced by the faeries presumably, eating from round "wooden bowls their dainty milk" connotes images of reproduction and fertility. Because both faeries and elves are mythical creatures who lack human sex signifiers traditionally, and she makes no overt mention of gender or sex, Orra is depicting a world in which gender is irrelevant. And yet reproduction has occurred. A non-sexed reproduction has created a thriving generation of non-sexed "rosy brats." The alternative world she pictures not only lacks sex signifiers, but it is a thriving, reproducing world that allows for a space where gender does not have to be constructed in order for people to progress or function. Because she pictures non-sexed reproduction she creates a world where gender does not need to be constructed. She creates non-gender. Orra makes this world and embraces it completely. In her attempt to show the audience, she is hoping to allow them to see themselves in this non-gendered world the way she does. Of course, Orra's physical hand also acts as a barrier inhibiting the audience's view of the fairy bower as well.

The fact that the show-glass is a physical hand, that is part of the physical body, changes the way in which both the audience and Orra interact with it. The fact that it is her physical hand that functions as a show-glass makes it impossible for the audience to

fully accept it as a literal optical device--not just because it is not a literal prop but because they are trying to look at a feminine body as a show-glass. Because they are not in Orra's head, they can only see her as what she is on stage: a woman playing a woman describing a fairy bower. Her physical hand will always be that of the feminine body. This feminine body can never exist in the fairy bower because it exists within a predetermined structure. The audience may momentarily see the alternative space Orra is creating, but, ultimately, they must refocus on the reality and the body within that reality. The audience might wish they had a mirror prop because that would make it easier for them to see the fairy bower, but it will not be granted. Baillie does not allow the actress to use a prop--she must pretend using her own physical body as the show-glass.

The combination of that refusal and the jarring feel of the stage direction itself leads me to believe that Baillie wanted the audience to be aware of that limitation. The audience is made aware of the fact that the reason why they cannot completely look past the hand into the mirror is because they are looking *at* her hand. They are looking *at* her body. Baillie makes the audience aware of the direction of the gaze and the limitations it creates. The audience, in their wanting for a prop, becomes aware that it is their restricted view of the function of the feminine body that makes them unable to completely reside in the alternative space the way Orra does.

For Orra, the idea of physical body as show-glass creates the *opposite* effect. Because Orra sees the show-glass literally she is not looking *at* her hand the same way the audience is. For the audience it is a hand pretending to be a show-glass, for Orra her hand is the show-glass, her body *becomes* the show-glass. And it is able to do so because

she perceives it this way. Her *perception of her body* allows her to see the fairy bower. She uses her body as a means to go into and depict what resides in her mental space. It is in her own manipulation of her perception of her body that she is able to reside in the fairy bower. It is her perception that makes the non-gendered come into being.

This creation of the non-gendered world through the perception of the body demonstrates Baillie not just reclaiming subjectivity, but also remaking it entirely. We can see how this subjectivity is created by, again, examining the nature of the show-glass. Because the show-glass is always literal for Orra, she actually sees her hand *as* a show-glass; therefore, she is always seeing herself in the alternative world she pictures. The show-glass is both that which shows and reflects. But Orra does not picture herself in a world that is like her own; instead, she pictures herself in an entirely new world. She does this by using the show-glass as a mirror and by inserting herself in the picture subtly like when she says that these are "my mountain elves." She pictures these mythical creatures as her children. The nature of the show-glass as a mirror and Orra's own subtle description of herself in the fairy bower allows us to see Baillie creating a new subject. She is creating a space in which non-gendered subjectivity exists. While the monologue certainly lends itself to be interpreted according to the "mirror" definition of the show-glass, it equally lends itself to an interpretation with the other definition, in both of these interpretations the audience is being prompted to look at and become part of Orra's utopia.

4. *The Show-Glass As Exhibition Box*

The second eighteenth century definition of a “show-glass” is “a glass case for exhibiting valuable or delicate goods”(OED). To differentiate between this definition and the mirror definition, in this section I will refer to the show-glass as the exhibition box. While exhibition boxes could be found in stores, I am interested in focusing on the place they would have been the most abundant: the museum. Baillie wrote *Orra* about sixty years after the British Museum opened (1759). When the British Museum was first opened it was not nearly as accessible as we think of it today. Initially, visiting the museum began with the arduous task of acquiring admission. It was not open to the public until 1810 and prior to this you were granted permission to visit based on a written request wherein you had to prove your worth and intentions (General 8). Once you were allowed access to the museum it was still a restricted and limited process. Whether through private or public access, visitors were escorted through on private, brief tours through rooms of exhibition boxes, which featured artifacts of natural history and value (Wilson 67). They were not to be peered over or walked around closely, and they were certainly not to be touched. The exhibition boxes were to be ogled at and revered, remaining mysterious and awe-inspiring. Exhibition boxes were the desired forbidden, inviting lookers to view without looking and examining (Wilson 67-68). Looking and examining were for curators only. In modern museums we walk closely around exhibition boxes as much as we want, and while we may not push our faces against the glass, we come as close as we can, peering down into the box unknowingly touching the sides and poking the glass trying our hardest to view the essence of the artifact, that

which is on show for us. We are intimate with the objects in museums, whereas, in the early nineteenth century they were distant and inferior to the objects, forbidden to view them. Our modern understanding of exhibition boxes and things that belong in these glass cases is fundamentally different to the one Baillie would have been calling upon when she used the word “show-glass.” The show-glass functioned in their optical unconscious as places of distance, superiority, impossibility, which of course has political implications as well. The museum was officially founded in 1753 when the private collection of Sir Hans Sloane was purchased through an Act of Parliament (General 7). This purchase was a step in the direction of moving from private collections to public collections, a small step but a step nonetheless. At the heart of this acquisition lies the implication that the collective, rather than the privileged individual has the right to participate in the collection and study of artifacts and the pursuit of knowledge. Granted, the collection would remain primarily for the wealthy and the scholarly for the next fifty years, but the founding of the museum was the first step towards what we now consider to be a right not a privilege: access to artifacts of value and knowledge. So while the exhibition boxes create a sense of distance and inferiority in the visitors on the one hand, on the other hand their existence at all represents access and equality, or at least the hope of it. As a result, and because there are so many terms one can attribute to this surprisingly complicated optical device, for the remainder of this section I will focus primarily on what seems to be the underlying meaning of the exhibition boxes: possibility.

It is the possibility that these boxes represent which Baillie’s stage direction both relies upon and calls forth. However, Baillie takes that implicit possibility and makes it

forefront, showing the audience, through Orra, that they have the power to hold, examine, describe, and imagine what is in the show-glass. Because the stage direction has Orra “[look] playfully through her fingers like a show-glass” we can assume that the performed action would have looked like the actress holding her hands in such a way as to mimic a box which she would then look down into or straight ahead into depending on how high she held her hands. Orra’s hands become the exhibition box. Baillie completely transforms the relationship between viewer and object by placing the box in Orra’s hands and making her hands that which constructs the dimensions and existence of the box. This allows her not only to view the object but also become as intimate as possible without being *in* the box herself. She may be what allows the box to exist, but she is never in the box herself. By taking the box off of the museum shelf and placing it in Orra’s hands, Baillie gives permission to the audience to break rules and be intimate with what is in the box. Moreover, it tells the audience that it is their existence that allows these exhibition boxes to exist at all. These boxes featured artifacts from human history; therefore, it is the human that says that these things are important enough to be put behind glass and creates the object to be place there. In terms of how this playful rendering of the show-glass effects the optical unconscious, it is making the audience aware that it is their viewing of the object that gives it value, and by extension that each person has the ability to create an exhibition box.

If we connect the implications of the exhibition box to what Orra describes in the show-glass, as aforementioned, we find that it is this utopia that is made accessible. Because it is Orra’s hands that create the exhibition box it is also her hands that allow the

fairy bower to exist. She is the one imagining it, and she is the one giving it value. Because the fairy bower represents her break away from traditional feminine roles, it is her existence that allows this utopia to exist. It is the existence of a woman who desires something outside of that which society would give her that will allow a world wherein women have autonomy and agency to exist. The exhibition box is her and she is the exhibition box; therefore, this utopia is her and she is the utopia. Moreover, because she is able to not only create the exhibition box and its contents but also hold it closely and examine it the feminist utopia becomes that which is not kept on the shelves to be ogled at and revered. Rather, it is that which should be studied carefully and held by people. In this stage direction, Baillie takes the feminist utopia, which cannot exist by its very nature, and makes it a tangible world. She removes the distance between visitor and exhibition box, society and utopia--ultimately claiming that the world Orra desires wherein she “improves the low condition of her peasants” “without another’s leave” is possible if people will recognize that they determine its value and its place. By taking the exhibition box off of the shelf, she challenges the idea that this is where they belong. The world Orra imagines, is not meant to stay on the shelf of her imagination, rather it is to be taken down brought into the tangible world of the self.

