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The Eternal Rehearsal: Judith Butler's Gender Performativity in Wilkie Collins, Sarah Waters, and Tana French

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The Eternal Rehearsal: Judith Butler's Gender Performativity in Wilkie Collins, Sarah Waters,
and Tana French

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Department of English

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ABSTRACT

SLEZEK, JILLIAN A. *The Eternal Rehearsal: Judith Butler's Gender Performativity in Wilkie*

Collins, Sarah Waters, and Tana French. Department of English, June 2018

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Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* proposed the groundbreaking theory of gender as a constant performance: a series of cues observed, internalized, and repeated over time. Her argument benefits society's desire to deconstruct gender, and her ideas apply to a vast array of texts and periods. In fact, whereas Butler's text was published in 1990, over a hundred years earlier Wilkie Collins already toyed with gender performance in his formative novel, *The Woman in White* (1860). In this thesis, I examine *The Woman in White* through a Butlerian lens, illuminating how Collins began critiquing the concept of performative gender, especially with regard to women's fashion. I compare Collins's experimentation with gender to that of Sarah Waters, a modern Welsh novelist writing Victorian-era historical fictions. In comparing the two authors, I demonstrate how Waters, in the post-Butler era, more overtly and controversially illustrates gender performance, critiquing the hierarchy it presents with a heavier hand in her novels *Fingersmith* (2002) and *Tipping the Velvet* (1998). To finish my examination of different instances of gender performance, I analyze two Tana French mysteries, *In the Woods* (2007) and *The Likeness* (2008). French sets her novels in the present, and as a result, the Butlerian manifestations prove more subtle, yet just as prevalent. In *The Likeness*, French presents characters who are aware of their performances, yet these instances of consciousness within performance still prove detrimental, as characters end up falling apart when attempting to

separate themselves from their performances. Ultimately, this thesis moves across chronological periods: Collins defines gender norms in somewhat reactionary terms, ascribing to Marian her own awareness of social limitations specific to gender and sex. Waters, by proxy, emphasizes the way in which performances of gender reveal its fluidity. Finally, French demonstrates the lack of gender identity or “true self” at all without performative attributes. All of the authors and texts reveal the inherent and dangerous power of gender regulations within performance.

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players*

-William Shakespeare

Introduction

Gender performativity, a theory explored by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is, in the most simple terms, the concept that society has constructed and reinforced gender over a long period of time. Butler, inspired by the theoretical texts of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Monique Wittig, dives into theorizing gender and sexuality and questioning the notions about sex and gender that are readily accepted (Lloyd 78). Gender, according to Butler and other theorists, is a series of cues that people subconsciously pick up from watching and imitating those around them who are of the same biological sex. Butler calls into question the widely accepted link between sex and gender, and she argues that this relationship is, in fact, not natural as one would believe. Gender, Butler asserts, is not simply the “causal result of sex,” but rather the “cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes” (Butler 10). There is no biological or ‘natural’ force that links a person to a specific gender based on their sex at birth, although most of society readily accepts this linking as natural and necessary. Butler urges the questioning of this fabricated relationship, stating that “the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (*Idem.*). Not only is the immediate pairing of sex and gender false, it is also problematic in that it restricts socially-constructed gender to mimicking the biological concept of sex, with no room for acceptable movement, change, or discontinuity.

Once the falsely deterministic linking of sex and gender is abandoned, Butler argues, gender can be seen for what it truly is. She states:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and

masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (*Idem.*, *emph. orig.*)

Gender, when freed from sex, is revealed as a construct, and then can be viewed as more mobile. As Moya Lloyd puts it: “sex (the biological differences between men and women) is fixed[,] gender is not” (79). While Butler has ideas about the instability of sex as a fixed category as well, for the purposes of this argument, I will not be examining those ideas further; I will only be examining the wrongly-believed-to-be-natural relationship between sex and gender. Once the concept of gender is liberated from its false dependence on sex, it becomes clear that it is a performance, or a series of artificial social constructs.

Gender performance, the truth behind gender once disassociated from sex, as Butler emphasizes – is a process that is perpetually practiced and repeated. As Simone de Beauvoir says: “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (cited in Butler 12). The “becoming” that de Beauvoir articulates is a constant process; women are always continually performing the actions they observe around them, and so the “becoming” is essentially a perpetual rehearsal. There are cultural expectations and norms that make up a gender, the metaphorical ‘performance cues,’ that are placed upon an assigned sexed body, as women grow up watching the other women around them mimicking performances, and they consequently imitate the performance themselves. Butler, dissecting de Beauvoir’s ideas on ‘becoming’ a woman, states: “‘the body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (12). The body, through the lens of Butler and de Beauvoir, is the biological entity on which all of the cultural expectations and practices fall and through which they are then practiced. The body, then, observes, mimics, and internalizes the artificial and exterior cultural

cues of gender, which are constructed and learned, and these culturally-created notions become exterior markers meant to signify the interior biology, or sex, of that body. Thus, the fallacious link between sex and gender is perpetuated. When looked at through this socially-fabricated lens, gender is revealed as, in Butler's own words, "a stylized repetition of acts" (179). Gestures, mannerisms and actions create an illusion of a cohesive gender and sex, that is, of continuity between the exterior and interior (*Idem.*). These cultural constructions constitute the idea of a gender, but without the constant practice and imitation of them, gender does not exist. Gender is, consequently, an effect of performance and imitation over time (Lloyd 80).

One way in which the cultural construction of exterior characteristics as markers of interior biology can be exposed as an imitation is through the exterior and interior not 'matching.' Butler argues that, in this case:

The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this "ground." (179, *emph. orig.*)

When a situation arises in which the performance cues that have been inscribed upon a body are actually not signifiers of the biology of that body, it becomes clear that the ground for those performance cues, or the gender, cannot possibly be sex. Rather, the gender and the actions and mannerisms that make it up are simply learned acts that need not have any biological or "natural" relationship to the sex of the body putting on the act.

Chapter I

Wilkie Collins: Removing Fashion from Performance

Wilkie Collins, a popular 19th-century English author, is still celebrated today for his intricate and captivating plotlines. He has a knack for, as Bradford A. Booth puts it, “sheer, one might even say mere, story-telling” (131). Collins’s novels develop in captivating ways that begin playing with the concept of gender performance as a direct result of his experimentation with narrative. His constant revealing of characters and the performances they are putting on mimics a kind of strip tease, or the costume of a performance falling away. I examine Collins’s unlayering of characters through narration below and, after doing so, I argue the unlayering’s connection to the societal power structure created by fashion and gender performance. In the preface of *The Woman in White* (1860), Collins discusses his writing style and the way he prefers to unfold a plot, stating:

I have always held the old-fashioned opinion that the primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a story; and I have never believed that the novelist who properly performed this first condition of his art, was in danger, on that account, of neglecting the delineation of character — for this plain reason, that the effect produced by any narrative of events is essentially dependent, not on the events themselves, but on the human interest which is directly connected with them. It may be possible, in novel writing, to present character successfully without telling a story; but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters: their existence, as recognizable realities, being the sole condition on which the story can be effectively told. The only narrative which can hope to lay a strong hold on the attention of readers, is a narrative which

interests them about men and women—for the perfectly obvious reason that they are men and women themselves. (cited in Booth 135)

Collins was quite adamant about narration and its importance in telling a compelling story.

Collins thought his characters, and their narration, were of the highest significance for the flow and the ultimate power of the novel. Because of this evaluation, Collins uses a shifting, first-person narration, never sticking to one singular narrator, to truly emphasize his characters and their personalities. He uses his characters to drive the plot of his stories, and this differs from some of the novelists whom Collins admired like Charles Dickens, who spoke about his characters, rather than through them (Booth 132). Collins recognized the significance of characters in appealing to an audience, and, through creating complex characters to relate to, he is able to present the performance and illustrate societal perceptions of gender.

In creating narratives that allow readers to see characters through multiple perspectives, Collins employs a specific unlayering process. Readers are able to understand the characters, and subsequently the plot, as he slowly reveals more and more through his characters' narratives, between which he constantly switches. The unlayering is dual: both metaphorical and physical. In *The Woman in White*, there is metaphorical unlayering as readers are able to learn more about Marian Halcombe, arguably the most interesting and complex character, through the unpacking of her personal narrative, which takes the form of diary entries. She is also, however, unlayered by other characters, as they describe her character to the audience in their narratives. Walter Hartwright, the initial, first-person narrator of the novel, is the first to introduce Marian to the readers, describing his first view of her:

I was struck by the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude.

Her figure was tall, [her] head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness; her

waist, perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural place, it filled out its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays. The easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly. She left the window — and I said to myself, The lady is dark. She moved forward a few steps — and I said to myself, The lady is young. She approached nearer — and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), The lady is ugly! (Collins 24)

Hartwright's initial reaction to seeing Marian provides a thorough description of Marian's exterior appearance, and the enchanting way in which she moves about a room. Hartwright, on first encounter, focuses entirely on Marian's body, unlayering every aspect of her appearance and revealing her form to the readers. In fact, he even ignores her clothes altogether, looking at her form as if she were naked, and this is a bit voyeuristic on his part. Hartwright feels entitled to Marian's entire body, so much so that he focuses on it and entirely ignores the obstruction of clothing. His emphasis on her physicality is quite significant in the way it attests to how a man, such as Hartwright, expects and believes every aspect of femininity, the main attribute of female gender, to be natural. Her movements and grace are, through the lens of Butler and her theory of gender performance, the result of watching and mimicking, without any knowledge of what she is doing, the performance of other women. None of the details Hartwright includes are a result of her biological sex; they are simply subconscious imitations. Society, however, is accustomed to attribute these performance acts to a biological, and therefore 'natural,' force. Consequently, women are deemed inferior based on these "natural" characteristics, despite the fact that every characteristic labeled as biologically-occurring is actually societally-constructed. When, however, Hartwright finally sees Marian's face, perhaps the most natural detail that he describes,

he exclaims “The lady is ugly!” Because Hartwright has internalized an aesthetic standard of femininity and women in general, he has a certain expectation for her face, due to the feminine forms that he has already noticed. He expects continuity from the femininity in her gown, the perfect round shape and the ladylike grace, so the stark opposition of her face takes him aback.

