

***Mansfield Park* and “The Lay of the Last Minstrel”:
Fanny’s Re-Enactment of the Gothic Anti-Heroine Lady Branhholm’s Gender Reversal**

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<1> Elizabeth Inchbald’s romantic comedy *Lovers’ Vows* (1798) is merely one among the many intertexts to Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814).⁽¹⁾ The purpose of the present article is to explore the relevance of another—much neglected—intertext to the carnivalesque confusion of gender identities in Austen’s novel: Walter Scott’s metrical gothic romance “The Lay of the Last Minstrel” (1805).⁽²⁾ It will be argued that Austen’s protagonist, the female reader Fanny Price, is intrigued not only by Inchbald’s comic heroine, the gender-bending Amelia Wildenhaim, but Scott’s dark anti-heroine, Lady Branhholm,⁽³⁾ a sorceress. Indeed, the lady functions as another mirror image (made strange) and role model—inspiring Fanny to emulate her seemingly empowering gender reversal.⁽⁴⁾

<2> At *Mansfield Park*, Fanny is prescribed by her cousin Edmund Bertram “educational” literature exclusively by men—or male discourse—that shall apparently teach her “proper” womanhood.⁽⁵⁾ But the list of books includes Scott’s romance, presenting Fanny with a gothic anti-heroine who desires to be a man in order to rule the ‘male’ body politic. Fanny, the “creepmouse” (106), is invited to look at the gender-bound world and her subjugated position in it through a glass darkly, or Lady Branhholm’s “altered eye” (4; Canto I, x). And like her, it appears, Fanny comes to believe that things might be otherwise—through gender reversal. In the present article, I will first trace Fanny’s response to the lady and the intriguing affinity between them and their circumstances. What will follow is an exploration of Fanny’s adoption of a male role in a private rehearsal of *Lovers’ Vows* in her East room in the attic—that is, gothic space—in interaction with the lady’s gender reversal. The subversive narrative threads in the novel and romance, then, ultimately challenge the obligatory story of heterosexual love and marriage. Fanny and Lady Branhholm (apparently) resume their “proper” gender performance and place in the domestic world. Yet this “happy” ending is, as will be shown, a false one.

<3> Julian Wolfreys notes that “[t]he gothic is clearly always already excessive, grotesque, overflowing its own boundaries and limits” (8). Its anti-heroine is no less excessive and

uncontainable. There appears, then, to be a radical difference between the gothic Lady Branhholm and the seemingly timid Fanny. Yet Fanny, we ought to remember, enters Mansfield Park as another transgressive agent, or rebellious alterity. At the age of ten, she is abruptly transplanted from her impoverished family home in Portsmouth to the genteel Mansfield Park. Her uncle Sir Thomas Bertram, already prior to her arrival, proves to be apprehensive of her as a source of anarchic feminine nature. In fact, immediately upon her arrival, repressed femininity gushes forth in the shape of Fanny's flood of tears. Drawn from the sea by Portsmouth, they are causing a commotion in the patriarch's rational household, indeed overflowing its boundaries. Luce Irigaray, interrogating injurious patriarchal culture, asks: "isn't there a fluidity, some flood, that could shake this social order?" ("Women-Mothers" 47) Fanny's name significantly means "free" (Harper, "Fanny"). She is hence, like Lady Branhholm, a threat to the patriarchal order. Edmund proposes to his apprehensive father to subject Fanny to "reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself" (16). In his roles as "guardian and ... teacher," he will regulate her body and mind (Morrisey 202). But Edmund proves to be a self-divided representative of patriarchy and the male discourse he recommends both socialising and subversive (Melikoğlu 114).

<4> It is difficult to locate in the novel Fanny's reader-response. Not only are the references to the works she reads, over the period of eight years, dispersed, but her response is rarely explicitly described. Yet the fact that she twice cites from memory some (half) lines from the "Lay" bespeaks Fanny's familiarity with and partiality to it. Many among Austen's contemporary readers would have immediately recognized the references to the romance, which is based on an old Scottish border feud. Richard D. Altick notes that it sold extremely well, that is, 15,000 copies within five years, and established Scott's fame as a poet (qtd. in Axelrad 286). It is their common experience of being excluded from participation in public life that triggers Fanny's recollection and empathy, indeed identification, with its anti-heroine.

