

**A COMPANION TO  
JANE AUSTEN STUDIES**

*Laura Cooner Lambdin  
Robert Thomas Lambdin  
Editors*

**GREENWOOD PRESS**





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*and*  
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With much love and gratitude  
to our parents:

Betty Marie Wagner Lambdin,  
Charles Samuel Lambdin,  
Ann Jeanette “Penny” Yeager Cooner, and  
Francis Marion Cooner, Jr.



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# Introduction

*A Companion to Jane Austen Studies* thoroughly examines the entire body of Jane Austen's works in two distinct manners: The first of the two chapters devoted to each work is an original critical essay summing up past reactions and then reexamining the text in the light of a current reader-oriented critical stance reflecting some aspect of the general heading "Jane Austen and Her Readers." This overall topic allows flexibility among critical approaches as well as unity throughout the book. Although these examinations are anything but uniform, there is a degree of similarity in the manner of presentation. The second of the two chapters dedicated to each of Austen's major novels or a particular type of her writing is a bibliographic essay chronologically describing criticism from initial responses just after the work's first publication to current literary analyses. For certain types of Austen's writing, such as prayers, verses, and letters, previous criticism is so limited that a separate bibliographical essay seemed unnecessary; in such cases, any available articles are clearly mentioned within the critical chapter.

Once one reviews the bulk of previous Austen criticism, then our particular choice—to privilege reader-oriented theories in each of the critical chapters of this reference text—seems understandable and beneficial. For continuity, both within this work and within the larger community of Austenian analysis, it is reader-response criticism that best lends itself to the texts examined. In criticism, historical conceptualism is impossible to remove, and in Austen's work the social mannerisms of particular classes within a certain time frame are highlighted, so we have sought to embrace this aspect of her writing. Further, Austen's astute, subtle layering of perceptions—the subjective responses of her characters and the intersubjectivity reflected in the rhetorical strategies of the author and her characters—seems based on assumptions of a reader's implicit

response. Whether through identification or distance, by delicately and shrewdly transforming philosophical and moral positions, Austen maintains reader interest.

Given the multitude of variances within individual thought, it is not so odd that the responses of various readers, even within the same era, have been startlingly different—to the point of being diametrically opposed. This dissimilarity is encouraged by the nearly consistently perfect ambiguity of Austen's works. Perhaps because the author was intent on fairly displaying all aspects of an issue, ultimate meaning often becomes obscured, and a case can seemingly be made for a wide variety of possible readings. Any one reaction is never officially sanctioned, and multiple responses appear to be encouraged by the author because of the multitude of character reactions to issues in a text. It seems impossible that Austen did not realize the many perspectives that she presented concerning her chosen themes; nearly every character's dialogue is overtly manipulated. This adds to the perception that Austen must have fully meant to reflect shades of meaning—and heightens our admiration of her talent for recognizing the various viewpoints possible within social situations.

Even at its height—with the works of J. I. Richards, T. S. Eliot or Cleanth Brooks—the New Criticism, or formalist approach that regards a literary work as an organic whole and separate from its creator's world, was difficult to apply to Austen's writing. When an author is so intent on accurately describing various social and class situations, it is impossible to regard her text in a vacuum apart from the culture of its emergence. Austen's writing clearly reflects a particular historical moment. The critical essays in this book are actively and overtly concerned with the author, critical reader and historical period of the author and her various readers. These chapters begin with a perspective that assumes that the reader is the most important component in literary interpretation. Our focus is therefore on the experiences that color a reader's reaction to a text.

In an attempt to present a variety of cultural responses, we have called on Austen critics from various theoretical outlooks or camps to write the chapters. While our efforts are noninclusive, most major sorts of recent critical responses are represented; however, complex interpretive or academic issues have not been allowed to overshadow other important aspects one would expect a reference book to clarify in at least a cursory way—like plot or subplot lines. Effort has been made to keep the critical pieces accessible to students who have limited knowledge of Jane Austen and her works; still, given its scope, range and freshness, we feel that this is an extremely useful reference text for even the most advanced Austen scholar.

The interaction of the audience and the text embraces subjectivity and rhetoric, as well as the art of persuasion, areas in which Austen clearly excelled. Even if we are uncertain of her desired response, we can usually see the strategy employed. There can be no affective fallacy if the interpretive act begins by privileging and assumes that Austen intended to influence, control and even transform her readers through writing. Such affective or emotional responses

are generally viewed here with an eye toward overall cultural trends, as literature that satisfies primary emotional needs or desires for some version of truth in a historical age and in various particular manners. We therefore embrace rather than ignore Austen's omnipresent ambiguity and posit that she will always be most easily read in the light of her reader's cultural views.



*Sense and Sensibility:*  
A Convergence of  
Readers/Viewers/Browsers  
*Rebecca Stephens Duncan*

In the twentieth century, readers of Jane Austen's printed texts have been joined by viewers of film adaptations of her works and also by browsers of numerous Internet sites and electronic discussion groups devoted to the study, adulation and celebration of the author, her work and even specific characters. These new media continue a trend of passionate and nearly cultlike involvement initiated by Kipling's 1924 story "The Janeites" as they create new opportunities for serious critical inquiry. As Claudia Johnson shows convincingly in a 1996 essay, the division between Austen scholarship and personal devotion has never been clean.

Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, is the subject of two recent films and a number of electronic discussion groups, all of which have broadened and diversified Austen's reading community. As greater numbers of viewers have become acquainted with the story, scholars have also given the novel new critical attention. These efforts, although incongruent in aim and in many ways leading to contradictory conclusions about the novel, are informative when examined together. Just as innovation in information technology has a habit of turning the possible into the necessary, I begin with the premise that the study of Austen at this time cannot ignore—in fact, has much to be gained from—a dialogue among the multiple genres that perform and comment on her writings.

Recently scholars have made numerous attempts to liberate *Sense and Sensibility* from its rather confining generic roots. For years scholars associated the novel, written in epistolary form under the title *Elinor and Marianne* in the mid-1790s, with similar works by Maria Edgeworth and Jane West. All of these novels feature a pair of heroines who represent opposing value systems and temperaments. They can be read as didactic commentaries on the less socialized



value system and heroine, cautionary tales for those unwilling to govern their stronger passions. Under such a reading, Elinor receives respect and sympathy for her sense, and Marianne, although compelling and for the most part virtuous, earns a certain degree of censorship from the narrator. Beginning with a 1975 study by Ruth ApRoberts, Austen's scholarly community has sought to look beyond this simple opposition, treating it as a point of departure or a multivoiced dialogic with which to approach a far more complex drama. Yet just as *Sense and Sensibility* seemed to be gaining stature among Austen's works, the larger communities engaged with the film and electronic chat groups recouped the oversimplified shape suggested by its title and sister heroines. Film reviewers in particular revisited the old terrain, rummaging about in dictionaries for etymological groundings to define Elinor and Marianne, and parsing the ending for signs of moral lessons taught and duly learned. It is not surprising that reviewers for *USA Today* or *Time* failed to contextualize *Sense and Sensibility* in the writings of literary theorists for their readership. It is, however, more surprising that a systematic critical reading of the recent films and the electronic media has yet to be undertaken, for both media urge us back to the text itself to reconsider Austen's narrative choices as well as the cultural and literary contexts that shape the spectrum of values that the novel dramatizes and examines. And such a reconsideration reveals a text that reaches far beyond the generic and ideological bounds within which it has long been received.

Transforming a novel into a film poses numerous creative challenges, all of which resound with interpretive consequences. Film, like staged drama, relies heavily on the spoken word to establish scene and character. In a comedy of manners such as *Sense and Sensibility*, dialogue also conveys the substance of distant and subtle action. In the absence of a voice-over, speech must also compensate for the loss of the strong, often ironic narrative voice that characterizes Austen's fiction and enables a multileveled reading of the printed text. *Sense and Sensibility* is further complicated as it alternates an omniscient ironic voice with certain gaps and silences that serve the plot and the motifs of silence and secrecy. The narrator, who can technically enter the consciousness of any character, for instance, will occasionally render a scene through the mind of a character physically removed from the center of action. In such cases, action and interaction turn to speculation and uncertainty, clarity to silence and suspense. These concerns, in addition to the interpretive choices involved in casting, pacing and those elements that make up the general category of the visual, present numerous creative challenges to filmmakers and performers. The crossing of genre from text to film has been the subject of a long critical debate, which cannot be repeated here. Important to this discussion, however, is the need to view the genres in creative dialogue and not as shadows or representations of one another. Comparing a novel and a film—an apple and orange debate, perhaps—can be reductive and unfair to one medium or the other. Instead, films based on published novels might be viewed as alternative readings of those novels, and not necessarily privileged or authoritative interpretations.

Two film versions of *Sense and Sensibility* are generally available today: a 1985 production by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and a 1996 Miramax film, directed by Ang Lee and written by Emma Thompson, who also plays the part of Elinor. Thompson has also published the text of her screenplay, including scenes that did not appear in the film, and her diaries written during production. She notes in the diaries her ongoing need to cut the script as filming progresses. She may have published the book in order to share with the public the script that actually was written, so it will be drawn on in this discussion as well. Thompson holds a degree in English literature from Cambridge. The 1971 version does not receive consideration here.

Both films capture, in varying degrees, the polarities of sense and sensibility embodied in the novel, respectively, by Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. Both convey, for instance, value systems that prevailed among the middle and upper classes in eighteenth-century England: the patriarchal land system, which passed estates exclusively along the male lines, the importance for men and women of making a good marriage and the manners and customs that kept the society intact. There are the parallel romances between Marianne and the dashing Willoughby and between Elinor and the shy, often opaque Edward Ferrars, both rendered and intertwined within the generic confines of the comedy of manners. A wide spectrum of characters represents a seemingly infinite range of ethical and moral qualities; Elinor and Marianne come of age as they learn to respond to these persons with a balance of social propriety and individual satisfaction.

The BBC version, nearly three hours long, offers significantly more detail of characterization and plot than the Miramax film, which at ninety-five minutes omits certain characters and moves quickly from one significant encounter to the next. While the Miramax film operates on a principle of economy, the BBC piece remains more closely aligned to the text, an attempt that actually leads to the expansion of dialogue and action. The implications for interpretation multiply with each cinematographic choice. I will discuss these choices by clustering them as neatly as possible into three categories: characterization and casting; shaping, which includes pacing and plotting and is generally accomplished through character interaction; and cultural context. These categories reflect an attempt to find a discourse that can be applied to a film as well as a printed text; the boundaries that separate them are artificial and will break down in discussions of specific scenes. The particular cultural contexts of *Sense and Sensibility*—the romantic imagination and the picturesque movement in the visual arts—offer interesting opportunities for the visual elements of the film interpretations. Elements from each category also have thematic implications.

Characterization and casting contribute to the tone of each film as they reflect the culture of its production. American viewers are less likely to respond as strongly to the BBC actors as they might to those whose lives and work have “gone Hollywood.” Emma Thompson, Hugh Grant, Kate Winslet and Alan Rickman bring to the Miramax film traces of high-profile marriages, fan adulation and personal scandal, layered with the faces of characters they have played

in other Hollywood productions. One reviewer suggests that remorse for one such scandal carries over into Hugh Grant's slump-shouldered characterization of Edward Ferrars. Although they deliver the accents that qualify them as authentic Brits, the Miramax cast seems to have felt more sun and seen more excitement than their BBC counterparts. They are the beautiful people that American filmgoers crave, the key to box office success. No attention is paid to Austen's observation that "Edward Ferrars was not recommended to their good opinion by any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing" (13), or that Colonel Brandon's face was sensible rather than handsome (30). The risk inherent in the physical appeal of the Miramax cast, however, is that the story may come off as a sentimental and trite romance, a genre that Austen chose to parody throughout her career.

In contrast, the BBC film, with its plain, pale cast, enacts the restraint expected of the affluent classes in eighteenth-century England. No man or woman stands out as extraordinarily beautiful in a late twentieth-century sense, yet the highly literate tone of the film makes such an observation seem banal. The film simply addresses an audience less concerned with matters of physical beauty than with the subtleties of social interaction and its attendant discourse. This interaction, dramatized through discourse, involves a much larger cast than that of the Miramax film. For instance, the servant Thomas appears several times, most notably to greet and present visitors and ultimately to relate the mistaken story of Lucy Steele's marriage to Edward Ferrars. In the former capacity, his presence softens the feeling of economic decline experienced by the Dashwood women's removal to the cottage at Devonshire. At the same time, the tall, rather gangly actor must bend his head to pass from room to room. These awkward movements sharpen the viewer's sense that the cottage is incommensurate and cramped. The Miramax film, with its much more streamlined cast, gives Thomas only the text's actual lines concerning Lucy's marriage and instead conveys the Dashwood women's socioeconomic condition through a few subtle visuals: Elinor slipping into and out of an apron, the women washing Margaret's hair in a basin in the sitting room and quiet conversations about the high price of beef and sugar.

The BBC film addresses issues of social and economic class in other ways as well. Two maids stand in attendance at the table of Mrs. Jennings in London, emphasizing her level of economic comfort. And the Steele sisters, Lucy and Anna, are treated more as servants than social equals by Fanny Dashwood and her mother, Mrs. Ferrars. Whereas Austen has Mrs. Ferrars befriend Lucy as a means of slighting Elinor, the BBC film shows her soliciting the Steele sisters' services as caregivers for the young Dashwood child. The sisters mistake solicitation for solicitude, and Lucy gloats to Elinor about her victory in charming Mrs. Ferrars, as she does in the text. The viewer, however, gains enough information to read Lucy with ironic distance. And this slightly different plot detail offers a more plausible motivation for Fanny's warmth toward the sisters, who

had only their beauty and their flattering attentiveness to children to recommend themselves socially. The BBC film therefore reinforces the boundaries separating the socioeconomic classes in ways that the printed text does not.