Hartwright, in fact, is inclined to believe that Marian’s physical body, completely covered by traditional 19th-century women’s clothing, is also a natural occurrence. Her waist, which he describes as “perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural space, it filled out its natural circle,” reflects Hartwright’s belief. He also notes Marian’s lack of corset, and consequent freeness of her bosom, so his emphasis is especially specific. He literally uses the term “natural” multiple times in describing Marian’s shape, which is actually created through completely unnatural means. The repetition of that very term, ‘natural,’ reflects perfectly the misinterpretation of femininity and gender. The clothing that Marian wears, in this case a gown, is the costume, a completely material entity, that furthers the perceived naturalness of her gender performance. Walter, because he is accustomed to seeing women in their constricting and body-altering wardrobe, believes feminine bodies to have a natural and definite shape. In this instance, Walter is a perfect example of exactly what Butler argues happens in society: because something happens for so long, continuously, society perceives it as naturally-occurring. There is no reason for Walter to believe otherwise, or think more seriously about Marian and her appearance, since he has internalized a feminine ideal of beauty and an unrealistic body image, and he wholly believes that it is natural. Women, like Marian, continually watch and adapt to what they see other women doing, and because of this, the performance of femininity endures and becomes accepted as something that is instinctual. Through Hartwright’s lengthy account of his first

impression of Marian, in which he misreads her completely as the societally-accepted feminine ideal, the readers have a sense of Marian and one of her layers.

Hartwright's descriptions of Laura, which are quite different from those of Marian, further illuminate the gender boundaries that Marian pushes. Hartwright describing Laura, the feminine ideal, is poetic and dreamy. He wonders, "how can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations...?" (39). Hartwright has an immediate reaction to Laura, just as he is "struck" by Marian immediately; he describes what women do to him, indicating his sense of superiority as a man, judging her based on her effect on him. His description of Laura, unlike his of Marian, depicts Laura as she is seen in a painting, further removing Laura from reality and creating an image of her as unreal. Hartwright describes:

The water-colour drawing that I made of Laura Fairlie ... lies on my desk while I write. I look at it ... a youthful figure, clothed in a simple muslin dress, the pattern of it formed by broad alternate stripes of delicate blue and white. A scarf of the same material sits crisply and closely round her shoulders, and a little straw hat of the natural colour ... covers her head, and throws its soft pearly shadow over the upper part of her face. Her hair is of so faint and pale a brown—not flaxen, and yet almost as light; not golden, and yet almost as glossy.... (38)

Hartwright's description goes on much longer, as he endlessly details Laura's beauty. He describes Laura, unlike Marian, as a passive object; she is not even a person, she is a mere figure in a painting in his account. Clearly, in Hartwright's eyes, the components that make up the beautiful and perfect Laura are completely performative, based in fashion, hair, and physical features, and all of them can be represented through a painting; a real person with a functioning human body is not even needed to represent Laura's identity. Even further illuminating Laura's

passivity and objectification, Hartwright also uses passive verbs to describe things being done to Laura. He describes her as “clothed” in a dress, while the material “sits crisply and closely round her shoulders” and “a little straw hat...covers her head, and throws its soft pearly shadow over the upper part of her face.” All of Laura’s defining characteristics are described as acts without human agents, as she is simply a product of multiple performative characteristics. Collins contrasts Hartwright’s depiction of Laura, the ultra-feminine ideal, to further illuminate the restrictions in feminine gender performance and to emphasize the disparities between the two women.

As the novel progresses, Collins presents Marian Halcombe’s personal narrative, a privilege not afforded to Laura, and through this, he peels off more layers of her character and reveals more of the plot’s intricate nature. Marian’s account shows an inner agency to her character, a strong will and fierce loyalty that can only be understood through a first-person narration. Marian’s love for her sister, Laura, and her confused feelings towards the despicable Count Fosco, are developed by Collins through the intensely personal medium of Marian’s diary entries. Upon discussing her sister, Laura, Marian’s narrative reveals a maternal devotion that unpacks yet another, deeper layer of Marian’s personality while simultaneously driving the plotline. Diary entries provide a close-up examination of a character, as the reader is able to hear the inner workings of that character’s mind. There is something different, however, between a diary and an inner monologue. Thoughts are written down, and have therefore gone through some sort of screening process before their presentation to the reader. There is some degree of construction involved in diary writing, as someone is crafting words on paper, and there is always the question of for whom the words are written. In one scene, in which Marian is particularly worried about her sister, her diary reads:

I had no longer the strength of my first angry resistance to outrage and injury to support me. My heart-sick anxiety to see Laura, my sense of my own helpless ignorance of what had happened at the boathouse, pressed on me with an intolerable weight. I tried to keep up appearances by speaking to the Count and his wife in the tone which they had chosen in speaking to me, but the words failed on my lips — my breath came short and thick — my eyes looked longingly, in silence, at the door. (264)

Here, another layer of Marian is exposed, as she empties her heart out onto the pages of her diary, allowing the reader to feel her emotion and connect on a level for which third-person narration simply does not allow. There is an intimacy in first-person narration, which provides a personal and important quality. The very word choice Collins uses, including “anxiety” and “helpless ignorance,” conveys a sense of Marian’s intense introspection and self-awareness, and by using first-person diary entries, he is able to unpack her further and to afford her an interiority denied her when she is viewed solely by Hartwright.

In one key instance, Marian again exemplifies the concept of costume and its restrictive nature for women. Marian decides she must eavesdrop on a conversation between Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde to gain information. To do so, she momentarily deviates from the performance of femininity and takes on an active, masculine role. Marian recounts:

A complete change in my dress was ...necessary.... I took off my silk gown to begin with, because the slightest noise from it ...might have betrayed me. I next removed the white and cumbersome parts of my underclothing, and replaced them by a petticoat of dark flannel. Over this I put my black travelling cloak, and pulled the hood onto my head. In my ordinary evening costume I took up the room of three men at least. In my present

dress, ...held close about me, no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I. (287)

The costume necessary for Marian's 19th-century feminine performance is restricting and "cumbersome." The very gown and undergarments that Hartwright earlier mistook for a natural representation of her body's shape are removed to take action, and she is closest to her true self when she appears least "natural" in the eyes of a man like Hartwright. Marian describes herself as taking up "the room of three men" in her traditional costume, yet Hartwright sees her as a feminine ideal, with a waist, we recall, that "fill[s] out its natural circle" (24). This discontinuity exposes feminine gender performance to be just as arbitrary as Butler argues it is. While Hartwright views Marian in her huge gown and undergarments as natural, that is, biologically predestined, Marian proves she can assume a costume when she needs to appear feminine, yet she may also discard the costume and participate in non-traditional behavior, like climbing atop verandah and eavesdropping. In many ways, this scene also exposes the artificial nature of Marian's body in costume that Hartwright observed and commented on earlier, since Marian can truly be herself and act on instinct when she removes the feminine garments.

Beyond exposing the performative nature of gender, this eavesdropping scene also provides a look at the power structure that is created in gendered fashion. Marian's costume, indicative of 19th-century society in general. Women's fashions at this time, large and inconvenient dresses that swathe unattainable bodies, force women to be immobile. Essentially, the gowns and corsets restrict much more than the waists of women, they also restrict their behavior and their ability to move freely and quietly. In this way, clothing, wholly material and artificial, contributes to gender performance by creating certain behaviors characteristic of femininity. Through describing the way in which Marian must disrobe in order to act in an

intelligent and athletic way, Collins offers insight into gender performance through costume and the very strategic power structure it creates.

As the unlayering of Marian in *The Woman in White* continues, she becomes completely vulnerable to one of the novel's villains, Count Fosco. Fosco, quite literally, steals and holds her diary in his hands, but he is actually holding much more of Marian. Through opening her diary and devouring everything she has poured out on its pages, the Count has now seen through, and subsequently removed each of Marian's layers. This unlayering is redoubled; through the diary the Count deciphers Marian's personality and innermost thoughts, but he also has her literal, bare body, since she has fallen sick and is lying helpless in bed. Again, the unlayering and the use of a clothing-like metaphor in Collins's work is a clever and subtle way to point out the way in which fashion creates a certain struggle, most specifically for women.

Collins's experimentation through Laura and Marian, while groundbreaking, is only the beginning of literature and gender performativity. While Collins uses Laura to demonstrate the social restrictions of a feminine gender performance, as she falls prey to the authorship and ownership of men like Hartwright, Sir Percival Glyde, and Count Fosco, Collins also introduces a mobile aspect to gender performance through Marian. By pushing against social norms and acting beyond traditional feminine performance, Marian points out the unnatural and unfair nature of this performance. Sarah Waters, whose novel *Fingersmith* rewrites *The Woman in White*, takes Collins's precedents, writes them with a modern, more progressive hand, and pushes them even further. In *Fingersmith* and *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters uses instances of gender performance to illuminate not only the unfair policing of social restrictions, but also the inherent gender fluidity the defense of behavior implies. Tana French, in her novels *In the Woods* and *The Likeness*, shows the fluidity and social restrictions within gender performance set forth

by Collins and Waters but takes the critique further by involving consciousness. French's characters reveal that, when stripped of performance, there is really nothing left of gender identity; it is all a fiction based on performative attributes. Put in terms of Collins's unlayering process, first Collins removes the clothing from the performance in *The Woman in White*, showing that a woman like Marian can move beyond the traditional gender roles simply by taking off the restricting gowns. Next Waters removes the body from the performance, proving that gender is unstable, as Nan moves between genders fluidly. Last, French removes stable identity from the body, stripping away every performative act, showing that underneath performance is a vast nothingness. Butler's theory helps decode all three novelists' works, while the authors demonstrate the problems that gender performance creates, and the ultimate fiction underneath it all.