<5> A ball shall mark the by now eighteen-year-old Fanny's formal entry as a marriageable young woman into society. She is expected to demonstrate her accomplishment in dance, but her vigorous exertion of her body in quasi public space raises patriarchal concerns. Pleasure and pain throb through her indelicately and implicitly mentioned feet that suddenly poke through social decorum. She is "sore-footed and fatigued, restless and agitated" (202, my emphasis). Like the overflowing gothic heroine, Fanny's hitherto straitjacketed body spins out of control and exceeds its 'proper' feminine performance. And patriarchy is displeased. During a racy country-dance, Sir Thomas 'advises' Fanny to go to bed. For George Colman, this dance epitomises the gender reversal he observes in his eighteenth-century society: "in the moral system there seems at present to be going on a kind of Country-Dance between the Male and Female Follies and Vices, in which they have severally crossed over, and taking each other's places. The men are growing delicate and refined, and the women free and easy" (qtd. in Kates

xxvii). Sir Thomas attempts to ward off the threat of such reversal. Fanny must “pass quietly away,” but is “stopping at the entrance door, like the Lady of Branxholm Hall, ‘one moment and no more,’ to view the happy scene” of dancers (201).

<6> In the “Lay,” Lady Branxholm is stopping at the door to watch her little son play with the older knights, who already see in him a legendary future leader:

... the gray warriors prophesied,
How the brave boy, in future war,
Should tame the Unicorn’s pride
Exalt the crescents and the star” (6; Canto I, xix).

Lady Branxholm’s husband, Lord Walter, chieftain of the clan of Scott, has recently been murdered by the clan of Carr. While their son will eventually take his place, the lady proves to be excluded from the masculine world of chivalry. It is in recognition of their common banishment that Fanny remembers and melts into one with the anti-heroine. Fanny is not only the analytical, but the affective reader in whom the deep pathos (Gk “suffering” or “feeling”) in “one moment and no more” elicits a deep empathy with the exiled lady. In patriarchal culture, such affective reading is not only aligned with the feminine, but pathologised as a threat to reason and restraint. In fact, “pathos” and “pathology” are, as Karin Littau notes, etymologically connected (75). An onrush of strong emotions thus lifts Fanny out of the rational patriarchal world and helps her sense the gothic reality of Lady Branxholm. The exiled anti-heroine rises in revolt, urging the straitjacketed female reader in the house of patriarchal tyrannies to follow her lead.

<7> Clearly, the pain caused by Fanny’s exclusion as a female from participation in the public world exceeds the pain caused by her frustration in love. If, for Fanny, the ‘proper’ destiny of women, matrimony, were the most important thing, she would identify not with the anti-heroine, but her daughter, Margaret. A paragon of feminine virtue, the golden-haired and blue-eyed Margaret is, like Fanny, hopelessly in love. Margaret knows that her mother “would [rather] see her on her dying bed,” than consent to her marriage to Henry of Cranstoun (4; Canto I, x). It is her fear of Henry as a rival to the role of chieftain, rather than his alliance with the Carr—who have ‘conveniently’ killed her husband—that causes Lady Branxholm to forbid the marriage. Similarly, Fanny is secretly romantically attached to Edmund, but Sir Thomas insists that the poor girl must know her place. Despite their common frustration, Fanny does not even once remember or allude to Margaret. Instead, she is intrigued by Lady Branxholm, who, as Nancy Moore Goslee observes, “uses” —or rather plans to use—“magic to help her take on the male role of leadership” (116). A “proud and individual challenge to romantic and domestic love,” the lady’s story is, as Moore Goslee suggests, placed in an oppositional relation

to that of her daughter (117). And Fanny finds herself on the side of the anti-heroine who puts in crisis the gender roles and gender hierarchies.

<8> The motherless Lady Branhholm has actually been reconciled by her father to subversive femininity. He is not only, like Fanny's surrogate-father, Edmund, a clergyman, but a necromancer who has taught the lady magic, which is rooted in the pagan worship of mother nature, but has been appropriated by men. Yet desirous of entry into the symbolic order and public realm, the lady wishes to be a man. She covets the wizard Michael Scott's "Mighty Book" of magic, a certain spell in which "[c]ould make a Ladye seem a knight" (16; Canto III, ix) —that is, a man. Although she fails to lay her hands on the book, she assumes a masculine identity, or gives a masculine performance, albeit maintaining her sex. This is, then, the role model that Fanny embraces and emulates.

<9> Fanny's association of James Rushworth's family chapel at Sotherton with the gothic Melrose Abbey in Scott's romance functions as a prelude to her recollection of Lady Branhholm. Fanny's response to the chapel is ostensibly conditioned by Scott's description of Melrose Abbey from which she is citing a line and a half (Littlewood 342). Her response is, as we shall see, also reminiscent of the protagonist of Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland's reaction to the Tilneys' abbey (Lau 183). When touring the chapel, Fanny does not seem to be thinking of Lady Branhholm, but the abject is, as we come to understand, lurking in the back of her mind.