Casting choices involving family and children have thematic implications as well. Thompson omits the character of Lady Middleton, wife of Sir John Middleton, the Dashwoods' benevolent landlord in Devonshire. In order to facilitate the introduction of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Dashwood speaks of her "cousin, a widower." This omission narrows the film's commentary on existing marriages, which in the novel is set against the urgent interest in marriage shown by the Dashwood sisters as well as Lucy Steele. There is hardly a marriage that seems worth the degree of pursuit and hopefulness shown by the single women in the novel. Lady Middleton, focused entirely on her children, insulates herself from intellectual or cultural pursuits and thus presents marriage as a passionless coexistence of man and woman.

Children, often portrayed as wild creatures in Austen novels, serve plot and characterization in both films. The BBC version includes several brief scenes in which the boisterous and spoiled Middleton children disrupt the usual social protocol; Lady Middleton expresses her maternal devotion in two scenes. The Miramax film greatly expands the role of Margaret, the youngest Dashwood sister, while she is absent entirely from the BBC film. In the former, Margaret facilitates the friendship of Edward and Elinor; although shy, Edward reveals warmth through his attentions to the young girl and thereby endears himself to Elinor. In other scenes she follows more closely Austen's text: her immature enchantment with Mrs. Jennings, an occasional error against the rules of social decorum. She likes Mrs. Jennings "because she talks about things, and we never talk about things." Taken in when Mrs. Jennings and Sir John Middleton try to guess the name of Elinor's supposed admirer, she innocently supplies the letter "F." With this new scrap of evidence, the pair intensifies the teasing.

Marianne, in both the book and the Miramax film, instructs her sister that "there is no such person." This interchange serves as an ironic commentary on the hypocrisy and deceit that are often used in the service of good manners. It also brings into relief the restraint under which the Dashwood sisters, and all other women of the age, must conduct themselves in courtship. And in terms of plot, the teasing begins a slippery slope of rumor and gossip that fuels numerous misunderstandings involving Mrs. Jennings. Some of these misunderstandings are amusing; others bring pain and embarrassment to the Dashwood sisters.

In a more general sense, the young Margaret softens the stark symmetry of temperament that exists between Elinor and Marianne. Resisting a polarized reading of sense and sensibility, ApRoberts writes of numerous instances in which the symmetry is broken through a complex social analogue to the algebraic concept of isomorph. More simply, a third daughter can serve this function by displaying affection for both sisters and echoing the sentiments of each.

Additionally, children offer a glimpse of the future and with it a sense of

optimism or pessimism regarding human affairs. Yet readers must wonder how Margaret, a “good humoured well disposed girl” who “had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne’s romance, without having much of her sense” (6), has been shaped by the events of the novel, partly because she simply disappears after the elder sisters travel to London. In the text Mrs. Dashwood leaves the child behind when traveling to Cleveland to attend to the seriously ill Marianne, and no mention of Margaret is made thereafter. Thompson, however, finds it important to comment on Margaret’s maturation and thereby offer some closure and optimism to the question of the child’s disposition. When Edward calls at Barton Cottage, he and the women suffer a few awkward minutes until he clarifies that his brother, Robert, not he himself, has married Lucy Steele. Having been told earlier to rely on the weather as a conversation topic, she fills in the silence by saying, “We’ve been having very fine weather.” The viewer can then conclude that Margaret has internalized some sense by this time. Thompson further draws on the young girl’s childlike perspective to narrate Edward’s proposal to Elinor. Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne at first censor, then encourage Margaret’s treehouse voyeurism. “He’s kneeling down!” she exclaims in a moment of great narrative economy.

Margaret’s childlike appeal may help to explain why the young heir to Norton, a child of four or five, fails to appear in either film. Austen’s narrator describes ironically the charms that prompted the elder Dashwood to settle his inheritance on the child, to the detriment of the Dashwood women: “an imperfect articulation, an earnest desire of having his own way, many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise” (4). It is significant also that the child makes no appearance in the novel either. Perhaps the risk for writer and filmmaker would be too great; a child capable of charming a rich, old man might have the same effect on a reader and particularly a viewer. Yet the implications for Fanny Dashwood are severe. Given no opportunity to soften her demeanor through mothering, Fanny remains grotesquely flat, a choice Austen made that is greatly magnified in the films.

In the novel Austen uses character to create a spectrum of morals, values and ethics. Elinor and Marianne, the most fully developed characters, move in dialogue with (or, more traditionally against a backdrop of) characters representing a range of these qualities. Their maturation involves making socially proper yet personally satisfying responses to each. The novel gets beyond the static and flat caricatures of Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny Dashwood to complicate this process for the Dashwood sisters. She does this specifically in the development of Mrs. Jennings’s character from ill-mannered gossip to sincere and loving surrogate mother to the Dashwood sisters. Emma Thompson omits this development by dropping Mrs. Jennings from the film when the girls depart London for the Palmers’ estate in Cleveland. The BBC film does the opposite: Mrs. Jennings not only accompanies the girls on this leg of their journey, but she chooses to send her own daughter Charlotte away with a very young baby while she remains in the house as nurse to Marianne. This revelation of Mrs. Jennings’s

depth and compassion helps to preserve the comic element of the story and to keep the reader/viewer hopeful that the ambiguous morality shrouding Edward Ferrars, John Willoughby and Colonel Brandon will also resolve itself well.

I have noted the importance of the spoken word in offering expository details and moving the plot of this social comedy along. The printed text conveys these elements through summary by an omniscient voice or through the internal musings of a single character; in the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, these strategies intensify the silence and secrecy that drive certain elements of the plot. The omniscient voice also conveys the irony that allows the reader to laugh at or critique individual character foibles as well as the larger social system, which dictates their attitudes and behavior. Dialogue, in contrast, brings characters together and thus colors their personalities and relationships as it reveals misunderstanding. When characters come together in such dialogue, there are several implications for the story's shape and themes. One consequence is the introduction of conflict and confrontation, and a second adapts the narrative irony for the more visual medium of film.

*Sense and Sensibility* is not a novel of confrontations, but rather one of more delicate interactions and "polite lies," as Elinor knows. The boldest, most dramatic encounter occurs between Marianne and Willoughby at a party in London. When she approaches him familiarly, expecting him to return the intimacy that he showed her in Devonshire, he responds formally and turns away with another woman. The effect of this exchange is intense, partly because of the particulars of the Marianne–Willoughby relationship and partly because so few confrontations of this kind occur. Both films, however, supplement this confrontation with others, dramatizing conflict and misunderstanding, which the novel conveys through narrative commentary and silence. The makers of both films, for instance, choose to bring Fanny Dashwood into conflict with Mrs. Henry Dashwood, mother of Elinor and Marianne. In a scene that is summarized but not rendered in the novel, the two women discuss the career and marriage ambitions that the family has imposed on Fanny's brother Edward. The Miramax film juxtaposes the exchange with footage of Elinor and Edward walking outdoors, clearly enjoying each other's company. Characteristically, Fanny is curt and vindictive as she asserts to Mrs. Dashwood that the young man's financial security depends on his marrying a woman approved by Mrs. Ferrars. The discourse covers this and additional ground in the BBC film; Fanny extends her cruelty by demanding that the Norland furnishings—china and furniture—be left intact. Mrs. Dashwood reminds Fanny that she brought these items to the estate upon her marriage and that Norland has no claim on them. In the text these remarks occur between Fanny and her husband. Because both films present enough of Fanny to convey her malicious nature and her flatness as a character, these enhanced confrontations must serve other purposes as well. By this point in the story, readers and viewers are well aware that Fanny has manipulated John into renegeing on his promise to support his sisters. "People always live forever when there is an annuity to be paid them," Fanny observes (9) as he

mullets over a proper financial settlement, and later, “I am convinced within myself that your father had no idea of your giving them any money at all” (10).

Soon John Dashwood has resolved only to send them a basket of fish and game on occasion. The focus of these comparable scenes, then, is the character of Mrs. Henry Dashwood. In the Miramax film she shares Marianne’s sensibility, convincing herself that Edward and Elinor are becoming attached and delaying their removal in order to foster the relationship. Her BBC counterpart, in this scene and throughout the film, acts with restraint and maternal authority, contradicting the “eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence” (6) offered in the text. The confrontation with Fanny further solidifies her character, and for the thoughtful viewer, it raises some issues regarding women and authority. Although the land-based economy is clearly patriarchal, the women, particularly Fanny and Mrs. Ferrars, act as preservers of the system—in this case to the detriment of other women of equal or similar rank.

In an example of character interaction and irony, the BBC film also contrives a confrontation between Edward and his secret fiancée, Lucy Steele. While Edward is visiting the Dashwood women at Barton Cottage, Sir John Middleton arrives and announces that the Steele sisters, distant cousins, will visit Barton Park. He notes, in Edward’s presence, that Lady Middleton thinks little of the sisters, but that one should “never turn away a pretty face.” The camera marks Edward’s expression of shock and discomfort as he departs abruptly and without explanation. Later in London, when Elinor leaves Lucy and Edward alone for a few minutes, the BBC film invents a confrontation. Lucy protests the brevity of his letters and asks, “Have you nothing to say?” This latter exchange heightens the intrigue in the continuation of the scene, a conversation between Marianne and Lucy on Edward’s loyalty and delicacy of conscience that echoes the text. Both reader and viewer know enough at this point to appreciate the multiple layers of misunderstanding that have stretched traditional notions of loyalty and conscience into a moral dilemma. Angela Leighton notes that “much of the dialogue of her novel has been a cunning exploration of how the spoken word does not quite match the speaker’s intention, or else of how the commonly expressed opinion fails to match the truth. It forces us to read the text as many-leveled, rather than as linear” (139). Yet the BBC’s addition of the brief exchange between Lucy and Edward dilutes the effect of the irony inherent in the novel-based conversation. As a shadow of the stark encounter between Marianne and Willoughby discussed above, the scene renders Edward as potentially villainous and morally corrupt. At the same time, the specific kind of detail that is added casts over the film the pallor of sentimental romance, familiar to contemporary viewers through soap operas, that locks two women in a struggle for the heart of a desirable yet mysterious man. Viewers who bring this generic context to the film will have their expectations fulfilled as they chalk up a point for Elinor.

Both films’ interactions between Marianne and Colonel Brandon draw the

story further into the sentimental realm. Questioning the success of the marriage plot in *Sense and Sensibility*, Laura Mooneyham White notes that Marianne and Brandon share no dialogue in the novel, nor is any reported by the narrator (78). For a while, the Miramax film highlights Marianne's resistance to his advances: she tosses aside his gift of hothouse flowers and delights in Willoughby's freshly cut weeds; she demurs from an invitation to a picnic until Willoughby's name is mentioned among the guests. Scholars have attempted to come to terms with the marriage between Marianne and the Colonel by noting generic confines of the comedy of manners that demand such an ending. Some call the novel a failure, while others consider it a threshold experiment that carried Austen beyond the traditionally feminine genres toward more compelling feminist fictional forms. By creating several meetings and exchanges between Colonel Brandon and Marianne, the BBC film mends the faulty marriage plot and reshapes the story in the manner of *Emma*.

Having heard Colonel Brandon's confession of his love for Marianne during the carriage ride to Cleveland, Mrs. Dashwood announces that Marianne will be well enough to receive his visit to her sickbed the next day. Elinor, who has told Brandon that "if ever a person deserved his heart's desire, it is you," dresses her sister in a bonnet and assures her that she looks "romantically pale, like the heroine in one of Mrs. Radcliffe's novels." Thus the sponsored courtship begins. Colonel Brandon gains Marianne's favorable attention by admitting his interest in Cowper and Scott. Then, like *Emma*'s Mr. Knightly, Brandon goes on to shape Marianne's mind along more classical lines, sharing with her the "majestic Milton" and the "demi-god Shakespeare." Upon their return to Devonshire he sends her a gift of books that includes *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. Marianne thanks Brandon for the books, and states, "I shall have hundreds of questions to ask you." And although the film stops short of the wedding scene presented in the Miramax version, Mrs. Dashwood seems happy to have completed the matchmaking scheme begun by Mrs. Jennings. The Miramax version also effects closure through marriage, but it relies more on a romantic spark between the couple. The physically recovered, romantically chastened Marianne responds pleasantly to the Colonel's reading of Shakespeare; his appeal is enhanced when he disappears mysteriously to find her a piano. Both films therefore offer what reviewer Terrence Rafferty has called "a slight, airy tale of love and marriage, an entertaining version of an ending rendered so enigmatically by Austen in the text" (125).

The challenge in presenting Elinor in film is to translate the silent meditations that the text offers from her perspective. As the principal perceiver or focalizer of the novel, Elinor is present at every important scene. She also serves as a moral center of the novel and both films. The text provides her with ample dialogue for adaptation, so there are few enhancements in either film version. The concern, rather, is to render this experimental heroine in a credible and sympathetic manner. Rafferty commends Emma Thompson's restraint in portraying this "insufferably virtuous" character who "too explicitly serves as the



standard-bearer for the author's opposition to the then current Romantic movement" (124). Irene Richard, the BBC's Elinor, renders the character with similar subtlety, with the exception of an outburst at Mrs. Jennings for spreading unfounded rumors regarding Marianne's "engagement" to Willoughby. In the absence of narrative reminders of Elinor's silent suffering, the films must seek opportunities to offer a glimpse of the heroine's emotional state. The BBC film lets her cry at the servant's erroneous report that Lucy has married Edward, while Emma Thompson writes and delivers for her Elinor a hyperbolic yet stunning burst of emotion at the end of the film. While Edward is quietly proposing to Elinor, she is sobbing uncontrollably—releasing all of those strong feelings she has hitherto succeeded at governing. The scene takes great risks in the direction of sentimentality, yet for film critic John Simon, Thompson "makes histrionic history" (67).

Marianne, generally a more silent and silenced character in the novel, is nonetheless quite easily adapted to film. Her physical beauty and her lively demeanor draw attention from everyone who meets her. Even before being dramatized on camera, she is textually the object of everyone's gaze. To emphasize this fact, the Miramax film renders Marianne through Colonel Brandon's longing view on several occasions.