By reading the optical devices in *Orra*, we can see Baillie's unconventional use of optical representation and optical devices as exhibiting her larger claim in the project: that subjectivity is defined by one's own perception of the self in relation to the world around it. For Orra, this manifests in her retreat into her mental space where she places herself in her fairy bower, in her imagined utopia. And like a utopia, which by its nature

cannot be, Orra herself, having remade her own subjectivity cannot *be* within the world around her, and she eventually resides only in her imagined utopia. It is in paying attention to the way Baillie redirects the audience's gaze and manipulates their viewing process that we see how Baillie manages to allow the audience to see from Orra's perspective. She attempts to let us in to Orra's private closet, and once allowed in we see that, at the end of play, Orra's break with reality allows her to see the unseen, which is what she has been seeking to do through the whole play. And the play itself becomes the optical device through which the audience, if we allow ourselves, can see Orra's utopia within the dystopia of reality.

Chapter 2

Avatars and After-Images in Louisa Stuart Costello's *The Maid of Cyprus Isle* and *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen*

Despite her success and her popularity as a travel writer, very little criticism exists on Louisa Stuart Costello, an early nineteenth-century writer and miniaturist. While she was most popular for her travel writing, she also had a prolific writing career across several genres, and became initially successful because of her miniature portraits. What has been said about Costello focuses primarily on her travel; however, her poetry, written in the early part of her life, and her memoirs, which extend through her career, warrant critical discussion as well.¹³ Two scholars who have focused on Costello's poetry are Tamara Holloway, who has written on Costello's *Songs of a Stranger*, and Timothy Ruppert, who has written on *Maid of Cyprus Isle and Other Poems*.¹⁴ Ruppert's article focuses on the pacifist readings of a few of the poems from the collection, and while it has little to do with what I will be discussing, it does speak to the broad range of subject matter covered in this, her first, collection of poetry. By examining the work that marks the beginning of her career, *The Maid of Cyprus Isle* (1815), and a work which comes

¹³ Clare Broome Saunders mentions Costello's artistic capabilities, notes that she has been "unjustly ignored," and discusses some of Costello's historical works and translations in *Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Medievalism* (2009) (9). She is listed in the *Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English* (1999). Some of her travel writing is examined by Elizabeth Bohls in *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* (1995), by Teresa A. Lyle in *British Travel Writers 1837-1875* (1996), and Ann Bermingham in *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*. Roger Simpson does examine one of Costello's poems in relation to Tennyson in "Costello's 'The Funeral Boat': An Analogue of Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott.'"

¹⁴ Both Ruppert and Holloway are featured in *Studies in Romanticism*. Holloway's "Louisa Stuart Costello" was published in 2001, and Ruppert's "Waterloo, Napoleon and Louisa Stuart Costello's Vision of Peace in *The Maid of Cyprus Isle*" is forthcoming.

much later, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen* (1844), this essay contributes to both the recovery effort of Costello and the recent critical discussion surrounding this regrettably overlooked writer.

In terms of recovery I am arguing, implicitly, the something similar to what Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen Behrendt argued in one of the first collections to address poetry specifically of Romantic women, that there is a “continuing need for reassessment not only of the works of them women poets themselves, but also of the conditions that governed their production, their consumption, and their contemporary reception and influence” (5).¹⁵ While this paper does not spend time making the argument for the need of the recovery of Costello, I do acknowledge that it is, in part, a recovery effort, and as such am arguing that it is vital to treat her work as part of a career wherein we can trace developing theories that connect her perception as miniaturist, poet, and author. Costello’s early work in the *Maid of Cyprus Isle* (1815) and later work in *Memoirs* (1844) demonstrates her ongoing re-theorization of the feminine body. In both works, Costello makes her audience conscious of their otherwise unconscious viewing process by creating haunting images of the feminine body and in so doing, allows the reader to view the feminine body with a power that might otherwise be overlooked. In her creation of miniatures and the written works I examine here, Costello ultimately creates an image of femininity rooted in physical autonomy and power.

¹⁵ Linkin and Behrendt state this in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* (1999), and while this argument seems to be accepted as general fact in contemporary criticism, I think it is important to reiterate their efforts because we are still in the process of recovery especially in terms of women who worked in multiple genres such as Costello did.

Before examining the poetry and the memoirs it is important to briefly examine Costello's career as a miniaturist and writer. Her skill and success as a miniaturist connect her with the visual culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, her point of view as a miniaturist influences her understanding of the viewing process. Costello was born in 1799, and by the time she was fifteen both her older brother and her father had been killed in the war, leaving Costello to care for her mother and younger brother,¹⁶ which she did by becoming a "proficient artist, and was able to add so considerably to her mother's pension by painting miniatures" (Lee 277). She continued her work as a miniaturist throughout her life, showing at the Royal Academy with some frequency from 1822-1839 (Graves 139). Many of her written works also feature engravings and illustrations by Costello. Her first written work, a collection of poetry entitled *The Maid of Cyprus Isle, and Other Poems* (1815), was not a widely acknowledged collection having a little over a hundred subscribers, but when we look at the poems now we find that they are heavily influenced by the tragedy that fueled her profession and that they are the start of a prolific literary career. Costello has written, novels, translations, memoirs, and travel narratives, forming a literary canon that spans her lifetime.¹⁷

¹⁶ There is currently no published biography on Costello, but Clare Broome Saunders is currently writing one.

¹⁷ These works consist of but are not limited to: poetry, *The Maid of Cyprus Isle* (1815), *Redwald, a tale of Mona, and Other Poems* (1819), *Songs of a Stranger* (1825); translations, *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France* (1835), *The Rose Garden of Persia* (1845); novels, *The Queen's Poisoner; or, France in the Sixteenth Century* (1841), *Gabrielle, or Pictures of Reign* (1843), *Catherine de Medicis or The Queen-Mother: A Romance* (1848); *Clara Fane: or Contracts of a Life* (1848); memoirs, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen: Volumes 1-12* (1844), *Memoirs of Mary, the Young Duchess of Burgundy, and her Contemporaries* (1853), *Memoirs of Anne, Duchess of Brittany, Twice Queen of France* (1855); and travel narratives, *A Summer Amongst the Bocages and the Vines* (1840), *A Pilgrimage to Auvergne from Picardy*

Costello did not paint miniatures or write poetry as a habit of pleasure or hobby; rather, she created art in order to earn money and to live, supporting not just herself but her mother and brother as well. While her first collection of poetry was not widely read, her second volume gained popularity, and it was her work as a travel writer and miniaturist that made her successful in the marketplace--a success that earned her a civil list annuity in 1852 that allowed her to write until her death (1870) (Blain, Grundy, Clements 240). Unlike many of her female contemporaries, Costello did not rely on the support of a husband (she never married), and her literary success afforded her an income throughout her entire life.¹⁸ Rather, Costello helped continue her family's middle class status primarily through her work as a miniaturist, and her work as a travel writer bespeaks a woman of independence and sense of the cosmopolitan. Costello creates a unique image of femininity, one that combines independence with a lifetime of success. It is in this image that we see traces of the view of the feminine body that Costello would overtly articulate in her writings and imply in her creation of miniatures.

1. In Creating the Avatar

Before looking at the poetry I would like to examine Costello's theorization of how she sees the feminine body and the viewing process connected to it. She makes this theorization in her introduction to a later work, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen*. I see

to Le Velay (1842), *Bearn and the Pyrenees, a Legendary Tour to the Country of Henri Quatre* (1844), *The Falls, Lakes, and Mountains, of North Wales* (1845), *A Tour to and from Venice by the Vaudois and the Tyrol* (1846).