Chapter II

Sarah Waters: Removing the Body from Performance

Sarah Waters, a remarkably successful Welsh author with five novels nominated for major British book prizes, is known for her “sensation plots and grim 19th-century scenarios” (Yeh 151). “Sensation fiction,” a genre that became exceedingly popular in the mid-1800s, was at the time considered “a form of creeping contagion, the means by which the world of the common streets, and the violent or subversive deeds of criminals were carried across the domestic threshold to violate the sanctuary of home” (Pykett 3). The themes of sensation novels satisfied cravings of the public for uncharted territory in literature (*idem.*). Waters’s work has recently sparked the interest of critical scholars, as her ability to weave complex and relevant characters into Victorian-Era settings is unique and groundbreaking (Yeh 151). She is heavily influenced by the aforementioned author Wilkie Collins, she credits him as an inspiration, and she is later praised for her reworking of specific plot points of his *The Woman in White* (Yeh 149). Waters’s *Fingersmith* very closely mirrors the plotline of *The Woman in White*, and it plays more extremely with the notions of performance and detection with which Collins began to experiment. *Fingersmith* is much more overt in dealing with Butler’s theory of gender performativity; her characters more fluidly dive into queer identity and clear gender performance than do Collins’s characters in *The Woman in White*. While Collins establishes a precedent for characters who toy with gender performance in their narratives, Waters takes this craft to a different level in the post-Butler era, using the already established notion of fashion as a material and performative entity that creates and maintains a certain gendered power structure. While *Fingersmith* mirrors the performative narrative of Collins and stretches the limits of this theme’s ability, another of Waters’s controversial and performative novels, *Tipping the Velvet*, takes the

concept of fashion as a central performative facet and amplifies it into the arena of a drag-show. A drag-show, something Butler herself actually addresses as subverting traditional gender expectations, and consequently exploiting the performance, is a progressive and revealing means to provide a manifestation of gender performance. The main character in *Tipping the Velvet*, Nan King, actually alternates between genders regularly, using disparate walks and clothing in order to pass either as a man or as a woman. Her ability to easily shift from appearing male to appearing female, while still remaining the same narrator telling the story in the same way, proves that gender is artificial and ultimately reliant on material and performative facets. Both *Fingersmith* and *Tipping the Velvet* employ, and seriously elevate (perhaps as a result of groundbreaking works like Judith Butler's), the already controversial and experimental narratives that Wilkie Collins founded.

As previously stated, Waters's *Fingersmith* rethinks and reworks Collins's foundational sensation novel, *The Woman in White*. While Waters published her novel in 2003, she decided to set it in the 19th century, making her nod to Collins even clearer. Certainly, setting the novel in the 19th century more than just writes back to Collins: it also says something about the time period's ability to do something important that setting the novel in modern day would not accomplish. As Katharina Boehm puts it, the historical setting of her novels "move[s] away from a mode of historiographic metafiction that is centered on history's textuality and towards an approach that concentrates on the affective and disruptive ways in which tactile encounters with architectural places and material objects shape our investments in the past" (238).

In terms of the "material objects" emphasized in Waters's books, there is a strikingly distinctive characteristic of the fashion of the time period, one that highlights the artificial construction of gender performances, and one that can clearly divide people into power structures and

hierarchies. Sue, much like Marian, is tied to fashion and the things it says about a person, often, their gender and its implications. Similarly to Collins and his multitude of narrators, Waters splits the narrative of *Fingersmith* between two characters, Sue and Maud. Offering two quite personal and introspective narratives by two oppositional characters, Waters is able to unpack and bare all of the characters to the readers through their recollection of events. There is, between these two narratives, a lot of gender performance, as the two protagonists pretend to be each other. There is also an obvious nod to the importance of dress and its impact on social status, as their clothing dictates their position in the social hierarchy and ultimately sends the one with lesser status to an insane asylum. Both the gender performance and the emphasis on fashion, themes which also prevail in *The Woman in White*, take on a new and more dramatic twist in the era of Waters's modern, potentially Butler-influenced writing.

Waters opens *Fingersmith* with a first-person narration by one of the main characters and performers, Sue. Waters, like Collins, is adamant about character development and its importance in driving a plot, and she even begins the first page of her novel with Sue's introduction to herself:

My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday as Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But if I never saw her, she was nothing to me. I was Mrs Sucksby's child, if I was anyone's; and for father I had Mr Ibbs, who kept the locksmith's shop, at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames. (1)

Already, within the first lines of the novel, Waters sets the reader up with an intensely personal, diary-like narration by the character. There is something inherently performative in these very opening lines, which are reflective of the progression of the entire novel. There is something

quite similar to the contrived and artificial nature of a play, as Waters immediately begins hinting at the transformative and fluid nature of identity through Sue's opening lines. Like an actor on stage, Sue's opening lines are her giving her character's name, giving a short background, and indicating that none of this is altogether too real. As Ya-Ju Yeh states: "saturated with intricate and plural discursive elements, *Fingersmith* bears, in particular, direct evidence of 'a theatrical performance'" (152). Sue is clearly unsure of any truth to her identity, using clarifying phrases like "if any," or "if I was anyone's," to prove the inorganic and learned construction of her identity. This decision indicates, already, a performance, as there is an obvious ambivalence in Sue about her name and self. Sue also claims her name "in those days" was Susan Trinder, as if there is, of course, the possibility of a change in name and, possibly in gender. Sue does not hang on to any aspect of her gender performance too tightly; there is a certain distance between her and all of the cues that make up the person people see. As Gretchen Busl puts it, playing with identity this way shows that "the sign systems used to express identity—whether they be linguistic or performative codes—are not mediums which represent any 'truth' about inner reality, but are merely contingent on pre-existing systems" (311). Waters is constantly yet subtly alluding to these "pre-existing systems," and through her characters, she is able to exploit their unnatural and unnecessary natures. Her casual referral to identity as something unimportant and changeable provides a unique counter to the common societal conceptions of identity as incredibly important and fixed, and she continues questioning the norm beyond identity and into gender.

Sue, like Marian, is sly and cunning, defying the traditional expectations of how a feminine woman should act. Sue is a "fingersmith," and this characterization entails an ability to trick, lie, and steal, as Sue explains:

I learned to cipher.... I learned it, from handling coins. Good coins we kept, of course. Bad ones come up too bright, and must be slummed, with blacking and grease, before you pass them on. I learned that, too. Silks and linens there are ways of washing and pressing, to make them seem new. Gems I would shine, with ordinary vinegar. Silver plate we ate our suppers off—but only the once, because of the crests and stampings; and when we had finished, Mr Ibbs would take the cups and bowls and melt them into bars.

(Waters 10)

Sue learns, from her upbringing at the house on Lant Street, exactly how to become a clever thief, with the same skill level as the men in the house. She is, like Marian, able to disguise herself, and she even translates this ability to disguise onto belongings, transforming commonplace items into precious jewels. The word “learn,” which Sue uses repeatedly to explain how she became the person she is, shows just how much of her identity is a series of directions on how to act that have been ingrained in her through watching other people. Sue learns exactly how to make an old plate shine like new, and in learning these simple processes, she became the “fingersmith” that she identifies as. This process is quite similar to the process of internalizing a gender that Butler theorizes, as there are a set of cues that are ingrained through learning and practicing, not through biology. The cues, however, when processed over time and internalized, create an identity that becomes perceived as natural.

Beyond Sue’s initial narrative and its similarities to the process Butler describes of learning a gender through repetition of a performance over time, Waters also describes the influence of fashion, a purely material entity, on a performance, and how one can dress to appear to belong to a certain class and gender. When Sue, is learning her part for the scheme, she is essentially taught by Gentleman, a conniving con-artist, how to act like a poor maid. She is given

rags for clothes, has her entire appearance changed, and is told how to change her dialect in order to pass as a working maid:

First, they washed my hair. I wore my hair then, like lots of the Borough girls wore theirs, divided in three, with a comb at the back and, at the sides, a few fat curls....

Gentleman, however, said he thought the style too fast for a country lady: he made me wash my hair till it was perfectly smooth, then he had me divide it once—just the once—then pin it in a plain knot at the back of my head. He fussed about us like a regular girl.

When we had finished, Dainty and I looked that plain and bacon-faced, we might have been trying for places in a nunnery. John said if they would only put pictures of us in the dairies, it would be a new way of curdling milk. (35-36)

Waters emphasizes the logistics of Sue's performance, painstakingly going through each aspect of the role Gentleman, the conniving con-artist, tricks her into playing. There is a certain hairstyle involved, and, eventually, a certain type of speech. Most importantly, however, there is an expected mode of dress for her to follow, one that helps ensure that women remain in their rightful place, one of "female subordination" (Gilbert and Gubar 13). This "female subordination" was a prevalent theme in texts of the time, as it accurately depicted the expectations of 19th-century society. There is, in the settings of these texts and, presumably, society, a rightful place for women, which is below men on a social hierarchy.

In one especially poignant instance of this practice, in which Gentleman is attempting to teach Sue how to dress Maud, the lady of the house, he quite literally pretends that a chair is a high-class woman. The thing that drives the performance, in which an ordinary dining chair is actually a woman in need of assistance, is the elaborate getup that women of the time are expected to wear, the subordinating wardrobe. The excessiveness of the outfit, quite similar to

Marian's explanation in the eavesdropping scene, takes up a lot of space, and impedes the 'woman' from any type of mobility. Sue narrates the dressing of the chair with impeccable detail:

After the corset came a camisole, and after that a dicky; then came a nine-hoop crinoline, and then more petticoats, this time of silk. Then Gentleman had Dainty run upstairs for a bottle of Mrs Sucksby's scent, and he had me spray it here the splintered wood of the chair-back showed between the ribbons of the shimmy, that he said would be Miss Lilly's throat. (38)

There are, as previously shown through Marian's frustration with the vast amount of space her clothing as a woman forces her to occupy, many layers of clothing inherent to 19th-century femininity. The layers are symbolic of the restrictions men wish to put on women, and of the accompanying ownership they feel over their female counterparts during this time period. While Sir Percival Glyde certainly felt quite entitled to Lady Glyde's money and even Marian's body, there is something even more dramatic about Waters's depiction of Gentleman's entitlement. As Gilbert and Gubar explain, there is an "underpinning of misogyny upon which...severe patriarchy has stood. The roots of 'authority' tell us, after all, that if woman is man's property then he must have authored her, just as surely as that if he authored her she must be his property" (Gilbert and Gubar 13). Gentleman feels he has the right to "author" a woman, as the gender itself is simply contingent upon a series of ridiculous articles of clothing and his approval. Down to the application of a feminine perfume, Gentleman creates the illusion of femininity through an absurd inanimate object. Not only does Waters present fashion as limiting and categorizing, but she even hints at the ludicrousness of it in general by replacing the passive woman going through the motions of performance cues that are forced upon her with the even more passive object of a

wooden chair. Once the chair is covered in the feminine clothing, it is, in the eyes of both Sue and Gentleman, Maud Lilly, a woman. The costume quite literally constitutes the woman, and consequently, in the words of Eve Sedgwick, people “fall in love as much with women’s veils as with women” (256). While the idea that people can be fooled by something as simple as a veil seems silly, it illustrates the exact point Judith Butler hits at. The veil, or the fashion, that is a large component in gender performance, becomes so associated with the femininity that it creates, it may as well become it. Therefore, people see the performance, in this case, the veil, as the woman herself, and fall in love with the artificial, performative aspects of her instead of the actually real characteristics.