Marianne is compelling not only for her appeal as a heroine of sentimental romance. She embodies the Romantic sensibility articulated by Wordsworth in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. He situates the poet at the most sensitive threshold between the natural world and the language. From such a position, the poet speaks for mankind through an elevated imagination. For Wordsworth, this imagination railed against urban, industrial culture and sought to restore a more direct interaction between humanity and nature. The perspective that informs Marianne's attitudes and behavior is associated with this Romantic sensibility. She relies, like the Romantic, on instinct to guide her behavior, suggesting to Elinor after an unescorted visit to Allenham with Willoughby, "If there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure" (60). She also ventures twice from her orderly, domestic environs into the natural world, both times with disastrous consequences. The novel renders these adventures intensely, and the Miramax film capitalizes on them.

Nature and the Romantic sensibility figure largely in the characterization of Marianne. In the first of her encounters with nature, she and Margaret are caught in a rainstorm. Willoughby happens by on horseback, and in a scene borrowed from the most sentimental of eighteenth-century novels, he caresses her ankle "to ascertain if it is broken," then carries her back to the cottage. The Miramax film adds a note of humor to this intensely rendered scene, as Marianne sends her mother to the door to catch Willoughby's name before he can slip away. In a parallel scene, a dissipated and heartbroken Marianne wanders away from Cleveland, presumably in the direction of Willoughby's nearby home, Combe

Magne. Again she is caught in a rainstorm, and Colonel Brandon carries her inside, where she falls into the fever that nearly takes her life. In the Miramax film, she stands overlooking Combe Magne and reciting Shakespeare's Sonnet 116: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments. Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove." On both occasions these encounters with nature put into practice the Romantic perspective articulated by Wordsworth. The consequences for Marianne constitute a serious critique of the Romantic sensibility.

Austen also, via Marianne, manages to graft her notions of the Romantic onto two other aesthetic movements current at the time. First is the notion of the picturesque, made popular in the travel books of Gilpin. These guidebooks offered descriptive tours of various areas of England, particularly the Lake District, offering suggestions to help travelers situate themselves for the most effective view of the landscape. Among landscape painters, ranging from Gainsborough and Claude to the amateur toting a newly available box of portable watercolors, picturesque beauty captured nature in its rugged and irregular shapes and forms. Edward Ferrars makes light of Gilpin's picturesque aesthetic in a conversation with Marianne: "I do not like crooked, twisted blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world" (85). Through Edward's irony comes a sense of the picturesque that parallels Wordsworth's attention to the humble and rustic figures who inhabit the unspoiled countryside. The sentimentality attendant on Gilpin's aesthetic also echoes the literary movement of sensibility associated with the poet William Cowper. Marianne disparages Edward's indifferent reading of Cowper, while she and Willoughby agree completely on Cowper's poetic genius. Together these three contextualizing aesthetics make it difficult to clarify Marianne's perspective. Most likely she represents an intelligent and sensitive young mind that has absorbed fragments of each. It is, however, safe to say that her literary and artistic education, limited as it is, has encouraged her to embrace the natural world, and in doing so she removes herself physically and spiritually from the social order of the interior or the domestic.

For this reason, it is curious that the BBC film pays so little attention to the natural world. Marianne's first walk occurs on a sunny day with Elinor at her side. When Willoughby reaches for her ankle, she resists, suggesting that such contact would not be proper. Their subsequent outdoor walks take place among straight hedgerows and along neat garden paths. At Cleveland, there is no second walk outdoors; Marianne's collapse occurs in the entryway of the house. Elinor and Marianne conduct their calm discussion of Willoughby's fate while sitting outdoors beneath a tree. But otherwise, the outdoor scenes belong to Elinor and Edward. And these also take place in sculptured gardens, scenes of domesticated nature.

Despite the differing visions of Austen's novel offered by the two films, both

go beyond mere entertainment value to complicate and re-articulate scholarly discussion of the work. Each interpretive nuance renders *Sense and Sensibility* in a slightly different light, with important consequences for the way we read the printed text. Casting and characterization serve as measures of important themes and social contexts. The forcing of confrontations and interactions has generic consequences, as the viewer adjusts expectations for the outcome of each. The aesthetic contexts against which characters are read also converge in interactions and cinematography, with the effect of complicating Marianne's character and the significance of her actions. The shaping of the stories on the screen speaks to the ongoing scholarly discussion of generic boundaries and experiments as well. These are but a few issues that the films may raise to inspire further interpretation and study of the novel.

At the same time, the films, particularly the Miramax film, have created new communities of Austen viewers. One glimpse at the nature of these communities is offered by film reviewers. In the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, these writers have ranged from established scholars, such as Louis Menand, to film critics for local newspapers. Because reviewers know their readers and write both to guide their choices of films to watch and to calibrate expectations, their comments offer insight into the viewing communities.

Not surprisingly, reviewers for national publications focused on Emma Thompson, for her screenplay and her acting. She receives raves for both, eventually winning an Academy Award for the screenplay, in which Menand finds several "improvements upon the original" (14). In presenting the story line, reviewers often begin with the sense-sensibility dichotomy, dividing the qualities between Elinor and Marianne. The high-profile cast fares well among the critics, the one exception being Hugh Grant, "whose flustered charm is getting a little overworked," in the words of Menand. Rather than being disappointed in the happy ending, as scholars have been, reviewers set up their readers for a celebratory conclusion, the typical happy ending. Although most reviewers mention Austen, a syndicated writer for Knight-Ridder does so in the last two paragraphs. The film is celebrated for its relevance to today: love and money.

Not too many years ago, the mass audiences for whom films are made would visit the theater, then go home and perhaps discuss the film with family or friends. In the past decade, however, information technologies have helped to unite film viewers and an infinite number of interest groups in cyberspace. Using the Internet, particularly the World Wide Web, and electronic mail systems, a new generation of Janeites can now find each other and discuss the author and her works. Lone aficionados can publish their views for the world to see. It is therefore possible to gain a sense of the reading and viewing communities outside academe and to witness their interaction.

Although by volume much more attention is paid to *Pride and Prejudice* on the web, tributes to and discussions of *Sense and Sensibility* also can be found. A web site entitled "The Republic of Pemberly" leads the browser to chat groups addressing each of the major works. During the first half of 1998, visitors to

the *Sense and Sensibility* chat room most often addressed the Miramax film. A rather intimate group has assembled, and although their chat most commonly concerns the love triangle involving Marianne, Willoughby and Colonel Brandon, they do raise a number of issues that echo those considered among the scholarly community. A visitor who identifies himself as Mark (postings are by first name only) wonders why Emma Thompson omitted Willoughby's confession to Elinor from her screenplay. He summarizes the previous interactions between Willoughby and Colonel Brandon, suggesting that a tension existed between these characters from the start. When they cross paths outside Barton Cottage, each in the act of calling on Marianne, they seem to have intimate knowledge of the other. Mark then agrees with Emma Thompson's remark that the confession scene would have interfered with the blooming romance of Marianne and Colonel Brandon.

Interspersed among these rather thoughtful considerations of the film is an energetic, sometimes lewd, chatter about Alan Rickman, who plays the part of Colonel Brandon in the Miramax film. A regular named Barbara has scanned numerous images of Rickman taken from Emma Thompson's published screenplay and diaries. Other visitors thank her effusively and offer comments on Rickman's appearance, culminating in the July 1998 posting of a photograph of Rickman wearing a kilt, which led to further on-line speculation about his physique. Chat group members have also offered links to sites devoted to Rickman and his other films. And this suggestive kind of banter sometimes spills over into discussions of the film itself. In a recent debate about whether Marianne could have been happy with Colonel Brandon after her intense love for Willoughby, a topic that continues to engage scholars as well, one chatter wonders who would not prefer Alan Rickman to Greg Wise.

The Pemberly chat also receives a number of requests—some urgent—for help with essays on Jane Austen, suggesting that one community of Austen readers—students sentenced to write literary essays—has adapted its practice to evolving technologies. The site provides some general guidance but will not sell papers or ideas. On a given day, one chat room visitor may have a question about a plot detail or character in an Austen novel that is answered by another. One may be looking for sheet music for a piece played in a particular film. Few such requests go unanswered. Those who find themselves enraged by Austen's villains may release some venom by clicking on the "Tell off a Character" link; of the *Sense and Sensibility* cast, Fanny Dashwood receives the most flames, or hate mail, here.

Because individuals as well as organizations can publish documents on the World Wide Web, a range of perspectives on Austen can be found. Ashton Dennis has published via Geocities a page entitled, "A Jane Austen Bulletin Board Postings from Male Voices." He admits that he, like many other male readers of Austen, has fallen in love with Elizabeth Bennet. He offers his views of *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Austen in general, and posts comments on the writer by a number of men, including C. S. Lewis and Sir Walter Scott. The

Jane Austen Society of North America maintains a web site listing its publications, upcoming meetings and links to other Austen sites. Chat groups sponsored by the Republic of Pemberly site and Killdevilhill organize group readings of Austen novels followed by on-line discussions.

Browsing the Internet for Jane Austen sites shows that the author and her works continue to create communities of readers, viewers and now electronic browsers. The description of Internet communities I have offered may well serve as an addendum to Claudia Johnson's recent essay on Austen cults and cultures. Johnson begins with the fictional cult created by Kipling's story "The Janeites" (published in 1924) and then describes a number of crossings from serious scholarly interest in Austen to more personal and cultlike attractions to the author. For Johnson, Austen criticism in the twentieth century, particularly for male scholars, has wavered from the misogynistic to the homoerotic, as critics responded strongly and passionately to ethics, values and feminine perspectives in the novels. She writes somewhat disparagingly of the Jane Austen Society of North America, which welcomes amateur and professional views. Johnson notes that academics "sometimes suffer the additional mortification of discovering our own papers becoming yet another relatively undifferentiated, unhierarchicalized item in the great repository of Austenania assiduously collected by Janeites and compiled in newsletters and reports, printed somewhere between recipes for white soup and the latest word jumble" (223). Johnson is presumably describing the society's journal and conference program, but her description aptly covers the archives of Jane Austen materials in cyberspace as well. And because the Internet has no editor, censor or archivist, the volume of publications and its lack of differentiation and hierarchicalization are magnified manyfold. The authors and publishers of web sites often remain anonymous; the suffix "com" suggests a commercial enterprise of some kind, although profit-based hosts such as Geocities provide web space to individuals. The Republic of Pemberly web site is maintained by fourteen persons identified by their first names.

For amateurs who simply wish to share their Austen enthusiasm with others, or to purchase a tea towel or coffee mug bearing Austen's silhouette, the immediacy and informality of the Internet are exhilarating. For those who teach or study Jane Austen seriously, however, certain problems can arise. It may be difficult for student browsers to distinguish informed views from the general chatter. Austen novels work well in an undergraduate classroom because their timeless treatment of human relationships sustains interest as reading and appreciation are elevated to address literary and cultural issues. Certain days in an Austen chat room can present Austen's works as proto-soap operas. And although abstracts of scholarly articles from juried journals such as *Critical Inquiry* and *Nineteenth Century Literature* can be found through Internet searches, economics, and perhaps the tenure system, have kept academic discourse rather aloof from the universal access of the Internet.

The technologies that make possible on-line discussion and universal access have also enabled new efforts in the realm of serious scholarship. Textual schol-

arship is facilitated through hypertext, a means of clustering bits of information (text) for various kinds of access by the reader-browser. Hypertext markup language (HTML) consists of nodes, or portions of information, joined by links. Links may be followed in multiple directions. For instance, an electronic text, or e-text, of an Austen novel might separate the text by chapters, which the reader may open in any sequence. The on-line chat often refers to the e-texts, which can be accessed from the chat room.

A hypertext version of *Pride and Prejudice* is published and maintained by the University of Texas at Austin. This text has marked characters, place names and numerous other items in the text and established them as links to files containing background and explanatory information. A student or scholar may study a character systematically by calling up multiple references to the character's dialogue and actions. There are a literary map of England and a chronology of events as well. Eric Johnson has posted on the Internet an essay on character dialogue in Austen's writings. Hypertext language allowed him to search for specific speech patterns and topics.

Searches for specific linguistic occurrences can also be conducted with a scanner and certain word processing software. A scanner can turn any text into an electronic one; this piece of hardware reads the characters and translates them into any one of a number of readable codes. An e-text can be searched for recurrences of words and phrases. Such technologies make it possible to locate linguistic and topical patterns in an author's canon in much less time than a comparable manual effort would take. One scholar has applied this technology to a study of several British authors' misuse of the pronoun *their* with a singular antecedent; Jane Austen is implicated among them.

With hypertext, scholars and reading communities can anchor literary works in their historical and cultural contexts, and they can make available archival information that has previously been confined to a single library collection. At the other end of the critical spectrum, hypertext can radically destabilize a text by altering its linear, published shape. Just as hypertext fiction allows a reader-browser to create a unique story with each visit to the text, hypertext reading can also constitute a performance of sorts. Following links through a hypertext version of an Austen novel, the reader makes a new text, a new dialogue with text and context that can lead to new interpretations. These new reading practices may simply extend and quicken the pace of traditional reading strategies. Serious readers have always made intellectual connections among texts and contexts. Yet their pace and scope call for a greater awareness of reading practice, as readers and browsers find themselves immersed in volumes of information not previously available. A sort of information overload, or distraction, may set in, prompting the reader to reorganize the data in shapes compatible with his or her prior reading experiences. And as undergraduates rapidly become thoroughly postmodern readers, attention to these kinds of responses will be necessary to establish communication and foster discussion.

Outside the classroom, Austen's reading/viewing/browsing communities may

otherwise carry on oblivious to one another. I hope that this discussion, partly by acknowledging these many communities and partly by placing multiple genres in dialogue, opens the possibility of discourse among them. The questions and issues raised about *Sense and Sensibility* in the various media—chat rooms, journalistic film reviews and juried scholarship—are not so far apart as they first appear. A chat room visitor's question, "Can Marianne ever be happy?" may, for the academic scholar, recall Austen's feminist critique or perhaps the generic limitations of comedy. Also, the various discourse communities, through interpretation, performance and technology, have reshaped and reenergized the writings themselves and thereby created new interpretive opportunities for generations to come.