¹⁸ In terms of her female contemporaries, Costello's position in society and the marketplace can be compared to that of Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Mary Scott, and Felicia Hemans. However unlike these women she was never married nor did she die destitute like Robinson and Smith. She was also not a working class poet like Ann Yearsley, Mary Collier, or Elizabeth Hands.

this theorization as a clearer articulation of the manipulation of the viewing process she does in her earlier poetry, which I will discuss later in the chapter. Her understanding of the viewing process, in relation to the feminine body specifically, is a governing principle behind her work and thinking. In the introduction to *Memoirs*, which is a four-volume history, Costello begins by theorizing the viewing process because she is going to explain why she decided to write this work and the reason behind her selection of the women in it. She starts with a discussion of Elizabeth I whom she feels, “involuntarily bestowed great benefits on her fellow females by proving of what importance they could be” (v-vi). In other words, once people saw Elizabeth I they realized that women could be powerful-seeing her changed the way they saw other women. Costello decides to write on women only post-Elizabethan era for this reason. She sees Elizabeth I as doing something different from the way women were viewed and she expands on this saying:

It appears to have been thought worth while to bestow some attention on women, after the glory of her *avatar* had given the dignity and importance from henceforth in the scale of society; and the long duty of paying deference to a female grew at length into a habit, which her own merit, once properly acknowledged, did not allow to decline (ii).

She uses the word “avatar” to describe Elizabeth’s presence, her image, or how she appears to the people who see her or know of her. This is a very particular word choice, and she only uses it this one time in reference to Elizabeth. The word avatar, at this time, meant a “manifestation in human form, an incarnation” or a “manifestation or presentation to the world as a ruling power or object of worship” (*OED*). By using this

word Costello places an emphasis on the physical manifestation of Elizabeth, or her physicality as a place of power. It is the power of her physical manifestation that gives “dignity and importance.”

She uses this word to draw the reader’s attention to Elizabeth’s physical body and to the fact that when people her saw her physical body as a place of power they were then able to view the women around them differently. It is important to analyze why Costello chose Elizabeth I as her “avatar” considering that there have been other Queens of England and women in power. She is drawing our attention to Elizabeth’s physical body or physicality and claiming that this physicality is the reason why she changed the way women were viewed; that is, Elizabeth I was and is well known for her control over her physical body. She was the Virgin Queen who was able to control the representation of her physical body and use it as a means to sustain power. By not marrying and by emphasizing her virginity she was able to lay to claim to the titles of both *woman* and *ruler*. Control of her physical body allows her to become an avatar and thereby to shape the way women were viewed after her. This understanding of the viewing process that she theorizes can be seen as the articulation of what she practices in poetry thirty years prior. By closely examining the content and structure of these poems we find that Costello presents us with an avatar that influences how we read the subsequent images of feminine bodies.

2. *In Writing Her Poetry*

Costello presents many images of the feminine body in her first collection of poetry, *The Maid of Cyprus Isle and Other Poems*. The collection consists of forty-two

poems, some of which are translations, and was published in 1815 when Costello was only sixteen. The collection was published by subscription and is dedicated to her primary patron, The Duchess of Leeds. While there are many images presented, I will examine only a series of these images found in three poems that follow one another. In these three poems she creates powerful and autonomous images of the feminine body, and the poems are written in such a way that allows the reader to connect them together. She creates three separate images that work together to produce one whole image. It is important to examine them in the order in which they are presented in the volume because each poem creates an image that is influenced by the previous one. In these three poems Costello presents three pictures of the feminine body, all of which gain power, or agency, when the woman claims the feminine body as her own.

In “Ballad in the Two Queens,” the speaker presents the tragic story of a woman, referred to as “the maid” or “she,” who goes through the process of mourning her lost lover. The poem begins with the maid arriving at the beach, distraught but still hopefully searching the waves “in hopes that him she loved on the waves would espy” while “tears trickled” down her cheek (6,7). In the second stanza, the maid appears again, only this time she is “tearless” and she has given up on her lover returning (20). This description of mourning sets the reader up for the final stanza where the maid appears, looks for him again, and then stabs herself in the chest when she does not see him. While the ending is certainly tragic, Costello’s message in presenting a dramatic representation of mourning and suicide is not one of victimhood or passivity.

The maid's choice to commit suicide demonstrates the power of having control over one's own body. Her suicide at the end of the poem functions as a release from despair. The suicide destroys the body that has been the vessel for this mourning. We see the victory of this destruction in the dramatic presentation of her suicide. Rather than have the maiden mysteriously die of grief or kill herself in secret, we are told that "she rests on the hill 'neath the willow's green shade...[then] *rose* in her tears" and finally, "She *raised* the fell dagger, she *struck* the sure blow, / Which has *buried* the steel in her bosom of snow" (26, 33, 35-36; italics mine). The poem directs our gaze to the destruction of the physical image that has just been idealized in the previous stanzas, allowing her seemingly destructive physical action to become a triumph over grief's destructive power.

The maid begins this section of the poem resting "neath the willow's green shade" or in a physical position of submission. It is when she finally decides that her lover is not returning and that "he *is* faithless" that she is able to quit that position of submission and rise in her tears, or stand up within her mourning (30). She moves from a physical position of passivity to one of action and agency, thereby taking control of her mourning, and this time, rather than retreat back to the palace, she takes complete control and ends her grief. We are told that she "raised" her weapon and "struck the sure blow." These are words that would normally describe a soldier in battle, and they add a tone of determination and victory. Additionally, the final image of her suicide is not sad or defeated nor does it focus on the biological elements of her body. In other words, we are not told that blood trickled down her chest or that her heart wrenched in pain. Rather, the

body, or her “bosom of snow” is presented as a *place* where she “buried the steel.” The steel literally refers to the dagger but could just as easily be read as a representation of her mourning, as mourning, like steel, is cold, deadly, and heavy. Therefore, the final action can be read as the woman claiming victory over her mourning by taking control of her body and making it a place where mourning is “buried” and dies. The same “bosom of snow” that her pale hand rested on is now being stabbed by a dagger held by that same hand. Her body, through her control of it, becomes that which gives her power over her situation.

The poem directly after this one, “Song in the Same,” also describes a woman who has found solace from her grief in death. The description of the woman is also very similar to that of the woman in “Ballad.” In this very brief poem, the speaker talks about how lovely his lady, Rosial, is and then, in the end, laments that she is not with him for reasons that are unclear but seem to imply that she has died. The only physical description of Rosial that the poem provides is that she has “golden ringlets...[and] soft curling yellow hair” (7-8). It is as if she was known for and identified by, maybe even referred to because of, this physical characteristic. We are given this limited view of Rosial and the speaker continues to lament the fact that she is not there and to sink deeper into his misery. The reader is given no reason as to why Rosial is gone, and the speaker does not seem to have any hope of her returning. Additionally, he says that she is “free from sorrow” and “gay as the air” which implies that she has left the world of suffering and gone to a place of peace, which is most likely because she has died. Again, the reader is presented with the idea that the destruction of a woman’s body has allowed her to be

“free.” Moreover, the poem, which directly follows “Ballad,” reminds the reader of the maid in that poem who was also known for her “golden tresses.” This poem is vague enough about what exactly happened to Rosial while still echoing the same physical description in “Ballad,” to remind the reader of the maid who killed herself in the previous poem, and perhaps even to suggest that Rosial also killed herself or even that perhaps that the speaker in this poem is the lover come back from the first poem. This intermingling of the poems makes the reading that Rosial killed herself and, as a result, is “free from sorrow” and “gay as the air” almost inevitable. Subsequently, “Song in the Same” seems to claim a similar message to that of “Ballad”: death is a form of freedom and bringing about that freedom through controlling one’s own body is a form of power.