<10> The disappointed Fanny sees "nothing awful [in the chapel], nothing melancholy, nothing grand" (62). There are "No banners, cousin," she says to Edmund, that would remind her of the banners of Scott's Melrose Abbey, "blown by the night wind of Heaven" and signalling that "a 'Scottish monarch sleeps below'" (62). In Melrose Abbey lie buried the high and mighty who once ruled over the body politic on earth and the other world, respectively: the Scottish monarch and Michael, holding the book of magic in his sinister hand. Similarly, an enthusiastic reader of gothic novels, Catherine anticipates an old abbey replete with a shut up or murdered wife, but to her disappointment beholds a modern one. Fanny and Catherine are corrected and shamed by Edmund and Henry Tilney, respectively. Sensory over-stimulation appears to have enfeebled the female readers' rational powers and resulted in their mistaking an extravagant gothic fiction for reality. Like Catherine, Fanny acknowledges to have been "foolish" (62). Yet, as critics have pointed out, Catherine eventually comes to the conclusion that she has been right all along.⁽⁶⁾ And so does Fanny. All is real: oppressive and dysfunctional patriarchy and the exiled anti-heroine who rises up in revolt.

<11> Both Fanny's disappointment and Edmund's anxiety-ridden derision originate in the same thing: the absence-presence of Lady Branhholm. Fanny mentions the dead monarch, but not the lady—yet the abject is, as noted above, lurking in her subconscious, ready to erupt. In fact,

that something “‘awful... melancholy [and] grand’” (62) that Fanny has anticipated and feared all along alludes not only to the aura of Melrose Abbey, but the anti-heroine. In the Gothic, exile is traditionally suggested by live-burial in or denial of entry into the house. Her seeming absence from the chapel at Sotherton is reminiscent of the lady’s being denied entry into Melrose Abbey, the fortress of—dead—patriarchy. However, it is her quest that dominates Scott’s romance and opens the abbey’s gates for us to step inside. Determined as she is to undergo gender reversal, the lady sends the knight Sir William of Deloraine to recover the book of magic from the wizard’s tomb.

<12> Fanny, then, recognises in Lady Branhholm’s story her own exilic condition in patriarchal culture and desire for empowerment. In fact, both inhabit alien, gothic spaces that are at once suggestive of the forgotten margins of the patriarchal house and culture, at large, and empowering. Fanny inhabits the attic room and East room, which is also located in the attic, and the lady “the secret bower” (3; Canto I, i). The strange, indeed uncanny, aura of the lady’s bower, which is sealed off by magic, resonates in Fanny’s rooms. While Inchbald’s Amelia inhabits the broad daylight world of comedy, Fanny and Lady Branhholm are denizens of a darker world. This is the beyond or Herland that attempts but fails to entirely ward off male intrusion.

<13> Lady Branhholm’s “secret bower ... was guarded by word and by spell,” and no one “[h]ad dared to cross the threshold stone” (3; Canto I, i). Herland is sealed off by ‘feminine’ magic, which is, however, as noted above, appropriated by men. It, moreover, bears the name of powerful men and is located in regal patriarchal space, “[i]n old Lord David’s western tower” (4; Canto I, xii). The old David is not only a forbear of Lord Walter, but the shepherd-king of the Old Testament. The latter David was secretly anointed king—while Saul was still ruling Philistine—and killed the giant, Goliath, with his slingshot. This allusion, in turn, alludes to the lady’s initial status as an outsider and eventual claim to the role of leader, which is, however, nullified. While the sorceress and her pagan magic are finally exorcised, David takes his place in a long line of male rulers and—as the reputed author of many psalms—narrators sanctified in the Old Testament.

<14> Her introspection in private space also brings to light the lady’s internal conflict. J.H. Alexander observes that “[t]he unnaturalness of the Ladye’s hatred [of Cranstoun] is vividly conveyed by her absurd address to the Mountain and River Spirits” (29). Actually, the debate between the two allegorical figures, I would argue, is an internal one.⁽⁷⁾ The River Spirit and Mountain Spirit represent the lady’s feminine and masculine component, respectively; both agree that the lady’s feud must have an end, her pride be quelled and Margaret’s tears stopped. Yet the defiant lady replies to the spirits thus:

“Your mountains shall bend
And your streams ascend
Ere Margaret be our foeman’s bride!” (5; Canto I, xviii)

Mountains rise and streams fall, but the lady is fiercely resolved to go against the very ‘nature’ of things—that is, transgress the seemingly natural and fixed boundaries between men and women. Her endeavour, then, seems both wrong and futile. The debate ultimately shows that it is both patriarchy and her self-dividedness that eventually undo the lady.