Fashion’s role in creating a fluid and seemingly natural performance is clearly important, but Waters’s depiction of the chair exploits the performance as a learned and artificial experience, and it also reveals the ridiculousness of the wardrobe, which only underscores the authority men have over subordinate women. Gentleman’s interaction with the chair is demeaning and disturbing, as he treats it exactly as he would a living woman:

He squatted at the side of the chair and smoothed his fingers over the bulging skirts; then he dipped his hand beneath them, reaching high into the layers of silk. He did it so neatly, it looked to me as if he knew his way, all right; and as he reached higher his cheek grew pink, the silk gave a rustle, the crinoline bucked, the chair quivered hard upon the kitchen floor, the joints of its legs faintly shrieking. Then it was still. (39)

As Gentleman interacts with the faceless, pulseless chair, his cheek pinkens as if he is truly experiencing the spark of flesh on flesh. There is, also, the awful sense that Gentleman is aroused by the chair, as Waters graphically describes his violating the “woman” he has created, and enjoying it. He is, from the beginning, the mastermind behind the creation (out of thin air) of this

fake woman, and his interaction only further proves his role as all-powerful author. He gives the directions on how to make her, a chair, appear feminine, essentially using performance cues he has seen other real women follow. It is a jarring and revealing decision by Waters to include this vividly and disturbingly detailed sex scene, as she shows men's willingness to believe in femininity even if just the merest performance cues, like fashion, are present.

Tipping the Velvet, Waters's later-published novel set in the Victorian period, is more openly exploitive of gender as a performance, and the method of exploitation is drag, a concept discussed by Judith Butler in her exploration of gender performance. The protagonist of *Tipping the Velvet*, Nancy "Nan" King, regularly dresses in drag, and her love interest, Kitty Butler, is a famous drag performer. Through drag, or the act of dressing as another gender and adopting the performance cues of that gender, the characters are easily able to alter their realities and their interactions with others. Identities are, as they are in *Fingersmith*, changeable, and, more importantly, gender is something that is socially constructed and mobile. Fashion, again, is key agent in gender performance, as the drag shows, and the daily engagements with drag, rely most heavily on a specifically gendered outfit in order to adequately pass as the particular gender. Waters demonstrates the power of fashion in continuing the performance of gender, and in doing this, she is able to demonstrate Butler's theory of gender as learned and artificial construction, and her distinct portrayal allows readers to begin to grasp the implications of Butler's ideas. Through actually having a character dress up as and 'pass' as another gender, Waters also more clearly delves into the social hierarchy that Butler's gender performance creates, and she illustrates the disadvantage that certain performance cues purposefully place on women.

In the opening chapters of the novel, the protagonist, Nan King, first lays eyes upon Kitty Butler performing in a male impersonator show:

She looked, I suppose, like a very pretty boy, for her face was a perfect oval, and her eyes were large and dark at the lashes, and her lips were rosy and full. Her figure, too, was boy-like and slender— yet rounded, vaguely but unmistakably, at the bosom, the stomach, and the hips, in a way no real boy’s ever was; and her shoes, I noticed after a moment, had two-inch heels to them. But she strode like a boy, and stood like one, with her feet far apart and her hands thrust carelessly into her trouser pockets, and her head at an arrogant angle, at the very front of the stage; and when she sang, her voice was a boy’s voice— sweet and terribly true. (13)

As Nan describes Kitty’s male-impersonation, she describes the fluid ability Kitty has of changing between genders. The parts of Kitty that make her look “male,” as Nan describes, are material and performative measures, and they are heavily made up of fashion components. She has trousers, a top hat, and a closely-cropped haircut, and she speaks with a masculine voice and walks with a typically male swagger. All of these components of her performance are the metaphorical “cues” that Butler theorizes; they are actions or directions that she has learned through watching how the men around her look and behave. In Butler’s discussion of drag, she examines the wrongly-perceived binary between sex and gender, and she theorizes that drag, by subverting the normal relationship between these two, essentially dispels the truth behind the ‘natural’ relationship. Drag performers are able to draw attention to the performance that is existent in gender, and they then exploit the way in which the markers of performance have been naturalized and internalized in order to forge a relationship between sex and gender that appears natural.

Kitty, however, when performing her drag show, never appears to fully be a man. Nan points this out, describing her as a “very pretty man” and referring back to the girlishness that

peeks out through the masculine facade. In fact, Nan's infatuation with her actually seems to be contingent upon the fine line between masculinity and femininity that Kitty toes. There is always a semblance of femininity in Kitty, even as she dresses in manly attire and closely crops her hair. In including this reminder of her true sex, Waters seems to be showing the varying levels of gender performance that are possible, and the way in which, perhaps, one could fluidly alternate, or even exist, as both genders. The fact that audiences approve of Kitty, paying money to see her, shows an acceptance of this particular form of gender performance. The key, however, that Waters seems to be stressing is that crucial remainder of femininity in Kitty, as this still allows for the 'natural link,' which Butler discusses, between sex and gender, to be believed. As Butler says, there is a perceived biological relationship between sex and gender, and this is something society has been conditioned to believe. So when Kitty dresses up as a male, it is a wild and entertaining show, but the link is not altogether broken because her semblance of femininity still peeks out through her small bone-structure and girly lashes.

When, however, Nan herself joins Kitty in dressing up in drag for the show, and her adoption of the male gender is deemed 'too real,' a problem arises as the binary is challenged. This designation proves that gender performance does, indeed, fall on a spectrum, and that Nan seems to fall too far to the masculine side of the spectrum for Kitty and the manager's liking. Once Nan has dressed up in the suit and gentleman's clothing along with Kitty, the manager states: "Too real. She looks like a boy—but, if you follow me, she looks like a *real* boy. Her face and figure and her bearing on her feet. And that ain't quite the idea now, is it?" (118). The word "real," which is repeated twice within this reaction to Nan's appearance, is a poignant one, as it alludes to that unnatural yet perceived as true biological link that Butler theorizes about, and Waters offers insight into the implications of society's perception of this link. The manager's

statement that Nan's drag performance is "too real" indicates that her adoption of the masculine performance wrongly puts off the idea that her sexual organs are masculine as well. When Kitty dresses as a man, no one actually believes that she has the biology of a man, but just that she is a feminine woman 'cutely' pretending to act like a boy for the entertainment of the crowd. Because of Kitty's constant reminder of her "correctly" linked sex and gender, the audience can rest assured that their ability to "see" gender and not be "fooled" has been reinforced.

Both Kitty and her manager see, however, the problem that would arise if Nan got up on stage looking as believably masculine as she does. Beyond ruining a wrongly believed relationship between sex and gender, there is an overwhelming sense of social anxiety that erupts around the prospect of the subversion of gender. There is a hierarchy that exists solely because of the class divisions that gender allows for, as Marjorie Garber states:

...the specter of transvestism, the uncanny intervention of the transvestite, came to mark and indeed to overdetermine this space of anxiety about fixed and changing identities, commutable or absent "selves." Transvestism was located at the juncture of "class" and "gender," and increasingly through its agency gender and class were revealed to be commutable, if not equivalent. To transgress against one set of boundaries was to call into question in the inviolability of both, and the set of social codes...by which such categories were policed and maintained. (32)

As Collins makes evident through Anne Catherick and Lady Glyde in *The Woman in White*, gender has a direct relationship with class, and there are a set of long-followed codes that rely on gender in order to prevail. When someone "transgresses" these harshly drawn lines, like biologically female Nan passing for a biological man, all of the rules upon which the social hierarchy operates are threatened. Kitty's adoption of male clothing and movements does not

trouble men like her manager, as he knows the audience will not begin to wonder about her true biological sex, and therefore, Kitty will remain in her rightful social position as a woman. If, however, Nan is able to cross the boundary between man and woman, she would, presumably, also be crossing a class line as well. By believably changing her gender, and in the eyes of the audience, her sex, Nan also has the power to move up in the social hierarchy that gender polices. Because of the implications of this type of mobility, the male manager immediately stops Nan from getting on stage looking this way.

Waters does not, however, stop pushing forward in pressuring society's perception of gender and in evoking anxiety around subverting its relationships. After Nan leaves Kitty's show, she begins dressing up quite often as a man, and she does not hold back on appearing "too real." In fact, Nan actually uses drag as a way to escape the restrictions of female life, and she decides to dress as a man to receive more respect. Immediately upon her dismissal from the drag show, Nan steals the costumes that Walter, her manager, claimed made her look too manly, and begins dressing to pass as a man on the street:

I left my dress and purse upon a chair, went out upon the landing, and locked the door behind me— my new dark heart, all the time, beating fast as a clock. As I had expected, the old bawd on the step barely raised her eyes as I went past her; and so, a little hesitantly, I began the walk down Berwick Street. With every glance that came my way, I flinched; at any moment I expected the cry to be let up: 'A girl! There is a girl, here, in boy's clothing!' But the glances did not settle on me: they only slithered past me, to the girls behind. There was no cry; and I began to walk a little straighter. At St Luke's Church, on the corner, a man brushed by me with a barrow, calling 'All right, squire!' Then a woman...said: 'Well now, pretty boy, you look like a lively one. Fancy payin' a

visit, to a nice little place I know...?’ The success of that first performance made me bold. (195)

Nan, upon her first attempt at dressing as a man embracing the ‘realness’ that her manager condemned, is nervous and frightened. Her anxiety about her gender ‘performance’ stems from the fear of someone recognizing the disconnect between her biological sex and the gender cues she is following. If, by chance, someone does recognize the lack of continuity between these two entities, Nan recognizes the problem that onlooker will perceive. Nan understands, exactly as Garber theorizes, the overwhelming social anxiety that exists around gender and its possibly subversion, and she chooses to ‘switch’ genders for precisely this reason. The anxiety, as Garber explains, exists because of the hierarchy that gender maintains. Women, and their gender performance, which is highly reliant on subordinate and absurd fashion components, are placed lower on a social hierarchy than men. Nan, clearly, can see the societal expectations that are placed on women, and she chooses to avoid these by dressing as the more dominant male gender.