In “The Sylph’s Song” this same message is articulated; however, this time it is not control over one’s own body that produces power but control over the societal roles in which that body is usually placed. The poem depicts the sneaky, malicious deeds that the “sister sylphs” performed while on earth and the pleasure they took in these deeds (5). The poem at first seems like a mythical tale, but upon close examination, it becomes clear that the sylphs in the poem are acting against the primary roles of femininity. They start by destroying the role of betrothed, bragging about how they “stole young warrior’s love, / How they did their hearts remove / From fair maids they vowed before / True to love forevermore” (9-12). They have sought the love of “young warrior[s]” purely for the malicious intention of stealing them from the “maids” they originally loved. They are bragging about destroying the union between woman and man, or the role of betrothed and wife, and mocking the role’s importance. They go on to tell of how they destroyed

and mocked the role of mother, saying “How we stole sweet babes away, / And in place young elves we lay: How we joy’d to see her pain, / And to hear the mother’s plain” (13-16). They swap a human baby for an elf baby and enjoy watching the mother’s painful reaction. They take this archetypal role of motherhood, the care and protection of an infant, and destroy it for their own amusement eliminating any sort of importance the role might carry. They go on to destroy and make monstrous the beauty of feminine youth telling of “how [they] witched young maidens fair / Like to beasts in shape and sin” (17-18). And all of this they call a “pleasing story” (19). The sylphs are both destroying and mocking three of the most important roles of women at this time: the betrothed and wife, the mother, and the beautiful virgin. Their song is only about their enjoyment of these deeds. The poem does not condemn them for abolishing these signifiers of femininity, but rather suggests that it is in this destruction of the various roles of the feminine body that they find power.

The poem’s emphasis on the body itself, or the physicality of the sylphs, connects them to human women and allows the reader to conflate the two. A sylph is generally defined as “one of a race of beings or spirits supposed to inhabit the air” (*OED*).¹⁹ So this is a song from a *spiritual* being, and yet the tribulations that happen on physical earth are what drive the plot of the poem. Costello starts by taking them out of the air and putting them physically on the ground: the speaker says, “Blythe we dance by light of moon

¹⁹ The *OED* also states that a sylph can be “applied to a graceful woman or girl; usually with implication of slender figure and light airy movement,” and this definition is cited as appearing about fifteen years after the publication of these poems. Costello’s conflation of the mythical creatures with women could also be indicative of a larger colloquial shift especially considering that “sylph-like” was used at this time in reference to women.

beam, / In the meads, where murmurs the cool stream, / While our *footsteps tread the ground*” (1-3; italics mine). The first image in the poem is that of air spirits dancing and physically walking on the earth. They go on to say that they are going to “tell / All on earth, that us befel” (7-8). In other words, they are going to recount what happened to them and what they did on earth. They are going to describe what they experienced in their physical forms. The poem leads the reader to imagine that these creatures were once on earth and now are not--that they once lived physical lives but now do not. The focus on the physical body of a being that should be of air is surprising and brings up the image of human women rather than mythical creatures. Thus, the poem lends itself to be read as if the song of the sylph could be sung by a woman.

It is easy to read the two later poems as building off of “Ballad” because of the focus on specific physical descriptions and death or the after-life. Moreover, each poem seems to suggest that it is through the control and/or destruction of the feminine body or the roles it is usually placed into that women find victory, freedom, and pleasure. If read in the order in which Costello presents them, the poems can be seen as expanding on one another. Thus, the unnamed maid of “golden tresses” who kills herself in the first poem is the same Rosial of “golden ringlets” and her lover comes back to mourn her suicide but knows that she is “free from sorrow” and “gay as air.” Rosial, who is compared to air, then exists in her after-life as the sylph who sings of her pleasure in the destruction of all of the roles her feminine body would have been placed into had she not killed herself. As a result, the sylph in the third poem is the freed woman from the first poem who has claimed victory over her mourning by controlling her body which allows her to tell the

entirety of her “pleasing story” allowing us to see the image of her empowered after-life that we would otherwise miss.

The metanarrative created in this reading suggests that Costello is manipulating our viewing process. She creates the poems in a way that allows the latter two poems to echo the first one, which alters the way we read the second two and the three of them as a whole. She manipulates our viewing process by reminding us of what we have seen previously and showing us how they are similar. She creates the poems that haunt one another and then points out the places where the ghosts show themselves.²⁰ By making the poems echo or haunt one another, Costello makes us aware of the fact that the image we were presented with in the first poem was so powerful that we remember it on an unconscious level when we read the subsequent poems. That image changes the way we see the images after it, and I see this as expanding on what she practices here and theorizes in her introduction to *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen* where she discusses this viewing process. In order for something to be viewed differently because of something seen previously, there has to be a memory of it, or an imprint. In order for these women to be seen through the avatar, the avatar has to stick with the viewer, and not necessarily on a conscious level. To explain this optical phenomena, I would like to retheorize the idea of the after-image.

²⁰ I am aware that here I am using the language of Joseph Roach who writes about “ghosting” specifically in terms of celebrity. However, for the purpose of this paper I am using it only in terms of a metaphor that helps explain the visual process I am discussing. Having said that, there are strong similarities between what I will articulate as the “after-image” and Roach’s idea of ghosting; however, in my opinion, my definition of after-image focuses more on the *process* that directs our viewing in addition to the viewing itself.

3. In Showing Us the After-Image

The optical phenomena of the after-image is generally something that happens on an unconscious level, and is not often connected with the redirection of the reader's gaze. Most simplistically it can be read as the author's ability to make us remember things from their texts that influence our future readings. However, Costello is doing more than that: she is changing what we view and making us aware of our viewing process. Contemporary drama theorists have defined the after-image, most notably among them Peggy Phelan.²¹ According to Phelan:

The after-image participates in a kind of 'optical unconscious' (the phrase is Walter Benjamin's)--a realm in which it is not visibly available to the eye constitutes and defines what is--in the same way as the unconscious frames ongoing conscious events. Just as we understand that things in the past determine how the experience the present, so too can it be said that the visible is defined by the invisible (14).

The viewing process Phelan describes here relates to the images that stay with us and inform the way we see other, future images on a level of seeing that we are not really aware of. Costello makes us aware of that viewing process; she makes us conscious of this optical unconscious.

While Phelan's definition of the after-image does articulate what I think Costello is doing in terms of the optical unconscious, it does not put as much attention on the fact

²¹ Part of the reason why I am turning to performance theorists to help me explain Costello's theorization is because I see Costello's poetry function like a performance itself, which I will explore further in a larger project.

that certain images create more powerful after-images which then function almost like lenses through which we see the next image. The after-image is what exists in our minds after we view an original image--it is the middle step in a three-step process. To further explain this idea I would like to look at the standard definition of an after-image, which says that the after-image is “a visual sensation which remains after the stimulus that gave rise to it ceases” (*OED*). The best illustration of this idea is the moment you look at the sun then close your eyes and see a dark circle. This after-image lasts longer than most because it is so powerful and we are usually unaware of the fact that anything has been burned to our retina at all. Therefore, the three step process consists of this: viewing the original image, that image remaining in the mind, that impression creating an after-image, and viewing a new image which is seen through that after-image.

In the context of Costello’s work, the avatar is that original image, and her claim that what we see after viewing that original image is somehow different is based on this idea of the after-image. Claiming that once people viewed Elizabeth’s avatar they were able to view other women differently is based on the optical phenomenon of the after-image. And by extension once people viewed a woman controlling her body as a means to power they were able to view other women’s control of their feminine bodies as a way for them to gain power and freedom as well. By making us aware of this viewing process we are able to see instance of controlling the feminine body as a way to power that we might otherwise miss. We see her employing this technique, manipulating our viewing process, in the three poems aforementioned.

The woman in “Ballad in the Two Queens” functions like Elizabeth’s avatar, controlling her body in a way that gives her power and changes the way the next two poems are read, or the next two women are seen. And like what Costello articulates when she discusses Elizabeth I, here she forces us to *look* in a particular way, specifically in her use of editorial annotations and creation of a miniature, both of which further emphasize the way the subjects in the poem echo each other. The title of “Ballad” indicates to the reader that the poem will be about two different queens. What we are actually presented with is a portrait of one maiden who is never specified to be a queen. There is nothing in the poem that indicates to the reader that it is about two different women. The poem is broken up into three parts that are titled “Part 1,” “Part 2,” and “Part 3.” Throughout these parts the physical description of the nameless woman is consistent, and the plot in each seems to be a progression from the previous part. On the surface, there is only one woman not the titular two. “Ballad in Two Queens” ends with a dead maiden, not the second queen we are promised.

