



Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists And the Late Eighteenth Century Stage (Ams Studies in the Eighteenth Century)

Nora Nachumi

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"Acting Like a Lady" examines the impact of the eighteenth-century theatre on the ways British women novelists represented female subjectivity. The theatre, Nachumi demonstrates, offered women alternatives to contemporary models of feminine nature that insisted on a direct correlation between a lady's appearance and her quality of mind. It provided theatrical images and tropes which helped women writers dramatize the performative nature of female experience. Grounded in theatre history, *Acting Like a Lady* draws on current theoretical work concerning gender and representation on the stage and in novels. It considers its primary subjects (Burney, Inchbald, Austen) in depth, and places them in relation to each other and to other novelists, performers, and playwrights. In each case, the novelist's use of theatrical images and practices is linked to her own theatrical experience and to debates relevant to the eighteenth-century stage. Especially valuable to scholars is the appendix demonstrating that approximately one-third of the female novelists writing between 1660 and 1818 were actresses, playwrights, or relations and/or members of the theatrical milieu. "Acting Like A Lady" envisions these women as participants in a "critical conversation" about female nature and performance that continues today.

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