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## Films

- Sense and Sensibility*. Dir. Ang Lee. Screenplay by Emma Thompson. Miramax, 1995.
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# A Critical History of *Sense and Sensibility* Rebecca Stephens Duncan

A critical history of any major author or work may reveal more about the critics and historians than it does about the subject itself. Those values and artistic strategies that serve as lenses for each era and generation look much more like mirrors to later readers and scholars. Such is the case with Jane Austen and particularly with her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. From its early reception to the present day, critics and scholars have shaped this novel—as they have its author—to reflect their relationship with its genre and context.

The fact that *Sense and Sensibility* has sustained such an evolving dialogue with readers speaks well of its artistic accomplishment. Yet this work, which Austen chose for publication in 1809–1810, has lived for nearly two centuries in the shadow of the widely celebrated *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813. Compared to *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* figures rarely in general discussions of Austen’s writing career. And those critical studies that address each novel individually most often seek in *Sense and Sensibility* early signs of a craft that would blossom into art only in the later works. In these discussions *Sense and Sensibility* serves as a bridge between the juvenilia and the more mature novels.

One impulse is to attempt a rescue of *Sense and Sensibility* from these critical injustices, arguing the novel’s superior merit or summoning a more noble paradigm for its structure. In chapter 1, I document one such rescue by tracing new interest created by recent film adaptations and Internet discussions of the novel. Far more interesting and instructive, however, is that dialogue that already exists among *Sense and Sensibility* and the generations of readers who have chosen to see—or not see—themselves in its pages.

If expectations for the success of *Sense and Sensibility* are low, the attitude can be traced to Austen herself, who set aside money from her income to cover



any losses the book would entail. Encouraged by friends and family, she chose this novel for publication by J. Egerton of London, retaining all rights. At the time, an early version of *Pride and Prejudice*, entitled *First Impressions*, and *Susan* (later *Northanger Abbey*) had also been completed. *First Impressions* had been purchased by a publisher but not published. Family correspondence suggests that the novel began as an exchange of letters, tentatively entitled *Elinor and Marianne*, around 1795. Austen is said to have read early versions to her family. Although the novel as published relies on letter writing for suspense and some revelation, Austen's biographers have mused about the conveyance of the entire story through correspondence, especially because its two heroines are never parted. This observation presumes that the letters would have to pass between the sisters, whereas numerous other relationships in the novel could have involved regular correspondence. More problematic for an epistolary novel, however, is the lack of correspondence between the two heroines and their romantic interests, Willoughby and Edward. None of the early manuscripts survives to clarify these issues, nor were any first editions located by David Gilson for the 1982 Clarendon bibliography.

Austen's caution proved unnecessary as *Sense and Sensibility* recovered its printing costs and moved into a second edition in 1813. Madame Isabelle de Montolieu, a popular French novelist, translated the work into French for an 1815 edition, *Raison and Sensibility*. Among the changes Madame de Montolieu made is a plate illustrating Colonel Brandon finding Marianne "in a swoon" (158). This incident does not appear in the English text, but oddly it is reproduced in Emma Thompson's 1995 screenplay. In the nineteenth century the novel was translated into Danish published as *Forstand Og Hjerte*. The novel has remained in publication, with more than twenty editions available today.

The first critical standards by which the novel was evaluated are consistent with our present understanding of the eighteenth-century novel. B. C. Southam has collected two unsigned reviews of *Sense and Sensibility*, one published by the *Critical Review* in February 1812, the other by the *British Critic* in May of the same year. Both reviewers praise the novel for delivering a moral lesson to female readers on the dangers of indulging one's sensibility at the expense of good sense. The *Critical Review* notice finds *Sense and Sensibility* one of the few "genteel, well written" novels of the day; it succeeds by offering "both amusement and instruction" (Southam 35). The *British Critic* reviewer recommends the book to "female friends," who "may peruse these volumes not only with satisfaction but with real benefits, for they may learn from them, if they please, many sober and salutary maxims for the conduct of life, exemplified in a very pleasing and entertaining narrative" (Southam 40).

These two contemporary reviews also establish in their discussions the primacy of character, a topic that dominated the critical conversation throughout the Victorian period. The *Critical Review* is amused by Sir John Middleton, while the *British Critic* remarks on the presentation of the heroines' half-brother, John Dashwood. Both admire the rendering of Marianne, although the former

admits that her excess of sensibility occasionally “annoys everyone around her” (Southam 36). In his critique of Marianne, this same reviewer conflates fiction and life in a manner that will also continue throughout the century, and in a slight variation, until the present day. This writer expresses concern that “we fear there are too many” Marianne Dashwoods, “but without her elegance and good sense, who play their feelings and happiness till they lose the latter, and render the former perfectly ridiculous and contemptible” (Southam 37).

Apart from setting up the criteria of didacticism, the reviewers offer little commentary on the novel’s context, nor need they do so for their audience. The *Critical Review* does, however, hint at—without naming—the faddish picturesque movement associated with Gilpin. This writer recounts Marianne’s discussions of natural beauty, particularly her joy in walking among dead leaves, and her disappointment in Edward, who seems little aware of what the reviewer calls “landscape jargon” (Southam 37). Twentieth-century scholars will renew and explore this context in greater detail.

Before new contexts and strategies were considered necessary for the enjoyment and understanding of Jane Austen, the critical discussions continued their focus on character and gradually expanded into contemplations about her artistic methods. Assuming that Austen rendered her world realistically and for the most part sympathetically, these writers sought ways to define her artistry. The list of contributors to this conversation is long and illustrious, although few single out *Sense and Sensibility* for a sustained discourse. Sir Walter Scott, for instance, simply summarizes the plot of the novel on the way to a discussion of *Emma*. Scott’s 1815 review does, however, write of Austen’s particular blend of characterization and artistry:

The author’s knowledge of the world, and the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize, reminds us of something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision that delights the reader. (Southam 67)

Scott concludes his review with praise for Austen’s moral didacticism, suggesting that young readers will learn vicariously of the folly of imprudence in love.

A pivotal commentary on Austen’s didacticism is offered in 1821 by Richard Whately, archbishop of Dublin. Calling Austen a Christian writer, Whately reconciles didacticism with realism, praising Austen for rendering her moral lessons more naturally and effectively by weaving them subtly into believable scenes and lifelike characters. Alluding to Scott’s review, Whately writes,

When this Flemish painting, as it were, is introduced—this accurate and unexaggerated delineation of events and characters—it necessarily follows, that a novel, which makes good its pretensions of giving a perfectly correct picture of common life, becomes a far

more *instructive* work than one of equal or superior merit of the other class; it guides the judgment, and supplies a kind of artificial experience. (Southam 88)

For Whately this success lies in a deep understanding of human nature.

Other nineteenth-century writers interested in Jane Austen include Robert Southey, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Samuel Coleridge and Wordsworth, and John Newman. George Henry Lewes, known today for his long-term relationship with George Eliot, writes in 1847 that Austen and Fielding are “the greatest novelists in our language” and equates “a correct representation of life” with “the only Art we care to applaud” (Southam 124). In 1851 Lewes affirms Macaulay’s assertion of Austen as a “prose Shakespeare.” Lewes fails, however, to convince Charlotte Brontë, who writes to him, “I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses” (Southam 126). Yet Lewes persists in defending the art of Austen’s language, drawing in 1852 upon *Sense and Sensibility*’s Lucy Steel. “Only cultivated minds fairly appreciate the exquisite art of Miss Austen,” he writes, noting that the subtle expression of Lucy’s bad English is “delicately and truthfully indicated” (Southam 141).

As the century progresses, critics begin to reveal a growing distance between Jane Austen’s world and their own. Julie Kavanaugh, a novelist and biographer, writes in 1862 that the heroines of *Sense and Sensibility* are “somewhat deficient in reality. Elinor Dashwood is Judgment—her sister is Imagination. We feel it too plainly. And the triumph of Sense over Sensibility, shown by the different conduct they hold under very similar trials, is all the weaker that it is the result of the author’s will” (Southam 179). While acknowledging the lack of interest stirred by the sisters, Kavanaugh lauds the “delicate irony” with which Austen presents flawed characters whom the reader cannot succeed in hating. Among her favorites are Sir John Middleton and Mrs. Jennings, two fools who for Kavanaugh bring comic relief to the slight story line and the artifice of Elinor and Marianne.

The notion of cultural distance frames a pair of 1866 reviews that Southam extracts from *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*. In Austen’s fiction, the writers note that “we are transformed at once to an old world which we can scarcely believe was England only half-a-century ago” (Southam 128). Yet for these writers, this formal and “quaint” atmosphere continues to provide interesting and lifelike characters. Their comments on *Sense and Sensibility* focus on character, particularly that of Lady Middleton. “Who does not know Lady Middleton?” the writer asks, calling her “the veriest nobody that ever was drawn” (Southam 208). In a description that emphasizes Lady Middleton’s materialism, lack of substance and pretentiousness, the reviewer seems to be recasting Austen’s character into a Dickensian spoof. Perhaps less typically Victorian yet historically telescopic in Kavanaugh’s vein, these reviewers delight in Marianne’s character and suggest that Austen makes “sensibility more attractive than sense” (206).

Margaret Oliphant, another Victorian writer who reviewed J. E. Austen-

Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1870, widens the gulf between nineteenth-century England and the world of *Sense and Sensibility*. Oliphant complains of Marianne's "selfish and high-flown wretchedness," Sir John Middleton's "foolishness" and the Miss Steeles' vulgarity (Southam 222). In short, the novel pales beside the more entertaining *Pride and Prejudice*, which again is evaluated on terms of character. The same year, an anonymous writer for *St. Paul's Magazine* contrasts Austen's novels with those being published at the time. This writer points to a sense of propriety and a lack of "delirious excitement" that characterize Austen's writings, noting that the singular exception, Marianne Dashwood, "is exhibited to be rebuked" (Southam 228).

Contrasting the realism and didacticism in Austen's fiction is the ironic voice, the recognition of which suggests a critical distance between the writer and her own real and imagined worlds. Kavanaugh makes reference to a "delicate irony" in Austen's characterizations; twentieth-century scholars will look to irony to sustain readings of Austen as social critic. The historian Leslie Stephen, however, finds Austen's humor devoid of ironic or cynical disdain for her literary contexts: "But there is not a single flash of biting satire. She is absolutely at peace with her most comfortable world. She never hints at a suspicion that squires and parsons of the English type are not an essential part of the order of things" (Southam 175).

In 1913 Stephen's daughter, Virginia Woolf, writes of Austen in very similar terms. Woolf considers Austen less compelling than some minor writers because "she has too little of the rebel in her composition, too little discontent, and of the vision which is the cause and the reward of discontent" (191). Woolf finds Austen's accomplishments limited in the depiction of good people and things, yet she celebrates Austen's critique of the "bad, weak, faulty, exquisitely absurd" as "winged and unapproachable" (191). Like a number of other nineteenth-century writers, Woolf delights in Austen's memorable fools: Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet, Miss Bates. Yet for Woolf, as for her father, these renderings represent no cynical, ironic or satirical impulse, in fact not even an element of bitterness. Austen gives her readers "life itself"—perhaps the highest artistic aim of Woolf herself.

By Woolf's account, early twentieth-century readers maintained their fascination with Austen's characters. She finds these characters "so rounded and substantial" that they sustain rich discussions reaching beyond their textual contexts, including speculation on "how they might have acted if one had been at Box Hill and the other at Rosings, and where they live, and how their houses are disposed, as if they were living people" (191). Those familiar with Woolf's ambivalence toward both her father and the Victorianism he represented may be surprised to hear Woolf expanding on such traditional approaches and finding Austen so complacent in her social context. Unique to Woolf, however, is an early modernist and feminist reading of Austen's men—heroes who never measure up to the heroines. While accounting for Austen's conservative upbringing, in which men and women were "less at their ease together" than in other ages,

Woolf writes that “it rests with the novelists to break down the barriers; it is they who should imagine what they cannot know even at the risk of making themselves superbly ridiculous” (191). Woolf seems to be urging here a more aggressive, less passive narrative approach—one more willing to speculate across gender lines, to reach into the consciousness of all characters, male and female. And so what first appears an extension of her father’s commentary on Austen’s personal and artistic contentment with her limited world soon carries Austen and her readers into the heart of high modernism. Woolf expects Austen to be more modern, more attuned to those forms and levels of consciousness that define not only Woolf’s narrative experiments, but the high modern novel in general.

Woolf is not alone in raising new expectations for Austen. Her close friend, novelist E. M. Forster, was perhaps the first admitted “Janeite,” if such an appellation correctly describes those who confess an affective devotion for Austen. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* is a grand tribute to Austen’s craft and her success in reconciling matters of the heart and the mind. In general, the early twentieth century witnessed a burgeoning of critical interest in Jane Austen. This resurgence can be attributed partially to R. W. Chapman’s new editions of the novels, published in 1923, and partially to a more widespread growth in literary and critical studies in American and British universities. Ian Watt writes that a new appreciation for Austen’s irony, prompted by Richard Simpson’s 1870 essay, led modernists to read her fictional world as a “microcosm of some larger moral universe” (2). Looking back on the critical response of the first half of the twentieth century, I see not only this modernist practice of invoking the universal or mythical, but also a historicizing practice that teases out forgotten morals and values to read on a broad universal canvas.

Writing on *Sense and Sensibility*, Watt explains a number of Regency values and social codes that he senses may be lost on readers in his day. He mentions, for instance, the familiar use of first names by Marianne and Willoughby, a practice that suggests an “understanding” or intimate attachment. Writing against the tendency to make reading an individual experience rather than a search for “universal norms” (42), Watt suggests that the novel’s significance lies not in the individual experiences of Elinor and Marianne, but rather in “their relation to a fixed code of values” (43).