Additionally, in this poem the overt influence of Costello’s understanding of seeing as a miniaturist, as a visual artist, becomes clear. Here we are presented with a verbal miniature of the feminine body. The speaker directs the reader’s gaze towards specific parts of the maid’s body. The reader is only allowed to see her body from the torso up: the speaker talks about the maid’s hands when she “clasped her fair hands” and “pressed her white hand to her bosom of snow” (4, 23); the maid’s hair when the speaker calls her the “maid of the golden bright hair” with “tresses of gold” (19, 10); her face when the speaker says, “her cheek, pale and cold” and “her pale cheek denoting her

bosom's despair" (9, 20); and her eyes which are "dark" and "blue" (4, 31). By presenting a miniature painting of the woman, the poem inserts her into a popular visual format, evoking the kind of seeing that would have accompanied a literal miniature of the woman--a seeing that was to be carried around, kept close, and done by many. For this reason, it is important to examine what exactly the miniature placed in our hands depicts. And this is not just a miniature of the feminine body--it is a miniature of the feminine body in mourning, and a body eventually that claims power through a very physical suicide.

It is important to discuss why a miniature, specifically, is important to how Costello manipulates the viewing process. Miniatures were at the height of their popularity at the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries (Piper 165). They were most commonly done only of the head of the sitter, or from the torso up, and were a cheaper, more accessible, and consumable version of the portrait (Fay 122). Miniatures were often worn or carried around by their owners most often portraying the beloved or child of its possessor; consequently, they became a pervasive part of visual culture. Thus, by giving her reader a miniature of the woman in the poem, which becomes a miniature of mourning and suicide, Costello gives her readers an image to be carried around with them, held close, and looked at often. She draws the readers' attention to an act of looking they would be extremely familiar with: glancing down at the small portrait hanging from one's bodice or hidden in one's pocket. Readers are reminded of this comforting act wherein they always see exactly what they expect--only this time the miniature does not show them what they have been promised. The title of the poem

claims it will depict two queens; yet, the image the reader views is that of a single maid committing suicide. As a result, the poem leaves the reader searching for that which they have not seen. The reader expects to see one thing but is given another. Because of this, the reader is prompted to look for this second queen; we, as readers, are left with a longing for her, looking for her.

Costello employs her understanding of the viewing process here in order to create an avatar by capitalizing on the impact a miniature would have had on the reader. She presents us with a powerful display of a woman taking control of her feminine body, like Elizabeth I, and instills in us a desire to see the poem extend beyond its life. It is the destruction, or the control, of the maid's physical body that gives her the ability to quit her mourning, to quit her torment. This power is enhanced by the fact that it is represented in the pervasive medium of a miniature portrait. This destruction of the feminine body which allows her to quit her torment is presented as an act that is to be seen by many. That image inserted in the optical unconscious and as a result leaves an imprint on the mind, or an after-image. This after-image is created for two reasons: one, the dramatic presentation of the suicide and two, the fact that the poem leaves us with a sense of looking. We want to see the other queen, but the poem does not present her to us. The avatar, like Elizabeth's, dies with the poem but informs our subsequent looking. The poems that follow this one make us conscious of this looking and the after-image the avatar leaves in our minds. This is why the women in the next two poems are so quickly conflated with the woman in "Ballad" because it is in these two poems that we go looking for the missing queen.

The editorial annotations and titles of those two poems only encourage this looking. The poem directly after is called, “*Song: In the Same*,” which at least indicates to the reader that even if it is not technically part of “*Ballad in Two Queens*” it is at least related because they are both songs. The title of the poem that follows “*Song*” is “*The Sylph’s Song*” which means this is the third song we are reading and that it thus feels like one in a series. Additionally the editorial annotations provide a link. After “*Ballad in Two Queens*” there is a single line that is used to separate the “*Song*” poems that follow. This single line is not used throughout the rest of the volume, making it unclear where exactly “*Ballad in Two Queens*” begins and ends. Something similar happens in the poem following this one entitled, “*The Sylph’s Song*.” This poem is also separated from “*Song*” by a single line, making it unclear whether or not it is connected. As a result, even just on a surface level, these poems seem to be expanding on “*Ballad in Two Queens*.” The way the poems are set up prompts us to read them through one another, specifically to read “*Ballad*” as the original poem that is influencing the other two. In this way, “*Ballad*” functions as the avatar, or the original image, which leaves an impression, or creates an after-image, in our minds. The after-image of the woman in “*Ballad*” fundamentally alters the way the other two poems are read.

As a result, “*Song in the Same*” is read through the after-image of “*Ballad*” making it possible to read it as if Rosial is the woman in the previous poem. Subsequently, the implication that she is dead becomes the implication that she has killed herself, and the speaker’s envy becomes an envy of Rosial’s ability to control her body and gain freedom. We become more conscious of the after-image in our minds when we

are told that Rosial is also known for her “golden ringlets” like the maid from “Ballad.” And we become even more conscious of this after-image when the speaker says, “Here, ev’ry eve, to this lone spot I wander, / While she, free from sorrow, is gay as the air: / Ah! Little her thoughts do her sad lover follow, / Each hour while he sighs for his Rosial fair!” (9-12). His looking and searching for her reminds us of her looking and searching in the first poem, and the implication that she might be dead is read through the after-image of a suicide. Therefore, to the reader, the speaker is almost wishing he too could kill himself so that he may find freedom. But for whatever reason he does not or cannot. He becomes the one who cannot take control over his body in order to quit his torment. What is now the suicide of Rosial in our minds is said to have allowed her to be “free from sorrow” and “gay as the air,” meaning that in this instance as well a woman has taken control of her body in order to gain power and freedom. This interpretation is not possible if this poem is read in isolation--it is only the result of reading the poem after “Ballad,” as the volume and editorial annotations suggest we do. The after-image of the woman in “Ballad” adds an importance to Rosial that we might otherwise miss.

The women in “The Sylph’s Song” are also given an importance that would otherwise be missed because they are read through the after-image of “Ballad” and, to a lesser extent, “Song in the Same.” What makes the reader conscious of this after-image in “Sylph’s Song” is the poem’s simultaneous focus on the spiritual, or air, and the physical. Right before this poem, at the very end of “Song,” Rosial is said to be “gay as the air.” This is the last image we are given of her. Because she is physically absent she is able to be as happy as air. The image of the sylph, a spirit of air, cannot help but evoke that

comparison. So, even the title of the poem reminds the reader of Rosial and the poem will be read differently because of this connection. The reader is made aware of the after-image Rosial left and the duplicated alter-image of the sylph woman begins to be seen.

The idea of this spirit woman also connects to something in “Ballad”: the missing queen. In “Ballad” we are told to look for a second queen, which we do not find. In the reading of the poems that follow that longing still exists, and “Sylph’s Song” presents the reader with the possibility that maybe the second queen is a spirit woman or a sylph. The focus on the spiritual in this poem also reminds the reader of the deaths in the previous two poems, and, as a result, the sylphs can be read as the after-life spirits of the maid from “Ballad” and/or Rosial.

Moreover, the poem’s focus on the physicality of the sylphs, or their physical bodies, as discussed earlier in the paper, makes the reader conscious of the after-image in their minds, emphasizing the idea that these sylphs might be spirit versions of the women in the previous poems. The poem prompts the reader to think about and view the physical body of a being that should just be made of air. The focus on physicality in a place where there should be an emphasis on spirituality makes the reader conscious of the images of physical bodies already in their minds. It makes them conscious of the after-images of the women in the other poems. And the bodies of the woman from “Ballad” and Rosial from “Song” both become conflated with the image of the physical body of the sylph--a sylph who seems to function much like a human woman. Because “The Sylph’s Song” focuses on the *physical* aspects of a *spirit* we are shown a disembodied woman. This disembodied woman may or may not be the second queen but the way it is presented at least makes

this possible. And we become aware of the after-image from “Ballad” which has been conflated with the after-image of Rosial, and the reading of the poem’s sylph woman is altered as a result. Ultimately ending in a reading wherein the sylphs are both the disembodied missing queen from the first poem and the after-life versions of the maid and Rosial, whose suicides, where they controlled their body, made it possible for them to come back and destroy all of the traditional roles of femininity. In other words, one act of feminine power produces multiple acts of feminine power. This reading comes about because Costello manipulates our viewing process, making us conscious and able to see a version of feminine power we might otherwise miss.

It is clear that both the editorial annotations and the content of these poems parallel the viewing process that Costello discusses in her introduction to *Memoirs*. The poems indicate that while this may not have been something Costello *theorized* in 1816 it was part of her thinking. I see the introduction and the poems as an attempt to discuss and articulate how we view the feminine body and what the implications for that viewing are. Based on these poems and her efforts in *Memoirs*, Costello does not seem to be claiming that *viewing* the feminine body causes it to become a place for the abject or to lose value in some way. Rather, she seems to be claiming that when we look at examples of the female *controlling* the feminine body, the viewing is somehow altered and alters that which we view after it. Not only does this avatar alter the subsequent images, but it allows for a power to be seen in them that might otherwise be missed. Here we find an unseen type of feminine power, which we find if we become conscious of our optical unconscious, wherein we view the feminine body through other feminine bodies. By

making us conscious of this viewing process Costello is inviting us to open our eyes to the images of ladies all around us and to see that it in their control of their bodies they find power.