Nan’s fear, however, of recognition, does not come true, as she passes on the street for a “pretty boy.” Her “first performance” is successful because she is able to follow the cues that she has so closely observed over time. Her ability to act in deference to her biological sex so seamlessly demonstrates the absolute fabrication and construction of gender, and how there is simply a set of codes that allow a person to embody that particular gender. As Myra Jehlen describes in her reading of *Huckleberry Finn* through the lens of gender performance, one can “detail femininity because [one]... sees it as a role, which must mean that masculinity is also a role” (268). Similarly, Nan can list out and then act out the cues of masculinity because she recognizes it as a role. She does not see it as a result of her biological sex, but she recognizes the

emphasis that society places on this wrongly accepted relationship, and therefore anticipates the anxiety about her possibility of not “passing.”

When Nan does successfully pull off the masculine performance, she proves, with even more clarity than Marian Halcombe or Sue Trinder, the subordination embedded in female fashion and other performance cues. She explains how “glances did not settle on [her], they only slithered past... to the girls behind.” There is a male gaze that is inescapable for women, something dominant and possessive that is unavoidable when one possesses even the smallest semblance of femininity. Marian experiences this inferiority through the ownership that Count Fosco takes over her body, Gentleman displays his downright authorship over the chair that he turns into a feminine woman, and here, Nan demonstrates how men “slither” their gaze over women as if they are art meant to be ogled. There is, within femininity and the wardrobe that constitutes this entity, a thread of subordination that forces women into an immobile and constricted position. As her performance continues and evolves to become better and more perfected, Nan realizes how much easier and fun life as a man is, stating: “to walk as a boy, as a handsome boy in a well-sewn suit, whom the people stared after only to envy, never to mock—well, it had a brittle kind of glamour to it, that was all I knew, just then, of satisfaction” (195). When describing the performance of a man, Nan is happy to don a “well-sewn suit,” as rather than restricting her movement or making her a sexual object, the masculine suit is a powerful piece of fashion. Rather than people eying her on the street to “mock” or attempt to own her, people are watching Nan with respect and admiration, as she is now acting out the masculine performance cues of a man.

Waters cleverly builds upon and illustrates the implications of Collins’s exploration of gender performance in *The Woman in White* through her progressive yet subtle *Fingersmith*.

While mirroring Collins's plotline of fashion as a means to keep a woman down and immobile, Waters also goes a step further by rendering the theme almost laughable. Through scenes like Gentleman's creation of a woman out of thin air, Waters begins actually exploring what notions of gender performance say about the nature of femininity and women in general. If a woman can be akin to a chair draped with a gown and spritzed with perfume, then there is something drastically missing from society's understanding of the capacity of women, and clearly the gender that society perceives femininity to comprise is completely and ridiculously performative. In moments like this, Waters is able to take Butler's theory and force readers to see why it matters; gender performance is important to understand and critique, so that men can not "author" women so easily and confidently, and so that a biological sex is not something people only associate with the artificial notions of a gown and perfume. Going even further into a critique of the implications of Butler's theories, Nan's experience with drag in *Tipping the Velvet* explores the differences between masculine and feminine gender performance and illustrates the hierarchy that these performances, and specifically the fashion components of them, create. While *Fingersmith* highlights the existence of gender performance and the disadvantaged position of women that Collins began hinting at in *The Women in White*, *Tipping the Velvet* starkly contrasts the advantages that the gender performance cues constituting masculinity allow with those of femininity. Nan's experience alternating seamlessly between genders, while remaining the same biologically, allows her to not only narrate the performative roles that constitute both genders, but also, and more troublesomely, the extremely different ways in which both genders are treated by society. Both of Waters groundbreaking novels shed new light on Butler's gender performance, and her works give a societal implication to the theory and a reason to care about the manifestations of Butler's argument.

Chapter III

Tana French: Removing Identity from Performance

The American-Irish detective-fiction author Tana French writes murder mysteries with a style that is distinct in its deeply psychologically-developed characters. While her novels take the shape of traditional crime plots, she is intensely invested in the development of her characters, and she focuses heavily on describing and developing their psychological underpinnings. In the words of Mimosa Summers Stevenson:

French's detectives are all on the boundaries of the group in some fashion, both within and without the society in some liminal never-never land, passing through dangerous territory, trying to find a place of safety and fulfillment for themselves within the society but somehow not fitting in, never quite removing the disorder within their own lives but passing through a threshold experience, a rite of passage, that awakens them to a reality they had managed to hide from themselves. (52)

French, like Wilkie Collins, carefully emphasizes the importance of unfolding characters and all of their nuanced traits. Moreover, French specifically crafts characters who are, in Stevenson's view, in a place of "liminal[ity]." There is a degree of ambiguity in French's characters, and she chooses to place them as outsiders desperately searching for an in, feeling lost and a bit unsure of themselves and their identities. This ambiguity surrounding identity demonstrates the fluidity that French recognizes within this concept. The very concept of identity is questioned, and this is where the "liminality" stems from, as characters find themselves in a state of constant questioning. Often, as Stevenson also points out, there is a distinct moment when characters recognize a subconscious truth that they have been blind to all along. This subconscious truth often arises when a character is most lost; the moment is not necessarily a realization of the truth

inside a fixed identity, but rather a recognition of the fluidity of identity as a whole and a character's ability to easily change.

This theme of fluid identity ties directly to the performative nature of gender, which deconstructs gender into a series of learned cues that are subconsciously practiced but actually unnatural. Despite the differences in French's style and genre from those of Collins or Waters, her novels certainly incorporate Judith Butler's theory of gender performance, and she provides a more subtle and modern application of Butler's argument. Unlike Waters, French does not write her novels as historical fiction. She is a contemporary author like Waters, writing about her own time period as Collins did. The main character of her first two novels, *In the Woods* and *The Likeness*, Cassie Maddox, is a detective. Like Marian in *The Woman in White*, who eavesdrops and at times acts as a detective, Cassie transcends traditional feminine gender expectations and takes on a job usually associated with men. Readers of *In the Woods* view Cassie through the eyes of a male narrator, her friend and partner, Detective Rob Ryan. Her femininity, though less obvious than that of someone like Lady Glyde, is still emphasized through the narrator's eyes. Rob feels conflicted as he attempts to reconcile her biological sex and the femininity he expects with her masculine job and seemingly "guy-ish" personality. Cassie narrates *The Likeness* while impersonating a murder victim in order to solve a case. Moreover, the woman she impersonates has actually stolen a false identity invented by Cassie herself. There is, of course, a performance involved in Cassie's impersonation, and her performance points again toward the cues that convince "spectators" that a person is feminine. Therefore, with this multi-layered and fairly conscious performance, French critiques the ease with which, even today, a woman's persona may be impersonated, crafted, and controlled. *In the Woods* and *The Likeness* provide further exploration of gender performance's modern occurrences: *The Likeness* is much more overt in its

portrayal and more complicated in the actual performances that play out, while *In the Woods* illustrates small instances that demonstrate the constant, subtle perpetuation of gender performance. French's novels illustrate how Butler's theory need not manifest in overt ways, as in Collins or Waters. French takes on gender performance and plays with the idea of self-reflexivity within the performance; she shows that, even when there is a consciousness of performance, characters are in no way free from the constraints of performance.

In the Woods, the first of two novels by Tana French to include Cassie Maddox, introduces the female protagonist in a sexualizing and discreetly objectifying manner. Through this initial portrayal of Cassie, French establishes a pattern of the subtle, yet problematic results of gender performance's perpetuation, as Cassie is passively defined by the gender cues she imitates. The narrator, Rob, explains how he first saw Cassie, naturally commenting on what she looked like:

... [S]he was barely medium height, with a cap of dark curls and a boyish, slim, square-shouldered build. She wasn't my type — I have always liked girlie girls, sweet tiny bird-boned girls I can pick up and whirl around in a one armed hug — but there was something about her: maybe the way she stood, weight on one hip, straight and easy as a gymnast; maybe just the mystery. (10)

While this description by Rob is noticeably not as repugnant as Gentleman's creation and violation of a woman-chair in *Fingersmith*, there is still a clear degree of ownership, and even a violation, in this very first impression. Rob, upon first seeing Cassie, immediately classifies her not his "type," since she is not small enough for him to "whirl around." In fact, he actually describes Cassie as quite the opposite, noting that she is a bit "boyish" and "square-shouldered." From the beginning, Rob, automatically assesses a woman based on whether or not she is "his"

preference, or whether or not she attracts him. There is already a possessiveness, and a possessive pronoun to prove it, to his interaction with this woman. His tendency to categorize women based on possessive sexual preference displays an immediate response to the hierarchy that gender performances perpetuate; when Rob sees the markers of a feminine performance, he associates the “natural” inferiority of the woman and assumes a higher status. His assertion that he normally only feels attracted to women he can conquer is indicative of the same type of entitlement and authorship that Gentleman feels; there is an emphasis on physical dominance. Rob is, however, still attracted to Cassie despite her not fitting all of the usual characteristics, and he sizes up every last aspect of her physical appearance, even the way she distributes her weight on her feet. There is something almost predatory about this assessment, as if every single performance cue that Cassie is subconsciously putting out, Rob is watching like a happy and ravenous spectator, and readers are brought along in Rob’s viewing. Again, French provides an example similar to Waters’ Gentleman and the chair, yet she makes the situation less graphic and shocking, which puts gender performance in a more discreet light. Although more subtle, it is absolutely an instance of gender performance and the implications it has for women. While, presumably, Rob does not intend to appear as any kind of predator, he has internalized the role of a man as superior a woman as an inferior sexual object, and as a result, he objectifies Cassie.