The bulk of Watt’s reading of the novel concerns the thematic and ironic use of the title terms. After weaving a history of sensibility from Rousseau, he complicates Austen’s use of the opposing values, demonstrating not simply a dichotomy exemplified by Elinor and Marianne, but an incremental scale of variations manifest in the minor characters. While suggesting that Austen was critical of unchecked sensibility, Watt notes that she “requires us to make much more complex discriminations between the two terms” (47). Ultimately, the theme spins into some sort of comfortable balance, which Watt agrees can be artificial at the level of plot. Marianne’s marriage to Colonel Brandon serves as the central problem of psychological credibility for Watt and for numerous other

readers. Yet Watt suggests that the complex interaction of sense and sensibility contribute to the history of the novel, in that

Jane Austen developed for the first time a narrative form which fully articulated the conflict between the contrary tendencies of her age: between reason and rapture, between the observing mind and the feeling heart, between being sensible and being sensitive. The dissociation of sensibility may or may not have been all but mortal for poetry, but splitting the human mind into its component parts, and so making them available for inspection, both in themselves and in relation to the outside world, brought life to the novel. (51)

Watt's is among a series of contemplations on the sense and sensibility dichotomy, a topic that lends itself to investigation from a number of critical approaches.

C. S. Lewis, writing in 1954, includes *Sense and Sensibility* in a discussion of passages from four Austen novels, all of which dramatize what he calls the "undeception" of the heroine. He actually compresses portions of three chapters in which Marianne realizes the pain her self-indulgence has caused Elinor to suffer during their parallel romantic disappointments. These scenes contribute to their respective novels' plot structure as they assert a moral context through carefully selected language. *Sense and Sensibility* is for Lewis the darkest of the novels that employ this device, yet neither it nor the others embrace a degree of moral seriousness or intensity that would place them in the realm of tragedy. The focus on conduct and obedience to a set of social principles is simply too possible, too attainable to call for the strengths of a tragic hero. Similarly "un-tragic" for Lewis is Austen's "cheerful moderation" (185). He concludes that "a ball, a dinner party, books, conversation, a drive to see a great house ten miles away, a holiday as far as Derbyshire—these with affection (that is essential) and good manners, are happiness. She is no Utopian" (186).

Both Watt and Lewis reach for historical and generic contexts that will illuminate Austen's moral universe. Their historicizing works at the level of detail, explaining a particular gesture or value whose significance would not be familiar to twentieth-century readers. More sweeping yet impressionistic are the writings of F. R. Leavis of the journal *Scrutiny*. Seeking to reverse what he sees as the undeserved elevation of minor novelists, Leavis establishes the "great tradition" of the English novel, placing Austen at its portal. Major writers, for Leavis, "not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but . . . are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life" (2). Austen not only understood and expressed an ideal balance of life and art; she was recognized by other great writers, including George Eliot and Henry James, as an inspiration and a paradigm.

George Moore provides on a smaller scale a similar celebration of *Sense and Sensibility*, albeit in a more modulated discussion of the novel's strengths and weaknesses. While impatient with the portion of the plot dealing with Wil-

loughby's disappearance and later return and apology, Moore suggests that of novels written on the theme of disappointment in love, "never was one better written, more poignant, and dramatic" (275). In his view Marianne's confrontation of Willoughby at the ball in London sets the paradigm for similar scenes written later by Balzac and Tourgueneff; in this scene "we find the burning human heart in English prose narrative for the first, and alas, for the last time" (276). Moore credits Austen with showing us, through Marianne, the essence of passionate love.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the project of historicizing has become more elaborate, as Austen's contexts have become stranger and literary theory more liberally applied to the reading experience. Few scholars since Ian Watt have begun their readings with an apology for interposing their ideas between Austen's texts and her readers.

Marilyn Butler's seminal work, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, supplies an elaborate account of various political and historical dimensions of literature in Austen's time. She positions Austen in relation to several literary movements: the sentimentalists, the Jacobins and the anti-Jacobins. For Butler the didactic oppositional structure in *Sense and Sensibility* transcends its artifice to dramatize not simply differing temperaments but rather the manifestations of two conflicting ideologies. Elinor, the conservative, anti-Jacobin, is meant to "typify an active, struggling Christian in a difficult world" (192). Marianne responds to the world more intuitively, as a sentimentalist or pre-Romantic might. The lesson she learns, partially from Elinor's influence, is to move beyond self-worship to recognize a larger moral authority.

Claudia Johnson moves the political-historical project more firmly into a feminist context. By joining the political and the sexual, she is able to reexamine what she considers simplistic or anachronistic approaches to the conservative-reformist debate inspired by the French Revolution. For Johnson *Sense and Sensibility* critiques the conservative ideology "thought an examination for the morally vitiating tendencies of patriarchy" in ways that she finds radical (69). Central to her reading is the inset tale of the two Elizas, neutralized by Colonel Brandon's narration, yet stark in their rendering of life outside the safe patriarchal social system. For Johnson all of the relationships and conflicts in the novel must be read through the experience of the Elizas.

Frederick Karl also positions Austen as a conservative in relation to the major eighteenth-century novelists. Karl begins with the premise that the novel, in form and content, is a socially subversive genre. Austen, in drawing such fine lines between her "sacred" and "profane" characters, must have

sensed that the novel offered dangerous alternatives, which, from her conservative point of view, had to be exposed and repulsed, however delicately. Her art, we can suggest, resulted from just this dialectic; that is, from her structuring a society in shaky balance only after she had examined the minute threats to its existence. (53)

Karl more thoroughly demonstrates the subversive strategies of the eighteenth-century novelists addressed in his study. His comments on Austen seem plau-

sible when buttressed by closer readings of others. Still, they raise some interesting issues regarding historicizing and contextualizing efforts. It seems hardly possible that such a theory of subversion could advance without the experience of the high modern novel, that act of confronting the abyss and retreating to safer philosophical ground. For Karl, Austen's narrators, if not her characters, offer shades of Conrad's Marlowe or Hemingway's Jake Barnes.

Twentieth-century scholars of a number of ideological persuasions acknowledge Austen's focus on money and property in *Sense and Sensibility*. Nearly every character is defined in terms of financial worth; the heroines' fate hinges on their ability to arrest the economic and class demotion set in motion by the death of their father and accelerated by the wealthy but greedy Fanny Dashwood. James Thompson introduces the theories of Marx and Georg Lukacs as context for the primacy of the material. More ideologically neutral are the discussions of class and money by Juliet McMaster and Edward Copeland, respectively, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Oliver MacDonagh weaves biographical details with the presence of money in the novel in a discussion oddly titled "Receiving and Spending" (43). He does not explain the reference to Wordsworth, although he clarifies that he has revised the title from "Getting and Spending" to reflect the fact that none of the characters actively earns his wealth. He does emphasize the necessary passivity of Elinor and Marianne in actions and circumstances that involve finances, and he emphasizes the parallels with Jane Austen's life, which seemed to involve a high awareness of material wealth yet little authority over the act of exchanging or accumulating it. He concludes by observing that the economic and financial details in *Sense and Sensibility* confirm its realism.

It seems safe to conjecture that *Sense and Sensibility* receives considerably less critical consideration than *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. In general the movement in the scholarship from relatively transparent commentary on character to dialogue with contexts has enriched the reading experience, if only by increasing our ability to understand the novel's fictional world. Contrary to Roger Gard's plea for a return to "clarity," an unmediated exchange between Austen's novels and the reader, the ideological readings show the extent to which even the most transparent reading is fraught with political and historical contexts and subtexts that cannot be banished at will. It is difficult, indeed impossible, to position Austen's politics or even the extent of her use of narrative form as political commentary. But we can be certain that the artist who created narratives capable of sustaining such intense reading experiences and ideological debates has used the genre well.

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## The Oppositional Reader and *Pride and Prejudice* Johanna M. Smith

Both Jane Austen and her contemporary women readers, one may argue, came to *Pride and Prejudice* from particular class positions and with particular ideological perceptions. This is not to say, however, that the novel or its readers uncritically accept those positions and perceptions. Using a concept of oppositional reading, we can unpack what might seem a hegemonic discourse—the novel’s endorsement of class-based, masculinist and heterosexual paradigms—by attention to the ways that the text also endorses the responses of readers in conflict with that discourse. In other words, *Pride and Prejudice* offers the hegemonic paradigms but also offers opposing paradigms, thereby opening a space for the oppositional reader to weigh, argue with, counter and/or accept the possibilities of the text. Such a reading of Jane Austen can also unpack several vexed areas of the critical discourse on *Pride and Prejudice*. Is the novel radical or conservative in its class politics? Is it feminist or antifeminist in its gender politics? Is it even appropriate to ask these twentieth-century questions of an early-nineteenth-century text? I would answer yes to all these questions, in the service of nuanced oppositional readings.

In the past twenty years or so, there has been much critical reevaluation of Jane Austen’s class position, as both a woman and a writer. As early as 1953, Donald Greene drew attention to both the many links between Austen’s family and the British aristocracy and Austen’s consciousness of those links. More recently, critics such as Rachel M. Brownstein have critiqued Austen for “drawing snobs . . . and encouraging them in snobbishness” (182), a critique that usefully reminds us that Austen’s novels promulgate not some ideal of universal human values but some very specific class and gender values. The precise nature of those values, however, has continued to be debated. According to Alistair Duckworth and Warren Roberts, Darcy and his estate, Pemberley, represent the

“traditional society and ethical orientation” (Duckworth 123) espoused by Edmund Burke, and Marilyn Butler concurred that Austen propounds a Burkean conservative politics. Margaret Kirkham called this position into question, first by situating Austen in the context of the radical feminists of the 1790s and then by postulating that for a woman “to become an author was, in itself, a feminist act” (33) during this period and that Austen’s heroines exemplify “the first claim of Enlightenment feminism” by acting as “independent moral agents” (84, 83). Mary Poovey factored class into such a feminist analysis, demonstrating the problematics of moral agency when claimed by ladies—that is, women of the gentry rank. Ascertaining Austen’s class and gender values is thus further complicated: ideological contradictions, latent in the cultural role of the Proper Lady, surface when a Proper Lady like Austen becomes a Woman Writer and when a Proper Lady heroine like Elizabeth Bennet “champion[s] the prerogatives of individual desire” (194). And these ambiguities and contradictions are symptomatic of rifts not only in Austen’s novels and culture but in Austen criticism. If Mary Evans argues persuasively that Austen was “deeply critical” (2) of late-eighteenth-century capitalism, she veers away from the more radical conclusions of such an argument. In contrast, Judith Lowder Newton reaches such a conclusion when she finds *Pride and Prejudice* “devoted to . . . denying the force of economics in human life” (61).

Rather than throwing up our hands in the face of such contradictions in the criticism, we can use them to analyze contradictions in the class and gender politics promulgated by *Pride and Prejudice*. To do so requires first reviewing the position of women writers in the early nineteenth century. Austen wrote *First Impressions* from 1796 to 1797, revised the manuscript from 1809 to 1810 and again in 1812, and published it as *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813. Why this gap of almost twenty years between inception and publication? Kirkham argues that Austen “felt ready to publish” (53) the manuscript in 1797 and indeed made efforts to do so; nothing came of those efforts, and “the ‘Great Wollstonecraft Scandal’ ” (Kirkham 48) in the following year initiated an increasingly chilly climate for women writers. Although a great many women had “rushed into print” (Fergus 13) by the end of the eighteenth century, and although they had “insert[ed] into the novel” (Todd 228) the “authority” of “the woman as moralist,” one effect of the Wollstonecraft scandal was to pressure women writers into the role of moralist. In other words, the very “ubiquity of the moral imperative for women” (Todd 229) functioned as a form of authority but also as a constraint. Indeed, as a “product of limitation” (Ferris 65) the Proper Novel might come to seem “limited and limiting,” as the critical history of Austen’s contemporary Maria Edgeworth suggests: Initially praised for aiding “the education and discipline of the newly literate” (Ferris 61), by 1817 Edgeworth’s novels were being denigrated for precisely this didacticism.

At the end of the eighteenth century, however, the woman writer’s didactic function had seemed especially crucial with the perceived split in the reading public into the (mainly male) “articulate classes” (Ferris 22) on the one hand

and the much larger and more disparate group of newly literate, middle- and lower-class men and women on the other hand. The latter group raised concerns that novel reading might be “seductive and inflaming” (Ferris 40), especially to women, and this anxiety increased the pressure on the Proper Lady to write the Proper Novel. Such a novel, characterized by “realism” (Ferris 54), “social utility” and a language of “enclosure and decorum,” was to fulfill the feminine cultural function of “moraliz[ing] the laboring poor” (Cole and Swartz 145). Whether by working to “suspend the subversive power of sentiment” (Watson 73), or by showing the deleterious “effects of the undisciplined or improperly disciplined imagination” (Colby 241), or by “urging the control of passion and the necessity of exertion” (Ferris 63), the Proper Novel by and for the Proper Lady was relentlessly didactic.

Of course, as Austen’s own characterization of *Pride and Prejudice* suggests, the book seems “rather too light and bright and sparkling” (Chapman 2:299) to fall into the category of didactic Proper Novel. And as Kirkham points out (53–54), political and gender conservatives such as Richard Polwhele might have considered just this “sparkle of confident intelligence” a sign of the anti-didactic, of the author’s feminist critique of masculine culture. Nevertheless, Austen was subject to many of the same pressures toward didacticism as other late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century women writers, and *Pride and Prejudice* copes with these pressures in the oscillation between radical and conservative ideologies that I noted at the beginning of this essay. Hence, Austen may be seen as “at once authorizing and enacting a resistant reading of her own text” (Litvak 36).