Ultimately, Costello theorizes the after-image as a lens through which we may view and understand the feminine around us. Costello's work in *Maid of Cyprus Isle* and *Memoirs* suggests that these after-images are not simply inserted into the optical unconscious, but directly influence the way we read subsequent, related images. That is not to say that Costello is suggesting that viewers are aware of this lens. In fact, her works seeks to *make* her audience aware of the lens she creates that allows her readers to see the feminine body as a place of power. In this way, Costello and her work become a necessary part of the viewing process of the feminine body.

Costello contributes to the literary and visual marketplace in a way that allows us to view the feminine body differently. Not only that but she makes us aware of how we view women by writing poetry that forces us to become conscious of our reading process and by extension our viewing process of the images she presents. We see that articulated more clearly in her later *Memoirs*, confirming that the image of women and the viewing process was something she theorized. Her success as a miniaturist and a writer creates its own image of femininity that is rooted in the manipulation of circumstances in order to attain autonomy and power. This is ultimately the image of women she is presenting, and feels that when we look at a woman being powerful in a way that challenges our understanding of femininity we are able to see power in women where it may have been overlooked before. In this way, Costello herself functions as an avatar and her work

becomes the optical devices, or the after-images in our minds and the miniatures in our pockets, through which we read the women around us.

Epilogue

What is “invisibly there”: Optical Representation and Performance in Joanna Baillie’s

Witchcraft

In Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft* there is a character who contributes largely to the plot but is never actually shown on stage, nor does she have any lines. In fact, Jessie, is not even included in the list of players. The closest the audience comes to seeing her is by seeing the outline of a body in a bed. Other than that, we are not granted view of her. We are told, through the other characters, that Jessie is sick, and some of the women in the play claim that she is being haunted or even possessed by witches. Several scenes in the play take place inside or just outside of her room. We are told that she has fits, and it is possible that the outline in the bed would portray this, but, beyond that, she is a character constructed by other characters. What we are given is a female character constructed by other female characters. It is their construction of her and the fact that they use her body to propel the action of the plot that forces the audience to keep looking at her even though they cannot see her and know that they cannot see her. She becomes a place where the audience is forced to look again and again for something they will not find. They will not find a person; rather, they will only see what the women in the play have put there. They will only see an image that has been constructed by reflection and representation. We are not allowed to see this character or this actress on stage; we are only allowed to see the attempt at showing her body--the attempt at showing what cannot be seen.

While there is no optical device or overt theorization of seeing in this section of *Witchcraft*, Baillie directs our gaze by not allowing us to see Jessie, while still creating a

picture of her for us. Jessie in *Witchcraft* functions as a more abstract optical representation of the feminine body. What happens in the play is similar to what I have discussed in the previous two chapters in that the play makes the audience aware of their optical unconscious specifically in terms of how they view the feminine body. However, because it is more subtle than what Baillie does in *Orra* or what Costello does in her multiple works, it is necessary to reexamine Baillie's theorization of seeing in the *Introductory Discourse*. Moreover, I see what the manipulations of the audience's viewing process, as related to performance and by putting the play in conversation with contemporary performance theory, we find that Jessie is not just an absent figure, but an optical device that Baillie uses to make the viewer aware of the inability to show the feminine body through representation.

I would first like to put Joanna Baillie's *Introductory Discourse*, written in 1798, in conversation with some of the overall claims in Elin Diamond's *Unmaking Mimesis*. I am not going to focus so much on her larger claims about realism itself as a form of hysteria, rather I would like to use some of her theories of seeing to discuss some of Baillie's theories of seeing, or what can or should be seen. In order to do this I would like to reexamine Baillie's *Introductory Discourse* where she articulates her theorization of not just writing drama, but of seeing, as I have already established in chapter one. On the surface of the *Introductory Discourse* it may seem as if Baillie is advocating for something like realist drama; however, if we closely examine what she says we find that she is actually advocating for drama to show what cannot be seen. Baillie does support the basic goal of realism, which Diamond quotes as "the drama 'of ourselves in our

situations" (Diamond 7). However Baillie bases this goal on the spectator or audience's overall desire to see themselves reflected back, saying, "Into whatever scenes the novelist may conduct us, what objects soever he may present to our view, still is our attention most sensibly awake to every touch of nature; still are we upon the watch for everything that speaks to us of ourselves" (79). Here she is discussing the reader's desire to find traces of reality in even the most sensational texts. This desire needs to be expanded on before I go on to discuss how it is actually not advocating for the type of realism Diamond is referring to. It is the same desire that I have previously discussed:

"sympathetic curiosity" (Baillie 69). She starts by saying that we study other people based on this principle, claiming, "From that strong sympathy which most creatures, but the human above all, feel for others of their kind, nothing has become so much an object of man's curiosity as man himself" (67). In other words, the reason why we want to see others and try to understand what we see is because there is some degree to which we understand them through ourselves, through sympathy. She goes on to say that after so many observations we become unconscious of the looking we do. She says:

From this constant employment of their minds, most people, I believe, without being conscious of it, have stored up in idea the greater part of those strong marked varieties of human observation which may be said to divide it into classes; and in one of those classes they involuntarily place every new person they become acquainted with (68)

She then recognizes man's tendency to focus on and observe surface characteristics because it is easier and does not interrupt the system of viewing he has in mind. And she

says that the only reason why we are able to view something more than the surface is because of our "sympathetic curiosity." She says:

but for this sympathetic curiosity towards others of our kind, which is so strongly implanted within us, the attention we pay to the dress and manners of men would dwindle into an employment as insipid, as examining the varieties of plants and minerals, is to one who understands not natural history (69)

What she is claiming is that we have an inherent desire to see other people, but it hinges on our desire to understand their situation as humans--to sympathize with them. The core of that resides in the premise that we have an inherent desire to see all parts of a person, so that we may understand ourselves, even that which cannot be seen.

Although Baillie does share realism's goal of seeing others to understand ourselves, she does not support what Diamond criticizes it for: that it reaffirms the hegemonic ideology of the society it portrays. Diamond claims "the drama of 'ourselves in our situations' exists only by repressing other selves, other situations" (7). She further claims that "if the early texts of realism seem to gender its spectators, dividing men who snigger...and fail to understand Ibsen, from women who weep and do understand, realism is just doing its job, mirroring and reproducing society's most conservative ideological positions" (7). In other words when representation seeks to be reality it merely reaffirms the audience's understanding of the world and their viewing process rather than make them conscious of it. Baillie does not advocate for this sort of representation in drama. Rather, she wants to take the idea that we look for ourselves in representation as a way to move beyond surface understanding of others and ourselves. Diamond's description of

Caryl Churchill's goal in representation most succinctly describes what I see Baillie articulating. Diamond says, "What I would suggest at the outset is that her texts have become increasingly attentive to the ideological nature of the seeable...In other words the lighted stage queries the world of *permissible* visibility, what can, and more importantly, what cannot be seen" (85). And while Baillie does not use the same techniques or methods as Churchill, I would argue that in her *Introductory Discourse* she is articulating her desire to do the same thing: question what can and cannot be seen and possibly show it.