This first encounter Rob describes represents the more modern and nuanced performance that we experience, and perpetuate, every day. Seemingly small cues to Cassie’s gender, like her stance, stature, hairstyle, and aura, all create a sense of mystery and attraction for Rob. All of these aspects of Cassie, however, are learned gender cues that she is “performing.” Judith Butler’s entire theory of performance, as Emily Apter explains, “reli[es] on a subject that makes itself *be* by enacting objectification” (18). With Cassie as subject, and her feminine traits that

entice Rob constituting her performance, the objectification Apter writes about is clearly present. The objectification, which is the key component of gender performance and its manifestations, occurs as Cassie serves as a body to be “inscribed” upon, in the words of Butler herself. In fact, readers only see Cassie through Rob’s eyes, so Cassie only exists as an object that Rob has noticed and reacted to. The “inscriptions” consist of each “feminine” performance cue: her stature, her hair, and all of the other minor nuances that Rob has picked up on. These “inscriptions” are what, in Rob’s eyes, allow Cassie to exist, or “to *be*,” as they are the very first things he notices about her, and the characteristics that to him, signify Cassie as Cassie, a mystery woman. These signifiers are not natural biological parts of Cassie, or of any woman for that matter, but they are rather learned cues and expectations that are put upon the body. While height or weight could arguably be a result of biology, Cassie’s stance on her feet is not genetically inherited, nor is the way she walks, and the entire way she presents her body. Rob notices her body based on her presentation of it, which is a result of decisions to style and move a distinct way. Her hairstyle, also, is a performative aspect; it reflects a decision based on Rob’s emphasis on these constructed entities, inscribed upon Cassie as an object, as the main components of Cassie’s entire existence, indicate an internalized habit of viewing constructed performance cues as natural biological results of femininity. As Butler puts it, “gender fables establish and circulate the misnomer of natural facts” (xi). These “gender fables” are, essentially, the false assumptions that “inscriptions” like stature, hair, clothing, and other artificial, learned constructs result from biological sex. This misleading belief, perpetuated by continual performance, further reinforces the “misnomer of natural facts,” or the fictitious link between biological sex and gender. Because Rob has repeatedly seen women acting out these similar performance cues involving stance and hairstyle, he associates them femininity and being

female. Therefore, when he sees Cassie, his first reaction to her as a person involves spectating these performance cues and objectifying her accordingly.

As Rob elaborates upon his first impression of Cassie, he also picks up on another important aspect of her gender performance: her clothing. He narrates:

She was wearing combat trousers and a wine-colored woollen sweater with sleeves that came down past her wrists, and clunky runners, and I put this down as affectation: *Look, I'm too cool for your conventions*. The spark of animosity this ignited increased my attraction to her. There is a side of me that is most intensely attracted to women who annoy me.... I didn't register her very much over the next couple of weeks, except in the way that you do register any decent-looking woman when you're surrounded by men.

(11)

Rob's description of Cassie's clothing reveals even more of the performative habits both Cassie and Rob have internalized. Rob, an avid spectator of Cassie, the performer, describes her outfit and its details with striking specificity. Cassie's clothing is obviously more modern than that of Marian, Sue, or Nan. In fact, her outfit is even tomboyish with trousers and "clunky runners," yet the fashion that defines her still places her in a category of restrictive femininity that lowers her status on the social hierarchy that fashion polices. Cassie's alternative clothing ("too cool for... conventions"), is not a reflection of her personality or her distinct preferences, in Rob's eyes, but rather an attempt to impress, an "affectation." Every detail of her outfit performs rebelliousness and, in doing so, according to Rob's interpretation, is designed to impress Rob and others by her alternative attitude. Rob's automatic assumption that Cassie dresses to get (his) attention clearly illustrates his consumption of Cassie as an object. In the world of gender performance, Cassie,

the “being” that Apter theorizes, must be objectified in order to exist, and Rob’s reading of her personal choices as determined by how she will appear to him only reinforces her objectification.

In fact, just as Kitty’s adoption of drag did not upset the public as her femininity still peeked through, Cassie’s tomboy clothing is not enough to evoke any social anxiety because, as Marjorie Garber puts it, the “subordination of social classes” still prevails (23). Cassie and her rebellious fashion, instead of providing her a position of independence from societal norms and the rigid walls that those norms construct around her, actually keeps her in the same spot. Cassie’s spot is one of inferiority, a lower, gendered class, as she remains an object in Rob’s eyes, and she is unable to assert her independence and agency.

Not only does Rob see Cassie’s fashion choice as an attempt to attract attention, he also finds himself sexually attracted to her because of it. He claims that going against the norm actually makes her even more appealing, as he always found himself “intensely attracted” to the most “annoying” women. Again, in this sense Cassie is objectified, since she, a detective who dresses practically for the job without the restraints of feminine convention, is still overlooked in favor of the constructed aspects of her identity. Rob does not focus on her toughness or the fact that she is a woman in a traditionally male field; rather, he minimizes these aspects of her personality, and instead finds himself objectifying her and finding himself attracted to the ‘cuteness’ of her attempt to draw attention by defying “convention.” Not only does this diminish Cassie’s being, but it is also patronizing, reinforcing the gender hierarchy seen in *The Woman in White*, *Fingersmith*, and *Tipping the Velvet*. In attributing Cassie’s determination and edge to a feminine desire to impress, Rob divests Cassie of power and respect, and instead reduces her to the position of a sexualized, feminine object. Rob’s position is representative of all men in the realm of performance, as there is a social hierarchy set in place.

Rob addresses the role that he and other men play as spectators in his clarification of how he did not really take any note of Cassie, except “in the way that you ...register any decent-looking woman when you’re surrounded by men.” This statement makes clear that Cassie is a sexualized object of the male gaze, and that Rob and other men have long internalized and normalized this view of Cassie and of all women. There is an automatic response that Rob, as a man, has to the presence of a relatively attractive woman, and he sees this reaction as completely natural and universally masculine. Women — “naturally” — in the eyes of men, exert a need to be noticed, and they exist to attract men’s attention.

Rob’s preconceived notions about Cassie and her femininity manifest often, and he even claims at one point that her femininity forces him to fall for her:

The oversized raincoat made her look about eight, as though she should have had matching Wellies with ladybugs on on them, and inside the red hood were huge brown eyes and rain-spiked lashes and a face like a kitten’s. I wanted to dry her gently with a big fluffy towel, in front of a roaring fire. But then she said, “Here, let me— you have to know how to twist the thingy,” and I raised my eyebrow and said, “The *thingy*? Honestly, *girls*.” (12)

Again, fashion is a key component in Rob’s view of Cassie’s gender performance. In this case, Cassie’s “oversized” raincoat emphasizes her femininity and daintiness by making her appear small and helpless. Cassie’s coat, in Rob’s eyes, makes her look young, vulnerable, and diminished in status. While an oversized raincoat is not a heavy or immobilizing 19th-century gown, its effect still reinforces the “set of social codes” that Marjorie Garber articulates (32). The social codes comprise the hierarchy that gender perpetuates, which keeps women subordinated, and this modern, less obvious example is no exception. Rob compares Cassie to a child and a

kitten, focusing on the young, ignorant vulnerability she possesses, equivalent to Count Fosco's infantilization of women and comparing them to children or pets. He claims he wants to handle her gently, taking care of her in front of a warm fire. Again, there is an inherently possessive, and also protective quality to Rob's thoughts about Cassie. Rob's attitude differs slightly from Count Fosco's control over the ailing Marian, or Gentleman's relationship with the feminine chair; there is an added component of protectiveness within the ownership.

Beyond expectations and judgements based on fashion, Rob also makes an assumption about Cassie's vulnerability again through her use of language, or in the realm of performance, her script. Cassie's use of the word "thingy" causes Rob to react sarcastically, saying "honestly, *girls*." In Rob's disappointed and patronizing reaction to Cassie's language, there is an obvious assumption that Cassie, as a 'typical' girl, is silly and seemingly ignorant of the world around her. Cassie's word "thingy" implies she does not know what she is talking about, part of feminine gender performance. Clearly, Rob has so internalized the feminine performance's implications; he does not consider the possibility of Cassie's language being a social construct, learned through hearing it repeated by other women over time. If this were the case, he would see that her language does not imply biological disadvantage, but rather a simple internalization of an often-heard term used by women, which is a completely artificial and inconsequential thing. Rob, however, is conditioned to believe that cues actually constitute women's beings, so he associates words like "thingy" with women lacking intelligence. Rob automatically assumes that the word "thingy" and its nondescript ignorance implies that women, whom he has heard use this word repeatedly, are inarticulate and silly. Cassie, by performing femininity through fashion, movement, and script, immediately is labelled by Rob.

Most indicative of the pervasiveness of gender performance and its internalization is the reality of Cassie's career. She is a detective, and a member of the elite Dublin murder squad. Over the course of the novel, Rob describes the brutal and hard-hitting cases that he and Cassie investigate together, and the job is, undoubtedly, not for the weak. Rob recognizes Cassie's value as a partner, and he often describes how helpful she is in solving the cases, and how he would not wish for any other partner. He claims that the two of them have "a good reputation within the squad," and that "Cassie came along at just the right time" (17). Together, as the plot develops, Cassie and Rob work on the brutal murder of a young girl. Rob's descriptions of Cassie, and Cassie's overall actions throughout the novel, show that her status as a detective is quite impressive, and her skills equal Rob's. Clearly, Cassie is neither ignorant, nor in need of someone to protect her, yet her feminine gender performance and its social implications persist because readers and Rob still see Cassie as a feminine object who is girly and immature, and all of her anti-feminine qualities are interpreted as attempts to attract and impress men.