We can get at these oscillations by looking at the problematic realism which many critics have seen in *Pride and Prejudice*. For Newton, the novel alternates between realism and a fantasy quest plot; for Poovey, the alternation is between realistic social criticism and a final “aesthetic gratification” (207); for Sarah Webster Goodwin, realism is joined to and undercut by the “possibly-real” of a feminist utopia (10). These formulations suggest that *Pride and Prejudice* is realism and/but something more, a generic mix that seems to call “realism” itself into question. For early-nineteenth-century readers, realism would have been associated with the genre of the “novel” as distinguished from that of the “romance.” Where the novel was expected to represent faithfully “the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society” (Moir 40), the romance was defined by Austen’s contemporary Walter Scott as “a fictitious narrative” of “marvelous and uncommon incidents” (qtd. in Duncan 10). Yet the distinction was not absolute, for an otherwise realistic novel of “every-day life” (Moir 42) might also incorporate the “mysterious and terrible” incidents or “powerful passion” more characteristic of the romance. And Claudia Brodsky Lacour locates *Pride and Prejudice* at a “dialectical moment” (602) of similar confusion over the nature of realism: if Austen’s novel marks the point at which “literature becomes identified with the historical and the particular, the representation (or misrepresentation) of the real,” it is also pervaded by the problem of realistic

representation, “the difficulty of translating between abstract and representational language . . . and thus of representing an abstraction, truth, in fiction” (603).

The demands of realism were complicated for women writers by cultural pressures toward didacticism. Novels like those that Jane Austen wrote might be expected to function as manuals for the proper conduct of “social and private life in the upper and upper middle classes” (Kelly 151), but they might then be condemned for “spreading false upper-class values and social expectations.” More centrally for my purposes, the realistic novel offered legitimacy to women writers if they were “scrupulous about fulfilling the office of educator” (Poovey 38), so fidelity to the real might well be displaced by the didactic imperative. For instance, Beth Kowalski-Wallace sees “ideology at work” (243) in early-nineteenth-century realistic novels that legitimated a “new-style patriarchy” of “non-coercive” masculine authority by focusing reader attention on the pleasures of “domestic fulfillment.” For women readers, these pleasures functioned as “compensatory gratifications, ideal rewards” (Poovey 38) for giving up other, more transgressive desires; they were the carrot at the end of the didactic stick. But realistic novels might also offer the fantasy of compensatory power, the pleasure of wielding the stick. Women are often “the legitimate agents for socializing men” (Poovey 169) in these novels; as such, they might punish insufficiently socialized men and thereby “retaliate against their legal superiors.” In the novel as in the bourgeois home, of course, such power was only compensatory; in the sexual politics of fiction as of fact, women generally remained subordinate to men. Perhaps the most significant ideological function of realistic-didactic fiction is thus its capacity to “represent an alternative form of political power [for women] without appearing to contest the distribution of power [to men] that it represented as historically given” (Armstrong, *Desire* 29).

But can we say that all women readers of realistic-didactic fiction in general, and *Pride and Prejudice* in particular, achieved—or even desired—the “compensatory gratifications” I have been discussing? Where in this scenario is the oppositional reader, the reader who resists the consolations of ideology? We can locate this reader by examining reading itself, as one of the “everyday practices, ‘ways of operating’ or doing things” that, Michel de Certeau argues, show us that the dominated are not necessarily “passive or docile” (xi–xii). As “users” or “consumers”—or readers—move through the “constructed, written, and functionalized” (xviii) space of their culture, they may follow not the paths laid out for them but “‘indirect’ or ‘errant’ trajectories obeying their own logic,” trajectories that “trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop.” Such trajectories also give the lie to an “ideology of consumption-as-a-receptacle” (167), an ideology in which “the efficiency of production implies the inertia of consumption.” If this latter formulation is applied to writing and reading, the efficiency of authorial production implies the inertia of the reader as consumer; but if “a system of verbal or iconic signs is a reservoir of forms to which the reader must give a meaning” (169), then reading is not passive consumption but rather “the production proper to the reader.” Furthermore, the reader “invents in texts

something different from what they ‘intended’ ”; “He [*sic*] combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality.” In academic practice, however, “only someone like Barthes can take this liberty” (172); students tend to be “scornfully driven or cleverly coaxed back to the meaning ‘accepted’ by their teachers.” In other words, a text may well function as a “cultural weapon” (171) in the hands of “*socially* authorized professionals and intellectuals,” and the reader’s autonomy as a consumer may well be relative to the “social relationships that overdetermine his [*sic*] relation to texts” (173). de Certeau calls for a “transformation” of those relationships, a “politics of reading” such that readers become truly “travellers . . . poaching their way across fields they did not write” (174), moving in trajectories, indulging in “advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text” (175). These “travellers” would be our resisting readers, and of this “politics of reading” what William Galperin says about *Emma* is equally pertinent to *Pride and Prejudice*: “Austen advocates resistance and change” (23) by “showing it” in her characters’ practices and “the counter-hegemonic practices of reading” she makes available. To exemplify such an oppositional reading, I want to consider Lydia Bennet and Charlotte Lucas, reading each in relation to Elizabeth Bennet as a contender for her status as heroine.

The focus of my reading is the function(s) of wit in the novel. Marilyn Butler regards Elizabeth’s wit as “so seductive” (216) of the novel’s predominating conservatism that *Pride and Prejudice* finally has “no clear message” (217). Similarly, Maaja Stewart argues that Elizabeth’s wit is foregrounded in the novel, but that background “patterns of power” (40), which gradually render her “completely helpless,” become visible in the form of Darcy’s judgment; furthermore, “diametrically opposed reader responses [are] produced by the text” (59) through the contest of wit and judgment. The “unclear message” resulting from “diametrically opposed reader responses” to this contest suggests a space for the oppositional reader. Such a reader might note that it is the easily led Bingley who has “the highest opinion” (64) of Darcy’s judgment, that it is Darcy’s “own judgment alone” (218) that determines to detach Bingley from Jane, and that Darcy’s judgment in the matter was “probabl[y]” (288) influenced by his desire to ally Bingley with his own family.

The boundary between wit and judgment is further blurred when we remember that wit is itself a form of judgment. According to Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* of 1755, in fact, wit might be defined as “sense” or “judgment” (def. 6), and the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* lists several eighteenth-century examples of wit defined as “good judgment” (def. 6a). An early conversation between Darcy and Elizabeth displays this overlap of judgment and wit. When Elizabeth admits, “I dearly love a laugh” (102), Darcy in effect rebukes her judgment:

“The wisest and the best of men, nay, the wisest and best of their actions, may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke.”

“Certainly,” replied Elizabeth—“there are such people, but I hope I am not one of *them*. I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, *do* divert me, . . . and I laugh at them whenever I can.”

Darcy’s magisterial judgment of people “whose first object in life is a joke” is presented as if it were a universal. Elizabeth’s “certainly” accepts that universal, but she then distinguishes herself from “*them*” by validating her own judgment, her ability to differentiate between “what is wise or good” and the follies, nonsense, whims and inconsistencies that do deserve her ridicule. A second, implicit area of judgment here is the distinction between jokes and ridicule: joking seems to be indiscriminate, while ridicule has a carefully judged object.

Although wit is not mentioned here, it is obviously related to jokes and ridicule. The difficulty of mapping that relation, however, is suggested by the many definitions of wit in the eighteenth century. In addition to “good judgment,” it might mean “quickness of fancy” (Johnson def. 2) with an accompanying “capacity of apt expression” (*OED* def. 7). Wit of this sort, according to the *OED*, is what Pope meant in the *Essay on Criticism* by “what oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed”; stretching a point, we might say that Darcy’s judgment of jokesters is witty in this sense. Still, according to the *OED*, wit is also a “talent for saying brilliant or sparkling things” (def. 7). There is no wit of that sort in the conversation between Darcy and Elizabeth, but it abounds elsewhere in this “light and bright and sparkling” novel. Elizabeth occasionally makes a remark of this sort, as when she ridicules Maria’s excitement over visitors from Rosings: “I thought at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lady Catherine and her daughter!” (194). Yet Elizabeth’s wit is doubly at fault here, for not only could the remark itself be seen as “bordering on the vulgar” (Johnson 76), she has made an error of judgment in taking Mrs. Jenkinson for Lady Catherine. True wit, the “apt association of thought and expression, calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness” (*OED* def. 8a), thus comes to seem the exclusive prerogative of Austen’s narration, both her *style indirect libre*—“Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how” (55)—and her third-person exposition—“The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lady Catherine determine what weather they were to have on the morrow” (201).

While these moments of wit might be categorized as jokes, they should certainly be categorized as ridicule, a point of some significance for the practice of oppositional reading. That is, since neither Mary nor Lady Catherine is “wise or good,” the reader is invited to ridicule their nonsense and folly; in other words, a nonresistant appreciation of Austen’s wit constitutes a judgment of Mary and Lady Catherine. As Brownstein puts it, if “we respond with approval to a snob’s ruthless high standards, and to her high-handedness” (182), that response constitutes readerly “complicity with Austen’s sure, exclusive Lady’s tone.” Such complicity in turn displays the nonresisting reader’s taste, in the correct judgment of Austen’s characters and the proper appreciation of Austen’s

wit. It thus marks such a reader as belonging to what Pierre Bourdieu calls “the aristocracy of culture” (11), for it shows her or his “elaborated taste for the most refined objects” (1). The “social hierarchy” of consumers of art, according to Bourdieu, “predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’ ” (1–2). Consumption of a novel, for instance, is “an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code,” in other words a “cultural competence,” which signifies class position. And as they exercise that competence, “social subjects . . . distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make” (6), so that “taste classifies” not just the art object but the consumer of that object. I have already said that wit is a form of judgment, of making distinctions; it is thus also a form and sign of taste. I have said too that appreciating Austen’s wit at the expense of her characters is a mark of complicity with the judgment implied by that wit; appreciating wit, then, is equally a form and sign of taste. If consumption of a text is “the production proper to the reader,” as de Certeau claims (169), it is also the production of the nonresisting reader as a person of taste.

Does this mean that the resisting reader has no taste? Not necessarily, for he or she deciphers and decodes the text with a cultural competence similar to that of the accepting reader. Indeed, it might be argued that resistance attests *superior* competence: Joseph Litvak postulates a “dynamic interdependence of perversity and privilege” (46–47) in an “oppositional criticism” (47), which resists the normative heterosexuality of *Pride and Prejudice*’s marriage plot. An oppositional reading that resists the novel’s wit might well signal a similar privilege; indeed, flaunting that privilege might place oppositional critics “in an even more privileged position to repel [distasteful] sexual and aesthetic regimes.”

I want to pursue Litvak’s oppositional reading of one element of these regimes in the novel, but on different trajectories. As “connoisseurs of the stupid and the vulgar” (Litvak 40) and thus as “author-surrogates,” Elizabeth Bennet and her father “demonstrate the classic middle-class technique . . . of making oneself look classier than the rest of the middle class” (41). Mr. Bennet does so by making witty remarks at the expense of his wife and younger daughters, Elizabeth by having “the wit to stylize the vulgarity” (44) of her mother and sisters and thereby captivate Darcy and marry up. Certainly this heterosexual and cross-class marriage achieved by wit both enforces and validates a particular “sexual and aesthetic regime.” This happy ending can be seen as slightly more complicated, however, when it is read on a series of feminist trajectories.

We begin with Mr. Bennet. It is important to recognize that his wit is gradually called into question as it is shown to betoken a failure of judgment. When he twits Elizabeth over Darcy’s supposed indifference to her, the reader joins with her in faulting “his wit” (372), in large part because his earlier witticism, about Lydia’s behavior having “frightened away some of [Elizabeth’s] lovers” (257), has already indicated a misjudgment not only of the nature of Elizabeth’s concern but of the extent and seriousness of Lydia’s “improprieties.” In other words, “Mr. Bennet goes beyond seeing the absurdity of life; he *wants* life to



be absurd" (Brown 154), and "his inadequacy as a father is directly related" to this cynical wit. That inadequacy becomes ever clearer as the detachment signaled by his wit extends into self-detachment from his paternal duty to Lydia; he gives Mr. Gardiner "full powers to act in [his] name" (317) in arranging Lydia's marriage settlement, and when he learns that his proto-son-in-law Darcy in fact arranged the settlement, he rejoices in thus being "save[d] a world of trouble and economy" (385).

To go thus far on this trajectory is to perform a feminist reading of the patriarch, but it is also a Proper Lady reading of Lydia and of "sexual regimes" that traffic in women, and as such it requires another, oppositional, trajectory. Lydia fits snugly into Darcy's category of "person[s] whose first object in life is a joke" (102): her "high animal spirits" (91) emerge in such "good jokes" (248) as dressing a man in women's clothes, while running off with Wickham is another "good joke" (307) and marrying him is "very good fun" (329). At this remark "Elizabeth could bear it no longer," and the reader is invited to join her in judging her sister as "Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (328). Certainly, to paraphrase Kingsley Amis, "to invite [Lydia] round for the evening would not be lightly undertaken" (12–13), but an oppositional reading of Elizabeth's judgment reminds us that she too "dearly love[s] a joke" (102) and that she shares her sister's "high . . . spirits" (130) and capacity for "laugh[ing] heartily" (208). More important, Elizabeth's (mis)judgments of Wickham replicate Lydia's: as Elizabeth herself admits, "We all were . . . ready enough to admire him" (302) initially, and when Lydia opines that Wickham "never cared three straws about [Miss King]" (247), Elizabeth recognizes that "however incapable of such coarseness of *expression* herself, the coarseness of the *sentiment*" is a mirror of her own. What finally distinguishes Elizabeth from Lydia, in other words, is taste—eschewing "coarseness of expression" and learning to eschew "coarseness of sentiment." Elizabeth's concluding judgment of Lydia might be called a Proper Lady distaste: although she is apparently party to the machinations whereby Kitty is "carefully kept" (393) from Lydia, she does allow Lydia an occasional visit to Pemberley (395). This tolerance is in sharp contrast to Mr. Collins's view that the proper response to Lydia and Wickham's sin would be "never to admit them in your sight" (372), and to Lady Catherine de Bourgh's view that "the shades of Pemberley" (367) would be "polluted" by the presence of Lydia's sister. Between Mr. Bennet's culpable indifference on the one hand, and Mr. Collins's and Lady Catherine's ferocity on the other, stands Elizabeth's tolerant distaste.