Baillie discusses this when she presents our desire to see and show not just the public performance people give but their most private moments. She says that we desire "to lift up the roof of his dungeon...and look upon a criminal the night before he suffers, in his still hours of privacy" (70). And she goes on to say that in each of us is a "concealed passion" which we are all eager to behold (73). She says:

Let us understand, from observation or report, that any person harbours in his breast, concealed from the world's eye, some powerful rankling passion of what kind soever it may be, we shall observe every word, every motion, every look, even the distant gait of such a man, with a constancy and attention bestowed upon no other. Nay, should we meet him unexpectedly on our way, a feeling will pass across our minds as though we found ourselves in the neighborhood of some secret and fearful thing. If invisible, would we not follow him into his lonely haunts, into his closet, into the midnight silence of his chamber? There is, perhaps, no employment which the human mind will with so much avidity pursue,

as the discovery of concealed passion, as the tracing the varieties and progress of a perturbed soul (73)

In other words, Baillie is saying that we, as spectators in life and in the theatre, desire to view the secrets of people because we too have secrets. Her language in that passage specifically focuses more on looking and watching than anything else. Baillie says not just that we as individuals harbor secrets from each other but that we hide them from the “world’s eye.” Not only are we as individuals trying to look in the deep recesses of human existence but also the world as a collective seeks to look and view the most private moments and feelings of the individual. The world becomes the spectator, not just the stage. Moreover, Baillie focuses on the physical characteristics we would observe, emphasizing the fact that our bodies can be viewed and interpreted through that viewing. She is emphasizing this idea that the self is something that the world tries to view, and she claims that we have the inherent desire to do that viewing. It is drama that is able to facilitate this viewing and goes on to say that a good portion of drama has failed to do what she feels is its most important duty: to show all of the facets of human existence. She goes through a varieties of these facets and then says:

But above all, to her, and to her only it belongs to unveil to us the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which, seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances, will from small beginnings brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature are borne down before them; those passions which conceal themselves from the observation of men; which cannot unbosom themselves even to the dearest friend; and can,

oftentimes, only give their fulness vent in the lonely desert, or in the darkness of midnight (86)

She is claiming that it is up to drama to show the inmost private moments not only of a person's life but of a person's soul. She goes on to claim that this is done not just by focusing on the grand features of characters but also on the small moments of their lives. It is up to the dramatist and the performers to show what otherwise would not and could not be seen.

While these theories are implemented in *Orra*, as I have argued, in that play there is a much more overt redirection of the gaze. In *Witchcraft* Baillie's manipulation of the gaze and her attempt to show us what cannot be seen, is more subtle and connected to theories of performance. Because of this I would like to specifically put this play in conversation with some of the ideas in Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* to discuss how Baillie is trying to create a performance of the unmarked. Phelan is also discussing that which cannot be seen, or perhaps will not be shown.

Phelan focuses more on various representations of marginalized bodies, and while Baillie may not be overtly discussing that, in *Witchcraft* we do see an attempt to represent a character, or a body that is not there. In her chapter, "Developing the negative: Mapplethorpe, Schor, and Sherman" Phelan begins by discussing Barthes' ideas about image repertoire and the concept of the "lure" (34). She says:

This double action, the recognition of not-seeing and the will to look again, is the lure of the image repertoire. The double action confirms the distinction between the gaze and the eye: the eye, ever hungry, ever restless, temporarily submits to

the law of the gaze, the ocular perspective which frames the image, sees what is shown and discovers it to be 'lacking.' Not quite the thing one wants/needs/desires/to see. And what is that thing? An image of self-seeing that is complete. An impossible image precisely because the law of the gaze prohibits self-seeing (34)

The lure is what brings us back to the image even though we know we will not see ourselves there. The lure is what is being employed in *Witchcraft*, and the play makes the reader or viewer somewhat conscious of that viewing process--making them conscious of their optical unconscious.

The character that is never seen but who the other characters, and the play, attempt to show is Jessie, and the play asks us to try to see her. The play attempts to show us what literally cannot be seen on stage. This can be demonstrated by looking at a specific scene in which the women verbally construct an image of Jessie, but her body is never actually shown. One of them starts and then the dialogue builds off each of their statements to construct the image of Jessie that ends up propelling the plot. In Act 2, Scene 2 the sheriff is questioning them about who has been in Jessie's chamber and they begin by speculating as to who has been with her. Her mother, Lady Dungareen, says, "Who has been visibly in her chamber, we can easily tell; but who has been invisibly there, the Lord in heaven knows" (95). Before continuing with the rest of the scene it is important to analyze exactly what Lady Dungareen does to the audience's sense of viewing in that line. She admits that we can know that we have seen or what is "visibly there," but then she opens up the possibility that there are things that are "invisibly

there,” or things that exist but that just cannot be seen. Within the context of the play she is specifically referring to demons, witches, or spirits; however, her admission that there are things that exist but just cannot be seen prompt the audience to look for things that perhaps they are not being shown, to look harder and closer. She opens up the possibility of an alternative type of viewing, and the women in the next lines respond to this possibility and expand on it. They participate in the kind of frenzy this opens up. Each woman responds to Lady Dungareen’s open-ended statement by giving a description of how they have *seen* Jessie act. And the descriptions are very short and cut into one another almost as if they are in a frenzy to describe it:

Lady Dungareen: She has stared, as though she saw them.

Anabella: She has shrieked, as though they laid hold of her.

Nurse: She has clenched her hands, as if she had been catching at them, in this way. (*Showing how.*)

Phemy: Ay, and moved her lips so (*showing how*), as if speaking to them. I saw her do it.

Nurse: And so did I; and I saw her grin, and shake her head so, most piteously (95-96).

Then it erupts into most of the women talking at the same time: Phemy, Nurse, and Maid-Servant (*all speaking at once*): And I saw her--- (96). At this point the sheriff interjects and says, "Softly, softly, good women! Three tellers are too many for one tale, and three tales are too many for one pair of ears to take in at a time" (96).

We are presented with a picture of Jessie's body through the mimicking and performance of these women. They are performing *her* body and it is that performance that allows us to see what Jessie looks like. What is interesting is there is really only one character, Annabella, who has a personal motivation in the construction of this image. The other two women get caught up in the moment with her and they each feed on one another's description to build their own. In this way, the scene becomes a sort of orgasmic performance of manipulating the image of the feminine body. The description becomes increasingly sensual and eventually the women account for almost all of Jessie's senses. They start by performing what Jessie *sees*, then moves to how the witches have *touched* her, then to how she has *touched* them, then to her *mouth*, which speaks to them, and then to her final fit.²² The scene builds to a climax, and the fit can be seen as that moment of climax that results in the collective orgasmic release of the exclamatory "And I saw her." That statement is what all of their statements are rooted in: their ability to see and tell what they have seen. The sexualized nature is made even more evident in the stage direction of "showing how" meaning that now the women are performing what they may or may not have seen. The audience is shown Jessie through the bodies of these other women. And these women are performing in order to create a depiction of Jessie and to please each other. This is a group effort and their individual depictions of her make for

²² I recognize that this scene lends itself to a reading that focuses on hysteria especially in terms of Diamond's discussion of hysteria and the play as a moment of hysteria itself. However, I feel that that reading is a separate paper that requires more secondary research than I am doing here. I have chosen to not use the word hysteria for that reason.

one whole picture. Or at least they try to make it a whole picture. But that is the problem: it is not a whole picture.

Jessie does not or cannot speak for herself and as a result these other women are able to construct a Frankenstein image of what Jessie's illness is. We are given the performance of the image of the feminine body not the feminine body itself, and by its very nature that performance would prompt the audience to look for Jessie herself, to look for what is "invisibly there." The sheriff's interruption, "Three tellers are too many for one tale, and three tales are too many for one pair of ears to take in at a time," speaks for the reader or audience member who cannot fully accept or take in this frenzied portrait so obviously rooted in group-pleasure. And yet, they are forced to look for the whole picture. This produces a sort of frustration and intrigue that makes the reader or audience member aware of the looking back that they do once they have already looked at Jessie. The play forces them to look again. And what they find is other people constructing her image. And since, according to Baillie, this looking is fueled by sympathetic curiosity and our desire to see ourselves, what they ultimately find are these women constructing their own images as well. In other words, because we as the audience know that these women have very little evidence to support what they are claiming, their performances of Jessie's body speak more to their own images of themselves or how they want people to see them. This scene makes us aware that other people have the power to construct and represent our image both in their words and their bodies.

To fully articulate what I see Baillie doing with representation here we need to again look at contemporary performance theory which in this instance is connected to one of the artists Phelan discusses: Cindy Sherman. Phelan discusses some of Cindy Sherman's photographs, which Sherman prefers to call "performance art" (Phelan 60). Sherman creates self-portraits of herself in which she dresses up like other people. Phelan says, "Sherman's work suggests that female subjectivity resides in disguise and displacement. She uses the self-portrait to investigate the foundational otherness of women within contemporary Western representation.... Sherman's 'real' was an endlessly varied performance of her own disguises" (60).²³ The repetition of these disguises make the viewer aware that the female subject they were looking at was representing itself through other representations, therefore, drawing attention to the inability of those representations to show the female subject. For Sherman, it is in *not* showing the female subject that we are able to see it. Baillie is doing something similar when she does not show Jessie, rather she shows her through other representations.