<15> It is in both her attic and East room that Fanny reads silently literature(8) written by men and recommended by a man. However, there is in her a similar desire for transport to Herland. Will Morrisey draws attention to the fact that Fanny—in chapter eleven—proposes to Edmund to do some stargazing on Cassiopeia (220) rather than the male star he is pointing at. Herland, then, takes the shape of a female planet, far beyond and above the troubled earth. Cassiopeia is also suggestive of Fanny’s desire to retrieve, in the true spirit of Luce Irigaray—if I may be pardoned an anachronism—her bond with her mother, or maternal genealogy. In mythology, Cassiopeia, as Morrisey reminds us, was “a queen who boasted of her beauty and nearly lost her daughter,” Andromeda, to a sea monster, as a punishment (220). Fanny is estranged from her mother, but her East room, imprinted by male discourse, as William Deresiewicz observes, also constitutes “a substitutively maternal space” where she keeps “a collection of powerfully evocative momentos” that help her reconstruct her “personal history” (57)—or herstory.

<16> It is noteworthy that, in the list of her possessions kept in the room, her geraniums are mentioned before her books and writing desk, as suggestive of Fanny’s prioritisation of nature over culture and, by extension, of femininity over masculinity. The spaces she inhabits may not be sealed off by magic from patriarchal scrutiny, but she proves resistant to it. When Edmund enters her East room and notices books lying on her table, they are closed. He himself opens one in an act of violation of privacy, but elicits from Fanny no response to his question about the progress of her reading.

<17> The East room’s association with China accentuates not only Fanny’s relative inaccessibility, but alterity, as reminiscent of the sorceress’s. The association is established through Fanny’s reading of the representative of George III, Lord George Macartney’s *Journal of the Embassy to China*. J. M. Roberts notes that “China was remote, inaccessible to alien influence, far from sources of disturbance in other great civilizations” (428). It is also here, in the East room, that Sir Thomas, utterly shocked by her refusal to marry the well-situated Henry Crawford, pathologises Fanny as “wilful and perverse,” a woman thrown into “a wild fit of folly” (226-227)—or a madwoman (Melikoğlu 112). “[F]rom its place of banishment,” as Julia Kristeva notes, “the abject does not cease challenging its master” (2). Fanny, as suggestive of the sorceress and—dare we say—Charlotte Brontë’s iconic madwoman, or ‘ghost,’ in the attic,

Bertha Mason, represents what Kristeva calls a “massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me” —or patriarchy— “as radically separate, loathsome” (2). A fire is burning in Bertha’s attic, but Fanny’s rooms have for many years been cold. Patriarchy fears fire, which will reanimate women. In the absence of a fire, affective reading revives and kindles the spark of rebellion in Fanny and renders her uncanny to a cold and rational patriarchy.

<18> While a dominantly masculine Lady Branhholm emerges from the exilic space she inhabits in order to participate in the political world, Fanny remains in the patriarchal house, but delivers a travesty performance in a rehearsal. In the “Lay,” we are presented an evil world of “discord” and “death-feud” and dissolution caused by power-hungry rivalling males (4; Canto I, viii). Neither “piety ...[nor] Christian lore ... patriot zeal ...love of blessed charity” (4; Canto I, viii) can, we are told, put an end to this war. In this time of crisis, the clan of Scott actually welcome Lady Branhholm’s courageous leadership, shared with the seneschal, in the war against the Carr and their English foes. We are told that:

The noble Dame, amid the broil,
Shared the grey Seneschal’s high toil,
And spoke of danger with a smile;
Cheer’d the young knights, and council sage
Held with the chiefs of riper age (20; Canto III, xxxi).

Lady Branhholm also raises a band to seize upon the enemy. She is referred to as “Dame,” but her integration into the ‘male’ body politic suggests a gender reversal, accomplished without the help of the book of magic.

<19> In fact, Lady Branhholm’s political career is presented to be in conflict with her roles as wife and mother. Although she recognises the lady’s desire to rule, Moore Goslee believes that her actual aim is to avenge the death of her husband and “protect her family and border-terrain” (16). Yet I argue that Lady Branhholm desires to replace rather than avenge her husband.⁽⁹⁾ It is his ‘convenient’ death that allows the lady to emancipate herself from her traditional gender role in the domestic sphere and enter the public realm. In fact, she is also ready to sacrifice her children to her political ambition. Margaret, who believes that her mother would rather see her dead than married to Henry, alludes to the threat of infanticide. The lady directs another such latent threat towards her son, who is the heir of Branhholm Hall. She “blushed *blood-red*” when, prior to a battle, her son, who is possessed by the goblin, acts cowardly (25; Canto IV, xiv, my emphasis). Furious that “[t]hat coward should e’er be son of mine!” (25; Canto IV, xiv), she orders one of her men to take him home; but her son falls into the hands of the enemy. Patriarchy is a culture founded on sacrifice and war. Lady Branhholm,

too, sacrifices others—in fact, her family—and wars with the enemy, and yet she is presented as a mere semblance of a male, an impostor of sorts.