I have already noted that the novel invites readers to ridicule Lady Catherine, and following that trajectory provides another take on the Proper Lady. If Lady Catherine did not exist, it would be necessary to invent her, for improper class pride must be offloaded from Darcy onto her. (In much the same way, Bingley's "easy, unaffected manners" [58] are brought into high relief by his sisters' belief that even though the family fortune was acquired through trade, "associating with people of rank" nonetheless "entitled [them] to think well of themselves,

and meanly of others” [63].) Darcy’s early class pride—his considering himself “above his company” (58), his stuffy insistence on maintaining “a family library in such days as these” (84), his impossibly exaggerated notion of a “really accomplished” lady (85) and his censures of Elizabeth’s “objectionable” relations (228) become as nothing to Lady Catherine’s “self-importance” (197), her disciplining of cottagers “disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor” (203), the “impertinence” (198) of her questions about Elizabeth’s accomplishments and her fear of Pemberley’s pollution. The reformation of Darcy’s manners is distinguished from the continued class arrogance of his aunt, a distinction brought home in the confrontation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth. Where Darcy has been “properly humbled” (378) by Elizabeth’s reproofs of his ungentlemanly behavior, Lady Catherine bridles when Elizabeth directs “such language as this” at herself (364).

That confrontation serves another function as well, by clarifying some class distinctions between Lady Catherine and Proper Lady Elizabeth. This is a complicated issue; although I have focused on and will return to Lady Catherine’s overestimation of her class status, another and more oppositional reading is possible. From this point of view, despite her title, Lady Catherine sometimes functions as one of Austen’s “marginal women” (Fraiman 168) who “voice anger and defiance that split open ostensibly decorous texts.” If we attend to the question of entail in the novel, we can fold Mrs. Bennet into such an oppositional reading as well, for Lady Catherine’s “I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line” (198) is not so different from Mrs. Bennet’s cry to her husband that “it is the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be entailed away from your own children” (106). That is, we are certainly invited to dismiss Mrs. Bennet as “a woman of mean understanding [and] little information” (53) and to disregard Lady Catherine’s “mere stateliness of money and rank” (196), but their shared concern with the entailing of property away from women reminds us of the Proper Lady’s economic disadvantages. Yet we should also remember that the disposal of real estate is a problem peculiar to ladies; in other words, property is a sign of class status. This returns us to the confrontation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth and the class distinctions it enables. Lady Catherine’s disparaging remark about the Bennet “park” (362) reminds the reader of her class arrogance but also of the Bennets’ status as landed gentry; her similarly disparaging remark about Elizabeth’s class “sphere” (365) allows Elizabeth to state that as “a gentleman’s daughter” (368), she is “equal” to Darcy, whereby she displays a proper class consciousness. In what is arguably her strongest speech of this sort, Elizabeth then states her “resolve to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*” and without “one moment’s concern” (367) for Lady Catherine’s objections. With this insistence on “her own opinion,” Elizabeth signals the shift postulated by Michel Foucault away from “deployments of alliance” or property in marriage arrangements and toward “deployments of sexuality” or individual desire. Yet she also signals that she deserves to marry up, in two ways. Where

Lydia's deployments of sexuality led to seduction and were thus "antithetical to the social order" (Allen 438), Elizabeth's are directed toward marriage and thus affirm the social order. And if Elizabeth's desire does destabilize the class order figured by Lady Catherine, her resistance to that improper class pride demonstrates her proper class consciousness and distinguishes it from the toadying of her cousin Mr. Collins. Indeed, insofar as Elizabeth's behavior to Lady Catherine is more admirable than his, we might see it as another instance of Austen's Enlightenment feminism—her belief that women can act as moral agents without the aid of "such moral teachers as Mr. Collins" (Kirkham 84).

But "what becomes of the moral" (389), as Elizabeth asks in a slightly different context, if we turn from her quarrel with Lady Catherine to her romance with Pemberley? When Elizabeth dates her love for Darcy "from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (382) and Jane entreats her to "be serious," the reader is invited to dismiss her statement as a joke. But an earlier remark—"she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (267)—is harder to read: it too might be a joke, but the *style indirect libre* makes the tone uncertain, and this appreciation of Darcy's estate is also "admiration of his taste" (268), an admiration that the reader is invited to share. Similarly, when Darcy's housekeeper praises his conduct as a landlord and master, are we to agree with Mr. Gardiner that this is "excessive commendation" (270) arising from "family prejudice"? Or are we to agree with the opposite view—seemingly Elizabeth's, but stated in *style indirect libre* and hence not clearly so—that "what praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?" (272). And what are we to think of the novel's prepenultimate paragraph, which underlines Elizabeth's position as mistress of Pemberley by stating that Darcy reconciled with Lady Catherine at "Elizabeth's persuasion" (395)? That is, if both Lydia and Lady Catherine now visit Pemberley, then the "multiplexity of relationships" (Deresiewicz 530) that have formed around Elizabeth's marriage functions as "something of an imagined community." But *imagined* is the key word, for this community is what Poovey calls an "aesthetic solution" (206) that "pushes aside" the novel's earlier "social realism and criticism."

An oppositional reading of this aesthetic solution would resist its closure, its happy ending in marriages. Such a reading would point to the fact that if the novel has earlier criticized Mr. Bennet's paternal failings, it concludes with a Lévi-Straussian exchange of women that functions to legitimate male homosocial power relations (Fraiman 173). Such a reading would also interrogate "the comfort and elegance of [the] family party at Pemberley" (392), not only by "investigat[ing] the contradictory, disparate elements" (Newman 195) from which this imagined community is made but also by noting the elements from which it is *not* made. Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas Collins do not figure in the imagined community of Pemberley, and I want to conclude with this exclusion, because it returns us to the issues of wit and ridicule, taste and distinction that are integral to an oppositional reading of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Mr. Collins is the butt of relentless ridicule in the novel, but at first blush

one would not associate Charlotte with wit or, given her marriage to Collins, with taste. Yet her view of marriage suggests elements of both. If we postulate that Austen “wrote her novels anticipating that they would be read aloud” (Michaelson 65) and if we try to *hear* Charlotte’s conversation with Elizabeth about marriage, it seems a piece of performative wit. To Charlotte,

“Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”

“You make me laugh, Charlotte” [replies Elizabeth]; “but . . . you know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself.” (69–70)

Elizabeth’s “you make me laugh” seems a cue to auditors—and readers—that Charlotte’s argument is a tour de force of wit. It displays her “capacity for apt expression” (*OED* def. 7), and it is also witty in the sophistic sense of “‘making the worse argument seem the better’” (qtd. in de Certeau 38). Certainly we already suspect (from Chapter 1) what we are later told explicitly (in Chapter 42): that the Bennets married on the principle Charlotte seems to espouse and thus that it *is* “the worse argument.” And while Elizabeth’s belief that Charlotte “would never act in this way” seems a dramatic irony, it is in fact correct, for Charlotte marries Collins knowing full well that he “was neither sensible nor agreeable” (163). She has also judged his “character, connections, and situation in life” (165) and thus has some grounds for being “convinced that my chance of happiness with him, is as fair” (166) as could be expected. We might add that her judgment in other areas of courtship proves correct. Her warning that “it is sometimes a disadvantage [for a woman] to be so very guarded” (68), for instance, is borne out by Darcy’s failure to perceive in Jane “any symptom of peculiar regard” (228) for Bingley; while this failure may or may not be a misjudgment on Darcy’s part, it certainly signals Charlotte’s perceptive recognition of “the uncomfortable limits of sexual signals” (Armstrong, “Politics” 172) available to a marriageable Proper Lady. Finally, the fact that Charlotte has weighed her own options and chosen marriage as her “pleasantest preservative from want” (163) suggests at least a degree of taste; although Mr. Collins is no prize, still we might say that Charlotte has sufficient cultural competence to make distinctions among “preservatives from want.”

If Charlotte displays wit in both the “apt expression” and “good judgment” senses, Elizabeth’s judgment of her friend’s choice is called into question. Initially we are invited to agree with Elizabeth that Charlotte’s match is “unsuitable” (166), that she has “sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage” and that she cannot be “tolerably happy.” But we are then invited to agree with Jane that Elizabeth’s language is “too strong” (174) when she accuses Charlotte of “selfishness” and “insensibility,” and what we learn of Charlotte’s marriage

indicates that she *is* “tolerably happy.” Most telling, when Elizabeth forgives Wickham for pursuing precisely the same kind of prudential marriage as Charlotte’s, the hint that she was “less clear-sighted perhaps in his case” (186) undermines her harsh judgment of Charlotte. Of course, it is true that Elizabeth’s marriage is a far happier ending than Charlotte’s and that she earns that ending by correcting her tendency toward such faulty judgments. But it is also true that there is something smug and smothering about the “family party at Pemberley” (392), and that Austen authorizes the happy ending of *Pride and Prejudice* but also the oppositional readings I have been pursuing.

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# *Pride and Prejudice: Jane Austen and Her Readers*

*Elizabeth Langland*

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has enjoyed a wide popular and critical audience throughout the almost two centuries since it was written. The recent spate of major motion pictures made from the novels as well as the fine BBC renditions testify to Austen's enduring popularity, and the critical responses to her work are unabated. *Pride and Prejudice* has provided hospitable analytic ground for critics of most persuasions: historical, biographical, new Critical, neo-Aristotelian, narratological, reader-response, psychological, Marxist, Foucaultian, Bakhtinian, feminist, new historicist, materialist, postcolonial and cultural. Further, the novel has demonstrated a continuing power to command attention to its narrative craft; year after year, it has drawn, and continues to draw, commentators on its narrative artistry.

Critics have repeatedly returned to the novel's stylistic and formal precision, and it would seem that this very narrative polish has made it a less fertile ground for deconstructive approaches, which do not figure prominently in readings of *Pride and Prejudice* despite their currency in the academy in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

This chapter surveys the sea of changes in criticism of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, beginning in the early nineteenth century and continuing through the present, but paying particular attention to recent developments, which have not been documented in earlier bibliographies. In the past half-century particularly, critics have argued over whether Austen is a social conservative or a subversive feminist, and the tension between approaches has kept both in fruitful play. Ironically, a majority of recent approaches, heralded by the advent of postcolonial and cultural studies and historicizing Foucaultian methodologies, have often recuperated the more conservative Austen, which dominated earlier critical perspectives. Austen is once again viewed as a conservator of the status quo,



and she is seen as representing a world whose values she endorses rather than critiques. Depicted as an artist comfortable with and complicit in her culture's values, Austen is criticized for her uncritical participation in her culture's imperial, colonial and class aspirations. The return of a "retrenched Austen"—the phrase is Elaine Showalter's—makes it particularly valuable to survey the larger historical perspective to provide a sense of how readings of *Pride and Prejudice* speak as much about the critics and periods that produce them as they do of Austen's novel.

I group the critical responses to *Pride and Prejudice* along some broad traditional and established lines set out in *The Jane Austen Companion*, edited by David Grey, A. Walton Litz and Brian Southam in 1986. The *Companion* identifies an initial period extending from the publication of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813 to the issuance of *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, by James Edward Austen-Leigh, in 1870. The second period covers the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first four decades of the twentieth. It ends with the publication of Mary Lascelles's *Jane Austen and Her Art*, which heralds a third phase. This third period sees several different critical perspectives emerge, from New Criticism to postmodernism, feminism to postcolonialism. All of these approaches find rich ground to explore in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

### 1813–1870

Jane Austen was her own stringent first critic of *Pride and Prejudice*. Calling it "too light, and bright, and sparkling," she proposed taking on the serious subject of ordination in her next novel (February 4, 1813). Of course, we hear in this self-evaluation the satirical raillery that characterizes her fiction throughout and warns us not to take her estimate at face value. Rather, this subversive comment about *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as her more general evaluation of her work as "this little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a brush," anticipates a range of critical responses to come (December 16, 1816).

In the first critical phase, Austen's near contemporaries define the nature of her art, often in contradistinction to their own work or that of other writers. Mimetic truth, a talent for conveying interest in the ordinary and prosaic—evaluations of this kind lead to both praise and censure. Writing in 1827, Sir Walter Scott commented,

Also read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*. That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, and feelings, and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonder I ever met with. The Big Bow-wow strain I can do like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me. (Gilson 475)

Charlotte Brontë identifies a similar “truth” in Austen’s novels but evaluates it more harshly. In a letter of response to G. H. Lewes, questioning his recommendation of *Pride and Prejudice* as a model for her art, Brontë asks why he “like[s] Miss Austen so very much.” Professing herself to be puzzled, she remarks that *Pride and Prejudice* depicts “an accurate, daguerretyped portrait of a commonplace face! a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses” (January 12, 1848).

Lewes responds to this query in his own longer essay, “The Novels of Jane Austen,” published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1859. There, he identifies the basis for his praise—in the art of the novel in general and in Austen’s work in particular—as the “art of truthful portrait-painting”: “It is easy for the artist to choose a subject from every-day life, but it is not easy for him to so represent the characters and their actions that they shall be at once lifelike and interesting. . . . But Miss Austen is like Shakespeare; she makes her very noodles inexhaustibly amusing, yet accurately real. We never tire of her characters” (Kaminsky 91–92). Lewes, like Scott, values mimetic fidelity, which he makes the touchstone of Austen’s excellence. Her place in the realistic tradition of the novel seems assured at this point and will be confirmed in later studies of the novel. It is remarkable, too, that Austen came through the Victorian age with a solid reputation established. As Joseph Duffy comments, “Her novels, it is clear, were not in harmony with Victorian desires for fiction: they did not provide solace to the distressed, emotional stimulus to the jaded, or information to the inquisitive” (101). Yet they clearly possessed both the artistry and range that would enable their reputation to flourish.

## 1870–1940

The general restraint and discrimination of artistic effects that mark this first phase give way in the second to gushing enthusiasms, set in motion by Austen-Leigh’s saccharine description of his aunt in *A Memoir*:

She was a humble, believing Christian. Her life had been passed in the performance of home duties, and the cultivation of domestic affections, without any self-seeking or craving after applause. She had always sought, as it were by instinct, to promote the happiness of all who came within her influence, and doubtless she had her reward in the peace of mind which was granted her in her last days. . . . Hers was a mind well balanced on a basis of good sense, sweetened by an affectionate heart, and regulated by fixed principle.