A surface reading of this scene in isolation from the rest of the play would produce an interpretation that positions Jessie as the object that is manipulated by others. However, if we put the scene in the context of the entire play wherein there are several plotlines that are fueled by this idea of misunderstanding and groups of people acting on misunderstanding, we find that what Baillie actually shows us is the idea of mob

²³ There is another character in the play who uses disguise to her advantage and attempts to represent someone else which almost has terrible consequences. This further supports my claim that the play is drawing attention to the unrepresentable nature of female subjectivity and the need to hear the subject's own voice. However, I feel like a reading of this character is outside the scope of this project.

mentality and the contagion of manipulation. As a result, Jessie becomes the female subject not the object because while people may use her to fuel their frenzy of construction she does not actually participate in it. In the context of the larger play, it is this same sort of frenzy of construction that convinces everyone in the play that an innocent person, whom they all know, is a witch. The play ends up condemning this sort of mob thinking or frenzied construction of a person. And because of the way the plot is structured the audience knows this through the whole play--they know exactly who is telling the truth and who is not. So the play as a whole condemns the way these women construct Jessie's image and while they are doing so the audience knows that they are not really telling the truth. In other words, they know that they are not *representing* Jessie they are *constructing* an image for their own selfish motives. Because of this and the fact that the play forces the audience to look at Jessie again knowing they will not be able to see her, the audience is made *aware* of the inability for her to be represented. It is very similar to what Sherman does by making her audience aware of the inability to represent the female subject. The female subject, or Jessie, is only actually recognized or seen when the audience is made aware of the "disguise and displacement" the women use to portray her.

Having discussed the female subject in terms of what is being represented, it is important to discuss it in terms of what is being viewed and by whom. In order to do this I would like to examine this same scene from *Witchcraft* and put it in conversation with some of Jill Dolan's ideas. By doing so, I think we will find that this particular scene opens itself up to the female spectator. Dolan starts by defining what the ideal spectator

is. She says, "Historically, in North American culture, this spectator has been assumed to be white, middle-class, heterosexual, and male. That theatre creates an ideal spectator carved in the likeness of the dominant culture whose ideology he represents is the motivating assumption behind the discourse of feminist performance criticism (1). She goes on to say that it is up to the 'feminist critic' to be a "'resistant reader' who analyzes a performance's meaning by reading against the grain of stereotypes and resisting the manipulation of both the performance text and the cultural text that it shapes" (2). She goes on to say that "performance usually addresses the male spectator as an active subject, and encourages him to identify with the male hero in the narrative," and that "the same representations tend to objectify women performers and female spectators as passive, invisible, unspoken subjects" (2). On the one hand this theorization is applicable to the scene from *Witchcraft*, but I would like to explore the ways in which this scene actually creates a space for the female spectator and is specifically addressed to her not the ideal male spectator.

If you were to read this scene in isolation from the rest of the play, it may read as if written for the male spectator and that it reinforces the cultural texts that objectify and silence women. However, in the context of the play, it does quite the opposite. Again, during this scene the audience is aware of the fact that the supposed witches who the women claim are possessing Jessie are not real. They are also aware of the fact that Annabella is fueling this for her own personal gain. So, as aforementioned, the audience is aware of the fact that the image they are given of Jessie is not accurate--it fails. As a result they become aware of the inability for the female subject to be represented through

other voices or constructions, even if they are female voices. At this point, the audience would want Jessie to be able to speak for herself and would realize the necessity of it. The play forces the audience to long to hear her voice and see her body, but that will not be granted. This process would challenge the male audience member's understanding of the female position because it says to them that women cannot be represented and if they are the object then that is what allows for a contagion of manipulation which ultimately condemns an innocent person. This process could challenge or confirm the female audience member's understanding of their subjectivity because it says to them that the only way they can be seen or heard, or the only way the truth can come out, is if they are not represented by others but by themselves--if they are not the object but the subject.

It is also important to note that it is a group of women who are constructing this image of Jessie, who are treating her like the object. This makes the idea that a silenced subject is no subject at all even more prevalent. The fact that it is a group of women allows us to recognize that it is not just men who objectify women but women also do it to other women. As a result, the play becomes much more about the individual's subjectivity rather than female subjectivity. That reinforces the address to the female spectator because it says that any situation in which the female is objectified and silenced whether it is by a man or a woman leads to misrepresentation, which is ultimately extremely dangerous.

Not only does the dialogue and context of the play indicate that Baillie is attempting to draw attention to how the female subject cannot actually shown through others, the stage directions do as well. These stage directions overtly make the audience

aware of the “lure” and the “lacking” they feel, attempt to show what cannot be seen, and make the audience aware of the unrepresentable nature of female subjectivity. Once the women depict Jessie’s body and they each start to build on each others’ descriptions in an attempt to construct her body, a couple of their lines are followed by the stage direction: “showing how.” This means that as the female performer describes a certain action of Jessie’s body she acts it out herself. She is mimicking an action that we, the audience, have never seen. They are attempting to create a picture of Jessie’s body through their own. If we keep in mind, again, the fact that the audience is aware that this representation is not accurate, we see that this would bring attention to the fact that their bodies fail to represent Jessie’s. They try to reclaim her body through theirs but the text of the play does not allow it. Therefore, the audience is again made aware of the lacking they find in the image or the representation before them.

Baillie is making us, as viewers, aware of the way the performance works and reminding us that the body on stage is not the same as the body in real life. She is doing what Diamond claims Churchill does: “no ecstatic ‘writing the body’ but rather foregrounding of the apparatus that makes the writing impossible” (85). If the audience were made to believe that these descriptions were true and honest representations, then the bodies representing Jessie’s would be conflated in our minds with Jessie’s body, which we have not seen. In fact, they *would be* Jessie’s body. One body would be able to not just signify or represent but function in our minds as the body we cannot see. The process of “showing how” would be a seductive meshing of the two women’s bodies with Jessie’s. And considering the sexualized nature of the scene, their “showing how” would

become their sexual possession of Jessie's body wherein she does not consent because she has no voice. In a sense, the "showing how," or the repossession of Jessie's body for their own, would be their lesbian rape of Jessie's objectified body. However, because the audience is aware that the witches these women are claiming possess Jessie are not real, we are suspicious of their description and do not believe them. This is the key--our knowledge of the various forms of lacking in this image. As a result, rather than a rape of her objectified body, the "showing how" becomes a grotesque attempt to possess her, which ultimately fails. They become monstrous in their attempt to embody her because the audience never believes that they are seeing Jessie. What the audience actually sees is someone else trying to manipulate and possess her body. The dissatisfaction felt on the audience's point of view is seen in the sheriff's response that the way they are telling the story makes it impossible for him to understand.

This whole process makes the audience aware of a body's inability to depict another body on stage. It can attempt to represent it, but ultimately it fails--it is only a device of representation not the thing itself. In this way the scene forces the audience to realize that "writing is impossible." It is more subtle than what Churchill does but in its own way accomplishes the same thing. The scene forces the audience to acknowledge that the body in representation cannot be the body in reality and that the play is a device of representation not reality itself. The play becomes an optical device.

This gets at what Baillie views to be the purpose of drama as a whole. She does think that it has a tremendous amount of power, so much so that it has the ability to "produce stronger moral effect than upon any other" (93). However, she also sees it as a

device for showing and seeing. In her own way, she breaks the illusion of the theatre like so many contemporary dramatists seek to do and forces the audience to realize that they are watching a device try to show them what cannot be seen--they have not actually gone into the private chamber but they are looking through the optical device that is the play in order to view what otherwise could not be seen.

By examining how Baillie and Costello both theorize their understanding of seeing and how they manipulate the viewing process within their drama and poetry, we find that both authors are making their audiences see the optical unconscious. Moreover, for both authors, this optical unconscious reveals pictures of powerful femininity and womanhood that late eighteenth and early nineteenth century viewers may have missed in their initial looking. Both Baillie and Costello function as the eighteenth century version of the camera, revealing images of subversive femininity, feminist utopias, and powerful and autonomous feminine bodies. Their works become the optical devices that allow us to see what we do not always see with the eyes of every day perception: the lady showroom all around us.

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