<20> We must remember that the certain spell in Michael's book of magic—which Lady Branhholm fails to acquire—“[c]ould make a Ladye seem a knight” (16; Canto III, ix, my emphasis), rather than actually change her anatomical sex. Towards the end of the “Lay,” representatives of patriarchy return to reassert control. Does their return, then, imply the lady's failure to inhabit a masculine identity? This would, in turn, affirm the assumption of a natural and unsurmountable difference between men and women. But neither the “Lay” nor *Mansfield Park* allows for such a conservative premise.

<21> Before her formal entry into society as a marriageable young woman, Fanny plays a travesty role. Her performance, which is delivered in the East room rather than in the public realm, may be considered to be less subversive than Lady Branhholm's. Yet Fanny has been prepared for her role through children's play—which Plato considers to be a political threat to the stability of the state. Before parting from Portsmouth, she was “playfellow” (11) for her siblings, four brothers and one sister. Plato both acknowledges the socialising effect of children's play and fears that the child who would at a whim change the rules of the game was likely to grow into an adult who would attempt to change the laws of the republic(10)—or, we may add, disregard the traditional gender boundaries. We may, in fact, assume that Fanny played boy's games with her four brothers. The seeming model of feminine virtue is, moreover, associated with a metonym of masculinity, a knife. When sent back to Portsmouth, she ends her sisters Susan and Betsey's quarrel over a knife, the legacy of their dead sister, Mary,(11) by buying another one. The rehearsals at Mansfield Park, then, open up space for Fanny (and other players) to experiment further with gender.

<22> The rehearsals attest to Austen's great interest in—rather than condemnation of—the world of theatre.(12) Many popular comedies, to which Austen was partial (Byrne 64), featured male and female cross-dressing and travesty.(13) These gender-bending performances and the heated “debates over what made women feminine and men masculine” they caused (Straub, “Actors” 258) clearly spilled over into *Mansfield Park* and possibly the “Lay.” Scott, who also wrote dramatic works and acquired the Adelphi Theatre (Fowler Wright 639), too, was familiar with the contemporary stage. When settling on *Lovers Vows*, Tom Bertram suggests that his sister Julia play Cottager's wife, but speak her husband's more serious lines, which alludes to a sort of hermaphroditism. Lady Branhholm and the seneschal, who rule the clan together, constitute another ‘hermaphroditic’ body. After Julia refuses the role of Cottager's wife, Tom presses Fanny to play the part. Fanny, too, declines, but tries to help James Rushworth, whose gender is ambiguous, memorise his lines. In his role as the fop Count Cassel, Rushworth is to wear a pink satin cloak over his blue dress, thus openly displaying his and his character's

'feminine' side, while hiding their 'masculine' side. Her involvement in these instances of gender confusion, then, functions as a prelude to Fanny's attempt at a travesty role.

<23> In the private rehearsal in her East room, Fanny reads the clergyman Anhalt's speech on matrimony to Mary Crawford, who is cast as his love-interest, Amelia Wildenhaim. Fanny is standing in for Edmund, thereby playing simultaneously two male roles. Fanny tells Mary, "I will do my best with the greatest readiness" (122); so she is not at all averse to playing a male role. We may ask ourselves whether it is not her identification with the gender-bending Lady Branhholm that motivates Fanny's prompt compliance with Mary's request. This is her chance to emulate the lady. However, if Lady Branhholm appears, as noted above, to be exposed as a mere semblance of a male, Fanny apparently fails to even merely *seem* a man.

<24> Dressed in her own clothes—which are an important part of the performance of gendered identity— and "with looks and voice so truly feminine," Fanny is "no good picture of a man" (122). Again, Fanny tells Mary that "I must read the part, for I can say very little of it," as apparently suggestive of her incapability to deliver a masculine performance. There arises, then, the question to what extent Fanny and Lady Branhholm's seemingly unconvincing performances in a male role constitute a challenge to the idea of an authoritative patriarchy. In order to shed some light on this question, let us return to the contemporary public theatre.

<25> Kristina Straub observes that late eighteenth-century audiences sought to persuade themselves that actresses in breeches performed "an obvious parody which left gender boundaries unquestioned" ("Guilty" 423). Put in breeches, the actresses, Straub remarks, displayed their legs in order to "sell tickets" ("Guilty" 424). Similarly, Lady Branhholm, albeit not urging her female charms, as noted above, merely seems to be a man. Her and Fanny's travesty performances—in women's dress—may appear to be unconvincing and hence non-threatening. Yet Straub continues to argue that even so actresses in breeches roles did challenge the traditional definition of the gender roles. She remarks that "the 'castrated' figure of the cross-dressed actress is ... capable of holding a mirror up to masculinity that reflects back an image of castration" ("Guilty" 429). The laughter that Fanny's poor performance provokes is, then, also directed at what she attempts to represent, Edmund, or men in general. Lady Branhholm appears to be another, in Straub's words, "failed m[a]n" (429) and thus also suggestive of loss of manhood.