Tana French's follow-up to *In the Woods*, called *The Likeness*, once again illustrates the more subtle manifestations of gender performance through the main character of Detective Cassie Maddox. Cassie narrates this novel, giving a female perspective to the performance, but her story is similar to that of Collins's Laura Glyde or Waters's Sue Trinder. Cassie must impersonate another woman in order to solve a case, and this woman happens to be the murder victim herself. Most importantly, the woman that Cassie portrays, Alexandra Madison, is entirely fabricated and performative, since she is an alias Cassie created years before. In fact, Cassie begins telling her story by stating: "This is the main thing you need to know about Alexandra Madison: she never existed. Frank Mackey and I invented her, a long time ago, on a bright summer afternoon in his dusty office on Harcourt Street" (3). In this very assertion, French

parodies feminine gender performance, as there are a series of artificial and learned performance cues that go into the creation of this persona. Alexandra Madison, the alias Cassie and her boss created in his office one day, suddenly becomes real when a murder victim turns up who has been using identification with that name and picture. Interestingly, both Cassie and Alexandra/Lexie (the murder victim who stole her identity) are impersonators, yet there is a consciousness to each cue that is acted out. Both women have made a decision to act in very specific ways so as to appear a certain way to their audiences.

French herself discusses the process of going undercover and its performative nature in an interview about *The Likeness*:

In acting, in writing a first-person novel, and in going undercover, your goal is basically to keep out of the way as much as possible: to speak for the character, as thoroughly and deeply as possible, and let your audience see the character rather than you. The difference is obvious, but it's also crucial: in writing and acting, the audience isn't intended to think that the fictional character is real. Their imaginations work together with the writer's or actor's to create the character; it's a collaborative process. In undercover work, though, there's nothing collaborative about it. The "audience" isn't in on the process; they're supposed to believe that the fictional character is completely real. The undercover is carefully, intently trying to deceive them.... ("A Conversation with Tana French")

Here, French talks about multiple modes of performance: acting, writing, and undercover work, which her character Cassie does. From her discussion, it is obvious that French is quite mindful of performance, and she is constantly thinking of the spectators who are taking in each performance. Her assertion that the goal in all three of these processes is to "keep out of the way as much as possible" proves that the individual person, her actual identity, and the natural

characteristics about her, are completely unimportant in that moment. The audience is meant to see exactly what the person intends: a series of cues and actions, nothing natural at all. In the realm of a legitimate show, the audience is in on it, and understands what is happening. In Cassie's going undercover, there is an even darker side, French argues, since the audience, in this case the housemates at Whitehorn, is unaware of the performance; they are forced to believe that each action is natural. In this way, the deception that French describes in undercover is quite similar to the constant process of gender performance. Rob did not know that Cassie's stance, clothing, and language were a naturalized result of imitation over time, he saw them as a "natural" result of her biological sex. The difference, in the situation of Cassie's undercover case, is that Cassie consciously decides to perform each cue, rather than simply mimicking subconsciously actions that she has internalized over time. Lexie Madison, the girl who has stolen an identity and crafted a performance in order to live in a home of college students, also demonstrates this darker, conscious performance. Lexie purposefully acted in a specific way in order to appeal to the people living in Whitehorn.

In initially crafting the identity of Alexandra Madison, Cassie's alias for her undercover job investigating a drug situation, French shows the host of performative, constructed facets that go into a feminine identity, even now. As Cassie describes her fabrication of Alexandra's identity, she states:

There was something intoxicating about this. I kept wanting to laugh, just at the lavish giddy freedom of it: relatives and countries and possibilities spread out in front of me and I could pick whatever I wanted, I could grow up in a palace in Bhutan with seventeen brothers and sisters and a personal chauffeur if I felt like it. (7)

Cassie is exhilarated by the sheer ease with which an identity can be constructed, and she takes pleasure in turning herself into Alexandra Madison, and giving Alexandra Madison any trait she wants. As Marjorie Garber argues, becoming a woman is “a passive process... at the mercy of biology and custom” (94). For one to be considered a woman, the process relies solely on a series of events occurring without any effort by the woman herself. Therefore, this makes the creation of a woman much easier than the creation of a man would be. There are maturation processes, such as growing a womanly body, and, as Garber further articulates, the leaving behind of boyish activities and immature actions, like sports and silly games for the taking up of more feminine practices, but there is no distinctive active characteristic by the woman that constitutes femininity (idem). Cassie describes the specifics of the personality they craft, saying “we made her a restless one” (7). Even the phrase “we made her” implies that a woman can be created, and that Cassie and Frank have done just this. There is also, similarly to *Fingersmith* or *Tipping the Velvet*, a lack of weight placed on identity, again an indication that the “sign systems” of identity “are not mediums which represent any ‘truth’ about inner reality” (Busl 311). Identity, something that society grounds in fact, can actually be crafted quite easily from constructed stories and fake characteristics. The easy ability to craft identity points to its instability, as there is nothing natural grounding it as ‘real.’

Once again, the invention of a woman speaks back to Waters’s *Fingersmith* and the creation of a “woman” by dressing up a chair with a gown and corset, or even to *The Woman in White*, and the ability for a man to easily determine a woman’s sanity, or to deny a woman her identity completely, like Sir Percival Glyde does to Laura. Through Cassie and her creation of a woman for the sake of a case, French raises the question of what penning a woman so easily implies. As Gilbert and Gubar say of the danger in Collins’s authoring of a woman: “as a sort of

‘sentence,’ ...she has been fated, jailed, for he has both ‘indited’ her and ‘indicted’ her” (13). While this assertion speaks only of a male author creating a woman, Gilbert and Gubar still provide a helpful insight into the problems of the “invention” of women seemingly out of thin air. When women are created, as is Alexandra Madison for the purposes of an investigation, they are in the hands of their creator, and therefore confined by the walls of that space, even if the creator is a woman, like Lexie. Women, consequently, are put into boxes, and their actions are policed by societal norms which render them inferior and prevent them from advancing further in society.

As the novel progresses, Cassie begins her assignment in impersonating the murdered Lexie Madison. When Cassie’s boss, Frank, proposes the idea to her, he says, “[L]ook. You’ve been Lexie Madison before, right? You can be her again. You can — no, hang on, hear me out — if she’s not dead, just wounded, right? You can walk straight back into her life and pick up where she left off” (25). In this casual suggestion, Frank suggests that identity is fluid and that Cassie can become a new person simply by adopting a name and learning a few performance cues. Cassie even labels the different impersonators and their different portrayals of the alias, noting that “her version of Lexie Madison had been, comfortingly, much different than mine” (83). She considers herself to be “play[ing] Lexie” as a role, and that is exactly what the murder victim did as well. The idea that an identity, a constructed woman, can be ‘played’ as a role demonstrates the artificial implications that accompany society’s conception of womanhood. Again, the signifiers of identity are all constructs, so creating a new one or embodying an existing one is not very difficult.

As Cassie begins learning the role of Lexie Madison, French again reveals, in a clever and infinitely more subtle way than Waters or Collins, how a series of performative details make

up a woman, and how these can consequently allow someone to easily portray her. Cassie's first introduction to the woman she is to impersonate happens through looking at her photograph, as she thinks:

She could have been any age. She had been passing for twenty-six, but I would have believed nineteen, or thirty. There wasn't a mark on her face, not a line or a scar or a chicken-pox blemish.... At her shoulders the housemates watched me, poised and smiling, long dark coats billowing and Rafe's scarf a flash of crimson. (45)

There is an ambiguity surrounding this girl's identity: even her age is indefinite. Her face is a blank canvas, unblemished and smooth, ready for Cassie to take over and to inscribe her own personal touches upon, with a body empty and ready for someone to take ownership of. Besides Cassie's description of Lexie and her physical appearance, which is made up of performative details, there is something quite performative about the very nature of the photograph she is looking at. She describes the entire group of people as if they are a show she is watching; they stand "poised," and the colors they wear all coordinate with each other as if they are costumes chosen for the occasion.

Again, as Cassie views Lexie as a spectator-actor would, attempting to learn the ins and outs of how to embody her, the aspects she picks up on her incredibly performative. She states:

She moved lighter than me, small steps tipped up on the balls of her feet, and girlier: her curves were no more impressive than mine, obviously, but she had a dancing little swing that made you notice them. Her hair had been longer then, just long enough to pull into two curly bunches over her ears, and she was wearing jeans and a tight cream-colored sweater a lot like one I used to have. (77)

The emphasis that Cassie places on what made Lexie herself is completely contingent on performative factors, which allow Cassie to imitate Lexie and basically, to become her. The exact details that Rob noticed about Cassie in *In the Woods*, like her walk, her stature, her clothing, and her hairstyle, all allow Cassie to take in Lexie's feminine performance. Each characteristic, however, from bouncing on her toes to wearing a cream colored sweater, is learned, not natural. Lexie's "dancing little swing" is not a biologically female trait, but rather a feminine performance she picked up from watching and imitating other women. Still, when Cassie attempts to get to know Lexie through recordings of her in order to convince her friends that she is the same person, she only focuses on these performative aspects. Clearly, in Cassie's eyes, even the people closest to Lexie, her friends, still view Lexie based on the performance she puts on, something that, if someone resembles her, can easily be imitated. In fact, when Cassie describes her first encounter with Lexie's friends as she is impersonating Lexie, she states "all I remember is trying to keep my weight forward on my toes like Lexie did, my voice up in her register, my eyes and my shoulders and my smile at the right angles" (109). Cassie attempts to remain in character, and to embody Lexie, she must move her body in certain ways and employ a higher-pitched voice, exactly what a performer would do if acting out a scene. There is, really, no 'authentic' Lexie to get to know. Lexie is, ultimately, a composite of performative characteristics. As such, Cassie's ability to 'pass' as Lexie depends only on her ability to perform the same way. In adopting the performance, Cassie is not overlooking the depth of Lexie's character in favor of more obvious physical characteristics; rather the absence of any 'depth' or 'truth' underneath the physical aspects of Lexie speaks to the absence of any natural, gendered depth, which is exactly what Butler articulates.