<26> But are Lady Branhholm and Fanny's performances really unsuccessful? What is the norm according to which they are judged? An ambitious, counselling and warring leader, the lady may, in fact, be said to show a perfectly 'masculine' performance. But neither does the patriarchy in the "Lay" nor in *Mansfield Park* correspond to the traditional notion of manliness. We may remember Lady Branhholm's husband's broken sword, as suggested not only of his death but loss of 'manhood' in his realm, which allows her to adopt the role of leader. There is

also the feminisation of her father and Michael through magic, which is, as noted above, rooted in the pagan worship of the mother earth, or archaic belly-magic. When Sir Deloraine and the Monk go to Melrose Abbey, the dead Michael, the book of magic in his left hand, issues from the tomb, as if from the womb. In *Mansfield Park*, Mary's much-noted pun on "Rears, and Vices" (44), in allusion to sodomy in the navy, not only undermines the illusion of a strong patriarchy, but the masculinity of the entire English nation. Mary, moreover, as Byrne observes, dominates Edmund, just as Amelia dominates the object of her love, Anhalt (160). Clearly, both Lady Branhholm and Fanny are placed and shaped in cultures that are pervaded by profound gender ambiguity.

<27> Austen introduces another twist. Lady Branhholm's heterosexuality is never questioned; she appears to have feelings for Sir Deloraine, but love seems to be irreconcilable with political ambition. On the other hand, David Marshall, in reference to Fanny and Mary's private rehearsal, speaks of "homoerotic currents" (77). Mary's following words to Fanny, "You must rehearse with me so that I may fancy *you* [Edmund]" (122), are indeed suggestive of a confusion of love object choice and homo-eroticism. Even if for a reason irrelevant to the present discussion, Jill Heydt-Stevenson associates Fanny with the eponymous protagonist of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known as *Fanny Hill* (1748-1749) (328),⁽¹⁴⁾ which, as Kirsten Pullen comments, "contains perhaps the most famous literary example of eighteenth-century lesbianism" (85). Are we presented a lesbian utopia? In an early scene, we see Austen's Fanny, as noted above, longing to do some stargazing on a female planet. Even if tongue-in-cheek, we are suggested different alternatives: women's participation in a 'male' body politic, which requires that they be like a man only to be exposed as a mere semblance of a man, and women's reconciliation with subversive femininity and transport to a female utopia.

<28> Both Austen and Scott are, then, acutely aware of the inadequacy of the dominant attitude towards sex and gender, signalling the need for change. Cultural renewal might actually lead back to the past when, as Anne Fausto-Sterling reminds us, "[e]arly medical practitioners" and, we may add, their societies "understood sex and gender to fall a continuum and not into ... discrete categories" (33). Again, they "were not," as Fausto-Sterling continues to observe, "fazed by hermaphrodites. Sexual difference, they thought, involved quantitative variation. Women were cool, men hot, masculine women or feminine men warm" (33). In *Mansfield Park* and the "Lay," there is an attempt to return to this understanding of sex and gender.

<29> In order to make a profound change, public discourse, regulated by and privileging men, must be revised. It is in particular Lady Branhholm's—vain—attempt to come into possession of Michael's book that attests to an awareness of the power that resides in discourse, defining,

among others, individuals' gender roles. Despite the relevance of the book in their narratives, neither Austen nor Scott dispenses altogether with the presupposition of an essential interior core of gendered identity.⁽¹⁵⁾ However, their protagonists (and other characters) suggest that men and women's nature's are more complex than the rigidly defined categories of sex and gender allow for. Lady Branhholm, as noted above, possesses both an apparently inherent masculine and feminine component. The privileging of everything defined as masculine by social discourse causes the lady to try to 'shed' her feminine side and cultivate her masculine side. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny rapturously exclaims, in the presence of Mary, "how astonishing a variety of nature!" and goes on to say that it "does not make it less amazing, that the same soil and the same sun should nurture plants differing in the first rule and law of their existence" (149). We may suspect that she is referring not only to the variety found among plants, but human beings. This variety is presented as the very law of nature. Yet in both texts, the subversive storyline uncovering this variety is abruptly disrupted by representatives of patriarchy.

<30> In *Mansfield Park*, Edmund interrupts Fanny's travesty performance vis-à-vis Mary. Sir Thomas's sudden return from Antigua terminates the rehearsals altogether and apparently restores order at Mansfield Park. In the "Lay," Margaret's lover, Henry, the lady's son, the ghost of Michael and the holy fathers (re)appear to reassert control. The agents of the subversive storylines are scooped up into the obligatory story of marriage, and the crises they have caused seem to be resolved. Morrisey argues that "[the lady] is bringing peace and arranging a marriage that will ensure the continuance of peace" (207). While she is said to have renounced her magic and attended her daughter's wedding, Fanny marries Edmund. Both women are seemingly reconciled to their traditional roles in patriarchal culture. Yet nothing is as it seems.

<31> Jane Milligate points to the minstrel's compression of the wedding into a few lines and awkward conclusion of the "Lay" with the fathers' hymn for the dead rather than "a marriage anthem" (21). What we are presented with is the revenant ghost of Scott and the holy fathers' exorcism of the overreaching lady from both the text and culture. It is "[f]alse slanders," the minstrel insists, that:

... the Ladye high
Chapel or altar came not nigh;
Nor durst the rites of spousal grace,
So much she fear'd each holy place (40; Canto VI, v).

The anti-heroine's alleged absence is suggestive of both exorcism and resistance to being absorbed into a false happy end. However, there is no alternative place that can accommodate her alterity other than the twilight zone.⁽¹⁶⁾

<32> Neither can nor will Fanny be assimilated into the civic order. She, too, ends up utterly uprooted. “[T]he conclusion of *Mansfield Park* is,” as Jo Alyson Parker notes, “suggestive of alienation and exclusion rather than celebration and reconciliation” (250). While quite a few characters are exiled from Mansfield Park because of their acting in the home theatricals, Fanny is packed off to her family home at Portsmouth for her refusal to marry Henry. Upon her arrival, she falls into her mother’s arms, “this first body, this first home, this first love” (Irigaray, “Bodily” 39), from whom her entrance into the symbolic order has alienated her. Yet the mother she has expected all along to be reunited with turns out to be overworked and negligent. Thus disillusioned, it is now Mansfield Park that she considers to be “the home” (309). Yet she is nowhere at home.

<33> At Portsmouth, her homesickness reminds Fanny of the schoolboy in William Cowper’s *Tirocinium: or, A Review of Schools* (1785) who finally returns home—but the child proves to be irrevocably estranged from his parents. Again, before her return to Mansfield Park, Fanny reads Samuel Johnson’s romance *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759). Rasselas, accompanied by others, leaves the Happy Valley in search of perfect happiness, but eventually gives up all idealism and decides to return home. This would attest to Fanny’s awareness that neither her family home nor Mansfield Park nor the outside world is a happy abode. While Lady Branhholm simply disappears, we see Fanny wander from one false home to another: she is first called back from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park and after her marriage to Edmund transplanted to the parsonage. Like Margaret and Inchbald’s Amelia, Fanny must acquiesce in the traditional destiny of women, but her identification with Lady Branhholm is suggestive of frustrated ambition and alienation.

<34> Both the “Lay” and *Mansfield Park* defy resolution and suggest strange and inconclusive reiterations of Lady Branhholm and Fanny’s rebellion. The Duchess of Buccleuch, is, like the lady, another proud—and possibly politically ambitious—widow. It may hence be said that the Duchess is not only the recipient of the minstrel’s performance of the “Lay,” but listening to her own story— the story of a woman who wishes to be a man in order to participate in the ‘male’ body politic. Towards the very end of *Mansfield Park*, Susan emerges as another potential female protagonist who is exposed—by Fanny—to literature and seeks to exceed her ‘proper’ role. Susan is established at Mansfield Park to attend to the wants and needs of Lady Bertram, and Betsey is next in line. Such service is traditionally aligned with women, but both sisters are, as noted above, in possession of a ‘phallic’ knife. The conclusion of *Mansfield Park* is, then, suggestive of doubling or a variation on the theme: an almost new generation of young women will rise in revolt against their exilic condition in patriarchal culture and demand empowerment.

Endnotes

(1)For the relevance of *Lovers' Vows* as an intertext to *Mansfield Park*, see William Reitzel, "Mansfield Park and Lovers' Vows," *Review of English Studies* 9 (1933): 451-456. See also Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2002), 149-176 and 177-209. In Ian Littlewood, "Notes," *Mansfield Park, Jane Austen*, 2nd ed. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 341-344, Littlewood also refers to other intertexts, such as Scott's "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Cowper's *The Task* and *Tirocinium*, Johnson's *The Idler* and *Rasselas*, Macartney's *Plates to his Embassy in China* and *Journal of the Embassy* and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.(▲)