Beyond the specific performative instances of Cassie's creation of an identity in her portrayal of Lexie, French also includes broader themes and more nuanced moments that reflect a critique of gender performance, and examples of the danger in actually being conscious of performance. In the house, Cassie immediately learns that there is an established rule of "no pasts" (183). Whenever any of the housemates begins to open up about their past or about their family or anything that happened before living in Whitehorn, Daniel, the head of the house, immediately stops them, asserting that they must never speak about their pasts. This idea that the people in the house are not allowed to have pasts points to a performance, as characters are not allowed backgrounds; they are just living out and acting out their daily lives without looking back at what has happened in the past. This "no pasts" rule, however, is a forced, conscious performance, intended to make the housemates act only in the moment, and to repress any other feelings. By including this strange rule, French is absolutely parodying gender performance. By stripping away access to backgrounds, the characters are reduced to singular performances, in many ways parallel to how Cassie is reduced to her gender by Rob.

The "no pasts" rule, however, falls apart, as the housemates naturally cannot keep up with this forced performance, and cracks quickly form. Cassie witnesses the housemates having issues with the rule, as Rafe states: "Don't you want to hear this I'm telling you a tender tale of father-son bonding..." and Daniel quickly interrupts him, saying, "I'm fairly sure we do need a license, officially," and Lexie describes Daniel's eyes "on Rafe, ice gray and steady and unblinking" (183). Naturally, Rafe wants to talk about his family and his past, yet Daniel, the rulemaker of the house, quickly cuts him off. Daniel's rule, which he later articulates more clearly, stating "no pasts," when Lexie begins testing him and talking about her childhood doll collection, forces the housemates to render their performance conscious, emphasizing the idea

that they only exist as who they are in that moment (184). There are more instances of the housemates' inability to reject their pasts completely, and each instance reflects, as Cassie says, "a tiny crack, in that perfect surface" (185). The "crack" represents the consequence of a conscious performance; even when someone is conscious of every move they are making and purposefully acting a certain way, the issue of social restrictions and negative consequences do not simply disappear.

In addition to the housemates' failed conscious performance of concealing their pasts, Cassie's conscious portrayal of cues in attempting to fool the housemates into believing she is Lexie also becomes problematic. Cassie's home life suffers drastically, as her boyfriend, Sam, loses her to her obsession with the undercover case. Cassie becomes completely wrapped up in embodying Lexie, and is unable to turn off these cues and act like Cassie again, alienating those who know her as Cassie and losing herself in Lexie's life. Once she is fully, unconsciously Lexie, Cassie states: "I hadn't rung Sam. This time it wasn't because I'd forgotten. It was because I had no idea whether he would answer, or what either one of us would have to say if he did" (206). Cassie is aware that every action she is carrying out is based on how the woman she embodies supposedly acts, yet she still cannot escape the performance, and she cannot stop repeating the performance once she has been doing it for so long. Lexie's life has so taken over hers that she becomes unsure of how to communicate with someone who knows her as Cassie, and she expresses her inability to speak to her boyfriend because their connection is now strained. Frank, Cassie's boss, begins worrying about Cassie acting unprofessional, as he sees her becoming too invested in her friendships with the housemates and with living Lexie's life. Cassie even sabotages Frank's investigation, turning her microphone off at times to act as Lexie without any reminders of her life as Cassie. Clearly, Cassie is unable to separate herself and her

emotions from the performance, even when, unlike a subconscious internalization of feminine cues, she is knowingly deceiving the housemates by acting a specific way. Cassie's breakdown, which comes at the end of the novel when the murder is solved and Cassie is unable to reconcile her feelings to the feelings she has on behalf of Lexie, demonstrates how blurred the lines become in performance, even when the performer is conscious that she is acting out cues. As Cassie illustrates, even self-awareness within the performance is not enough to remove the person from the performance altogether.

The only character in *The Likeness* who almost successfully pulls off a conscious gender performance is Lexie Madison herself. The woman, whose real name and identity are unknown, stole the alias that Cassie created in order to begin a life at Whitehorn. She put on a show for all of the housemates, attempting to make off with a sum of cash by secretly selling out on their home. Lexie's entire persona was crafted to fit in seamlessly with the housemates, and she consciously decided to be a person that they would accept and love. As Daniel describes, Lexie was "both incapable of thinking about the past... and incapable of thinking more than one step into the future" (334). Daniel goes on to say "that level of simplicity is hard to imagine, and also hard to describe. It was as startling as a deformity" (idem). Essentially, Daniel correctly describes Lexie as someone unable to consider consequences, and someone who truly existed solely in the moment. Daniel's remark that these qualities were "startling" proves the rarity of completely separating oneself from all factors other than the performance cues of that moment. Lexie embodied the performative "no pasts" rule that the other housemates could not stay true to because her entire existence at Whitehorn was a deception. Lexie successfully convinced the housemates that she was a clever, impulsive, but ultimately loyal friend. Even Lexie's conscious performance, however, ultimately fails, since the housemates kill her when they uncover her

deception. Lexie, the only character to successfully perform with complete self-reflexivity and fluidity in identity, ends up murdered. Lexie is the most performative character, but when her entire performance falls away, there is no 'real' Lexie underneath, only a dead girl. In this decision, French illustrates that an awareness of performance does not solve problems; it only further illuminates the lack of truth in a gendered identity, and the emptiness underneath the performance.

French's portrayals of failed gender performances demonstrate Butler's gender performativity in conversation with identity, and French examines what can happen when someone manipulates the performance and consciously decides every action. French's experimentation with fluid identity demonstrates how an acceptance of Butler's assertions still does not render a person exempt from the negative outcomes, but simply prove that it is impossible to remove oneself entirely from performance. Butler describes the fiction behind identity, stating:

If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal.... If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character....

Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. (180)

Butler argues that every gender attribute, such as the way someone walks, talks, or moves, and so many other subtle aspects, is performative, and that these very attributes are the components that constitute identity; without them, there is truly no concept of gender identity. Beyond the simple physical attributes, Butler also argues that there is a subtle and pervasive nature to these performances, and these little aspects highlight the lack of truth in a fixed identity. Just as Rob saw Cassie and immediately associated her identity with the performance cues of her clothing, stance, and language, Butler argues that these truly do make up an identity and its perception. Because, as Butler says, there is no identity without artificial performative actions, identities are not existent on their own. A “true gender identity” is, as Butler states, “fiction,” as identities solely depend on performative attributes. When stripped of all of these attributes, there is absolutely nothing left. French’s characters embody this assertion, as Cassie realizes that she is unable to remove herself from the performance cues, which truly do begin constructing her identity and her view of herself. Cassie does not feel tied to her identity as Cassie, as she is only acting out performance cues pertaining to the identity of Lexie, so she begins associating herself more and more with that persona. Through the lens of Butler’s theory, in fact, there is nothing that says that Cassie’s ‘true self’ is any more the detective she has been all her life than the college student she is now acting as. When performance and its many components constitute identity, identity is fluid and unstable, as Cassie highlights through her narrative. The ‘real’ Lexie, the girl who was murdered, solely embodies a performance. Lexie successfully deceives the housemates, calculating each action to put on a distinct performance, but there is no ‘truth’ to any of the performance cues she acts upon. If the performance is stripped away, the real Lexie is

absolutely nothing, and there is not even a body left to constitute her 'true' self, as she is left dead.

Afterword

My intention in writing this thesis was to apply Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to unexpected texts, and in turn, to learn something new and important about the theory. Collins's *The Woman in White* is formative for many reasons, but not as a feminist novel, and definitely not as a 'Buterlian' text. Waters and French are contemporary authors, so their writing has the potential to be more progressive, but neither is overtly inspired by Butler, which makes the gender performance applications exciting to uncover. While, certainly, *Fingersmith* is influenced by *The Woman in White*, and French's Cassie is as formidable a woman as Collins's Marian, the three authors I consider are all extremely different in style and form. Yet, because of these differences, the prevalence of representations of gender performance in each work points to the ubiquity of the concept. The pervasiveness of performance, however, is only the beginning. These works powerfully critique gender performance, showing how the restrictions placed on women create a distinct gender hierarchy. Women are disadvantaged as a result of their expected gender performance, and these texts highlight this fact through characters like Anne Catherick and Laura Glyde, Sue Trinder and Maud Lily, Nan King, and Cassie Maddox. All these female characters represent, in disparate ways, how the perpetuation of gender performativity restricts women and keeps them in a position of inferiority with regard to men.

This thesis moves chronologically, and the manifestations of gender performance and the consequent negative implications change slightly with each period. Moving through these works, I found that my dissections of each subsequent novel pushed a little further with the theory, and consequently, something new about it was revealed in each work. My progression through gender performativity's implications is a metaphor for the unlayering or undressing of a person; each chapter removes another aspect of the performance until there is nothing left. Marian, a and

strong woman in Collins's *The Woman in White*, demonstrates the power of clothing in policing gender norms, as she removes her feminine costume and acts outside traditional expectations. Collins, first, separates the clothing from the performance, proving that, without the restrictions of a feminine costume, women achieve mobility and therefore agency. Waters, next, removes the entire body from the performance. Through Nan King, Waters introduces fluidity in gender, as Nan adopts a new gender with ease by changing everything about the way her body looks, moves, and acts. French, lastly, provides the final unlayering through Cassie Maddox and her impersonation of Lexie Madison. Both Lexie and Cassie perform self-reflexively, and both know exactly what they are doing when they perform. Despite this self-awareness, however, Cassie loses her sense of self, Lexie is murdered, and French defines the characters as pure performance. Identity itself is stripped away, leaving another key underpinning of gender performance gone.

The three authors supplement each other, and the end result is a deconstruction of gender performance's layers that reveals the dangerous power that Butler has begun uncovering in her argument. Gender performance is pervasive and also inescapable. While Butler theorizes about a fictional "true" identity, arguing that identity is defined by a series of performative measures without any natural core, and a socially-constructed view of gender, simply acknowledging and becoming aware of this does not solve the problem. As Cassie demonstrates, even consciously recognizing one's performance and acting with awareness does not free one from its restrictions, in fact, this causes an even graver downfall, as performative actions are the only thing linking people to their identities, and without them, an emptiness arises.

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