(2)It is probably Will Morrisey who gives the intertextual link between *Mansfield Park* and the "Lay" the greatest attention, albeit not in terms of gender confusion. See Morrisey, *Culture in the Commercial Republic* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996), Chapter 10, "The Politics of Self-Knowledge: *Mansfield Park* and the Refounding of the English Aristocracy," 197-251. I elsewhere suggested that Fanny is partial to "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" and intrigued, in particular, by the masculine Lady Branhholm, but did not explore their affinity or Fanny's re-enactment of her gender reversal. See Esra Melikoğlu, "Bibliomania and Home Theatricals in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*," *Jane Austen and Her Work: Proceedings of the 18th METU British Novelists Conference*, eds. Margaret J-M Sönmez et al. (Ankara: Kardelen Ofset, 2011), 116-117.(▲)

(3)In *Mansfield Park*, the lady's surname is spelt "Branxholm." In order to avoid confusion, I will adopt this spelling rather than the spelling in the edition of the "Lay" I use, "Branksome," except in quotations from that edition.(▲)

(4)In Joel C. Weinsheimer, "Mansfield Park: Three Problems," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 29. 2 (1974): 193, Weinsheimer argues that *Mansfield Park* is possibly "a rustic cousin of Gothic Romance" and Fanny a helpless, pathetic gothic heroine. I, on the other hand, argue that Fanny demonstrates subversive agency as reminiscent of Lady Branhholm.(▲)

(5)It is thanks to Edmund's brother Tom, who suggests that they perform *Lovers' Vows*, that Fanny reads and becomes involved in the rehearsals of a (dramatic) work by a female writer. She picks up a copy of the play presumably left by Tom on a table and begins to read.(▲)

(6)In Emily Auerbach, *Searching For Jane Austen* (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 91, Auerbach remarks that the presumed Bluebeard "General Tilney summarily ejects Catherine Morland from his home because he has discovered that she is not rich." Auerbach goes on to say that "[t]hough Austen pillories gothic melodrama in *Northanger Abbey*, she simultaneously shows that the world really does offer ... hidden evils." Catherine is, then, in principle, proven right.(▲)

(7) In Helderis De Cornuaille, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, ed. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 117-125, Silence, a girl who is brought up as a boy and becomes a knight, too, experiences an internal conflict represented in the shape of a debate between allegorical figures. While Nurture, who has turned her “into a defective male,” and Reason approve of her travesty, Nature taunts her (123).^(^)

(8) Fanny also reads to her aunt Lady Bertram in the drawing-room. Yet it is her unsupervised silent and introspective reading in private space that is more dangerous.^(^)

(9) In Walter Scott, “Introduction and Notes to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*,” *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. J. Logie Robertson, 12th ed. (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1944), 52, Scott acknowledges to have been inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s use of an irregular meter in *Christabel*, which (Dr. John) Stoddart had recited to him. Lady Branhholm proves to be reminiscent of Coleridge’s shape-shifting Geraldine, another witch who besieges rather than defends a weakened chivalric order.^(^)

(10) For Plato’s view on the socialising nature of children’s play, see Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 1.643; for his view of children’s play as a threat to the state, see 1.798.^(^)

(11) Fanny’s dead sister, Mary, is the missing link between her and the emancipated Mary Crawford, whose wit directed at patriarchy cuts like a knife. Seemingly radically different from each other and rivals for Edmund’s love, Fanny and Mary Crawford are also sisters or doubles.^(^)

(12) For Austen’s interest in all things theatrical, see See, for example, Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2002).^(^)

(13) See Kristina Straub, “The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing,” *Feminist Theory and the Body*, eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 423-431. See also Kristina Straub, “Actors and Homophobia,” *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*, eds. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne Fisk (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 258-280. Paula Byrne observes that Austen, an eager theatre-goer, most likely saw the gender-bending *Lovers’ Vows* in Bath, where it was staged about seventeen times during the period of her stay there, that is, from 1801-1806. According to Byrne’s account of Austen’s visits to the theatre, she saw at least one play that, unlike Inchbald’s, actually featured cross-dressing. In *Of Age Tomorrow*, the leading male actor, John Bannister, as Byrne notes, performed in a cross-dressed role. See Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, 39 and 42-43.^(^)

(14) Heydth-Stevenson argues that both Fannies are sexual objects exchanged among men.^(^)

(15)Nor must we assume that, given the relevance of the home theatricals, Austen completely subscribes to Judith Butler’s notion of gendered identity as a performative act that is designed in accordance with discourse and can be learned, abandoned and changed.(^)

(16)In the above-mentioned romance *Silence*, the eponymous protagonist—a girl who is raised as a boy and becomes a knight—later adopts the disguise of a male minstrel. In the introduction, Sarah Roche-Mahdi notes the popularity of “the theme of girl as minstrel”(xvii). Is it possible that the minstrel in Scott’s romance is Lady Branhholm in disguise?(^)

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