This middle phase saw a few pieces of fine, discriminating criticism, notably by Richard Simpson, Margaret Oliphant and, later, Reginald Farrer, who recognized the astute intelligence and, in Oliphant’s words, the “fine vein of fem-

inine cynicism” (reprinted in Southam 216). However, by and large, the period was dominated by the “Janeites” and the anti-Janeites following in the wake of this biographical notice. The “gentle Janeites,” as they are called, sentimentalized Austen and helped foster damaging conceptions and criticism of her art as tidy and limited—an image that provoked Mark Twain to praise a ship’s library in *Following the Equator* (1897) because “Jane Austen’s books . . . are absent. . . . Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn’t a book in it.”

Henry James added to the chorus in a way that took the artistry of the novels more seriously but at the same time diminished the artist. Describing her writing practice, he commented that it is as if she “fell-a-musing over her work-basket,” lapsed into “wool-gathering” and afterward picked up “her dropped stitches” as “little masterworks of imagination” (206). Appreciation for the craft and achievement of the novels in this period fell to Virginia Woolf. Writing in *The Common Reader*, Woolf astutely observed that, “Jane Austen is thus a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears on the surface. . . . Think away the surface animation, the likeness to life, and there remains to provide a deeper pleasure, an exquisite determination of human values” (142). Woolf’s comments force the critical lens to focus more sharply. It is not simply verisimilitude—a surface animation, the likeness to life. Rather, the novels engage significant moral issues and more complexly than first appears. In contrast to James, Woolf recognizes in Austen’s works an art that is difficult and intricate instead of simple and unconscious.

## 1940–PRESENT

What is perhaps somewhat astonishing is that Jane Austen emerged from this seventy-year middle period with a well-established reputation as the “most widely read and loved of all the classic novelists of English literature” (Southam 102). Even the sentimental enthusiasms of the Janeites had had the positive effect of ensuring the publication of multiple editions of novels like *Pride and Prejudice*. Henceforth, the popular and critical audiences would divide; it was Mary Lascelles’s *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939), which has a superb chapter on *Pride and Prejudice*, that systematically analyzed the scope of Austen’s work and formally ushered in the serious academic criticism of this author that has dominated the past sixty years. Yet the spate of major motion pictures made from Austen’s novels in the 1990s may also represent the recuperation of a “popular” Jane Austen to close the twentieth century.

D. W. Harding’s justifiably famous “Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen” identifies Austen as a social subversive, skewering the very people who admire the world she represents. Following from Farrer’s essay and anticipating Marvin Mudrick’s *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, Harding sets in play an image of Jane Austen as supreme satirist and ironist, and so establishes what will become a structuring framework for later criticism:

the tension between subversive and conservative elements in *Pride and Prejudice*. The ensuing close readings of New Critics and Formalists often find common ground in charting this precarious balance. For example, Dorothy Van Ghent identifies in the language of property and “want” that structures the novel’s opening sentence the tension between money and love, between marriage as economic, social contract and marriage for affection: a “clash and reconciliation of utility interests with interests that are nonutilitarian” (102).

The 1950s ended with New Critical approaches confirmed in the study of *Pride and Prejudice*. Such perspectives vouchsafed keen appreciation for the stylistic and structural excellencies of Austen’s first major novel. Introducing *A Collection of Critical Essays* in 1963, Ian Watt looked both backward at where the criticism had traversed and forward to where it had yet to go: “In general, the criticism of Jane Austen in the last two decades is incomparably the richest and most illuminating that has appeared; but in demonstrating how the restrictions of her subject matter are the basis for a major literary achievement, recent criticism has perhaps failed to give the nature of Jane Austen’s social and moral assumptions an equally exacting analysis” (13). This astute assessment has proved to be the prelude to a host of critical perspectives wedding the artistic technique with the social and moral vision.

Significant among these studies are those focusing on language, style and narrative technique. For example, in *Jane Austen’s Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (1962), Howard Babb examines dialogue between Darcy and Elizabeth to explore the subtleties of intention and understanding in *Pride and Prejudice*. Norman Page’s *Language of Jane Austen* (1972) takes a linguistic approach to distinguish shifts in style between novels; Stuart Tave’s *Some Words of Jane Austen* (1973) identifies the larger significance in the careful discrimination Austen makes between seemingly similar concepts, like “mortification” versus “vexation” and “amiable” versus “agreeable.” Finally Barbara Hardy’s *Reading of Jane Austen* (1975) charts the aesthetic distance Austen traversed in creating a flexible language capable of controlling the reader’s responses.

These early analyses of language have been followed by a number of studies of the novel’s narrative craft and form, which make up one chapter of larger theoretical examinations. For example, Elizabeth Langland’s *Society in the Novel* (1984) takes *Pride and Prejudice* as an example of a represented world in which, despite the emergence of tensions, society is still able to accommodate individual needs and aspirations, in contrast to most other novels of the nineteenth century, which depict society limiting, more or less tragically, the protagonists’ aspirations and achievements. In *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*, Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires use *Pride and Prejudice* as a model for a narratological approach, which elicits from the novel examples of such concepts as kernel and satellite events, enchainment and embedded events, paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures and the “traiting” of characters. Their book is intended to introduce readers to structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies and draws on the work of such theorists as Fer-

dinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette. James Phelan's *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (1989) takes a formalist approach, reading character in relation to plot and insisting that mimesis must be as prominent as theme in understanding what motivates Elizabeth Bennet's actions in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is interesting to note in this context how often theorists of the novel have drawn on *Pride and Prejudice* for their formal and narratological paradigmatic analyses.

A critic like Phelan is also responding to other critics of Austen who emerged in the 1970s—critics like Alastair Duckworth, who take a more thematic and historical approach to *Pride and Prejudice*, relating the social background to the verbal texture of the novel. Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (1971) takes the estate as a metaphor for other inherited structures, such as manners, and reads the novel's emphases on books, libraries and letters in the light of his thesis that there must be compromise between innovation and conservation, between the individual and society. Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), which traces Austen's literary and philosophical forebears, shares with Duckworth's study an emphasis on the essentially conservative nature of Austen's values.

On the other hand, Susan Morgan's *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in the Novels of Jane Austen* (1980) takes issue with Duckworth's conclusions, insisting that "to understand *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of some ideal blend of the individual and the social is to speak of finalities about a writer who herself chooses to speak of the possible, the continuous, the incomplete" (80). For Morgan, the central issues focus on the relation between freedom and intelligence, conveyed primarily through the representation of Elizabeth Bennet. Yet Morgan also joins Duckworth in handling literary and political backgrounds with a greater sophistication.

Since the late 1970s, feminist criticism has been a powerful and shaping force in Jane Austen criticism. Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Female Imagination* (1975) helped inaugurate feminist criticism as a mode, and this work gives prominent attention to *Pride and Prejudice*. Arguing that Austen's heroines are the first in English fiction to undergo change, Spacks reads Elizabeth Bennet's development as a "paradigm of adolescent potential fulfilled." Elizabeth discovers "the positive advantages of maturity over childishness, even in a society whose rigidities offer protection to the continued immaturity characteristic of most of its members" (155). Ellen Moers's *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1977) also pointed to the value of a feminist perspective in reading *Pride and Prejudice*, calling for attention to what had been overlooked by male critics: "Austen's concern with the economic aspect of a man's professional choice—to put it bluntly, the question of his income" (106–107). Similar questions of the social and cultural conditions that frame marriage for women are raised in Rachel Brownstein's *Becoming a Heroine* (1982), which gives *Pride and Prejudice* a central place in representing a woman's complete fulfillment in her union with a man. However, Brownstein argues that this love story "figures forth the

novel's fantasies, that character determines fate, that virtue is rewarded, that to know oneself is to know and control one's destiny." But this is "art not life"; in fact, "happiness is a matter of chance quite as Charlotte says" (134). Finally, Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (1978) examined the Bennet household in contrast to the March household in *Little Women* and claims that Austen offers a negative version of female community, one in which "the malevolent power of the mother is ennobled by being transferred to the hero, and the female community of Longbourn, an oppressive blank in a dense society, is dispersed with relief in the solidity of marriage" (55).

The 1970s were brought to a close by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's magisterial *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which found common cause between Austen and Brontë in their struggles as women artists, negotiating between the compliant female narrator and the angry feminist author. And this work helped turn from the early feminist emphasis on images of women to what Elaine Showalter has termed "gynocriticism," a study of the woman as *writer*. Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (1984) followed up on the idea of ideological contradiction introduced by Gilbert and Gubar. Poovey finds in *Pride and Prejudice* a shift in the end from the realm of "society to the realm of art. . . . Austen substitutes aesthetic gratification . . . for the practical solutions that neither her society nor her art could provide. That we do not more often feel shortchanged by this sleight-of-hand attests to the power of her artistry and to the magnitude of our own desire to deny the disturbing ideological contradictions that have made such imaginative compensation necessary" (207).

Julia Prewitt Brown's *Jane Austen's Novels* (1979) also early pulled together several strands of feminist criticism in a full-scale analysis of Austen's corpus, which makes a powerful argument for Austen's stature as a major novelist. Brown argues convincingly against a long-standing critical assumption that because Austen was ignorant of the "great world," her novels basically deal with trivial subject matter but in a nontrivial way. Pointing to the antitheses that ground that idea—between women and history, between domesticity and history—Brown defines Austen as the first novelist "to fully assert the cultural significance of marriage and family, their role in social and moral change" (1), the first to record the "shift from a tradition-directed to an inner-directed society" (19). *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates through its several marriages the necessary ties between past and present, the moral ethos for the present justified by past behaviors.

Brown's study of Austen is somewhat distinctive because it finds marriage and domesticity appropriate goals for the novels' heroines. It is not surprising, therefore, that a decade later Brown worries that feminist criticism has in fact largely *devalued* rather than *revalued* Austen as a writer. She notes that "Jane Austen's stature has declined with the rise of feminist literary criticism" (303). Crediting earlier male critics with a more systematic attention to the moral se-

riousness of Austen's work, Brown claims that the feminist depreciation "hinges on the question of marriage." "To the feminist critic marriage is too simple and restricted a resolution . . . an inadequate symbol with which to conclude a great novel" (305). Brown defines an alternative feminist tradition that has been slighted, "a feminist tradition that looks at society as integral rather than aggregate, in which the interest of women does not compete against other groups or men but is seen as part of a contiguous whole" (313). However, what Julia Brown makes amply clear here is that feminist criticism as a whole and, in particular, of Jane Austen has never been one thing. It is not in itself a methodology, but a wide range of methodologies that take as a starting point the significance of women and the woman writer. Thus, we may say that since the advent of feminist criticism, no perspective on Jane Austen has been uninformed by it.

The studies of Jane Austen that mark the 1980s and 1990s adopt the variety of theoretical positions available. Renewed interest in literary history and culture informs several studies, which look at Jane Austen in the context of the writers preceding and contemporaneous with her. Margaret Kirkham's *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1983) puts Austen's novels in the context of eighteenth-century feminist ideas and of the Feminist Controversy of the turn of the eighteenth century. Kirkham links Austen with Mary Wollstonecraft and argues that her "adherence to the central convictions of Enlightenment feminism becomes more marked and more forceful" with the conclusion of *Pride and Prejudice* (92). Alison Sulloway also examines Austen indebtedness to earlier women writers, now focusing on Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, to paint a picture of Austen as a moderate feminist, "shaped eventually by the French Revolution and the feminist revolt of the 1790's" (xvi). Sulloway's *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (1989) finds in Austen a writer whose "struggle with feminine conditions that she could neither change nor wholeheartedly respect" enables her to create paradigms for the human predicament (xx). The marriages of Darcy and Elizabeth, Jane and Bingley that conclude *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrate that "Christian hope" and "infectious joy" should "triumph over her rational social cynicism" that recognizes the "bizarre compensatory equations built into every marriage" (217).

Claudia L. Johnson paints a more tempered portrait in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988), putting Austen in the context of popular fiction written by her contemporaries. Johnson argues that *Pride and Prejudice* legitimizes a "progressive yearning for pleasure" and a "conservative yearning for a strong, attentive, loving, and paradoxically perhaps, at times even submissive, authority" (73). She sees the novel as being a conservative, even conciliatory, text, even though the liberal concept of happiness is central to the novel. The conservative ending is also problematized when one considers that both Elizabeth and Lydia elude moral codes throughout the novel. Ultimately, however, Johnson reads Austen as neither conservative nor progressive, but as a writer legitimizing desire.

Deborah Kaplan's *Jane Austen among Women* (1992) also takes up issues of desire in thinking through Austen's relation to her contemporaries. Kaplan reads *Pride and Prejudice* as an attempt to revise the conventions of the eighteenth-century courtship novel. Conducting a review of feminist literary criticism, as did Brown before her, Kaplan notes that the criticism is heavily framed by the issues concerning feminist scholarship at the time these studies were published. Kaplan takes a biographical approach to her subject, noting that Austen's friends "encouraged a self whose voice is confident, imaginative, and critical, although the criticism is not aimed at male domination outside their own social group" (192). She notes a tension in *Pride and Prejudice* between a subversive voice and the urge to curb this voice in order to conform to patriarchal expectations. She sees Elizabeth's speech as an example of this tension, especially in her use of wit to challenge Darcy's power, and she labels it a "female voice." The female friendships in the novel are not used for didactic purposes nor do they form a political constituency; rather, they provide a context for the heroine's desire for a man.

Finally, in *Unbecoming Women* (1993), Susan Fraiman reads *Pride and Prejudice* through the history of the bildungsroman, or novel of development, bringing to the concept a poststructuralist questioning of linear and coherent development and an appreciation of a discontinuous self produced through clashing social determinisms. Fraiman discovers in Austen's novel a process of diminution in the heroine's stature and argues that the "female protagonist's humiliation, as much as it advances the romantic plot, also comments ironically on this plot and on marriage as a girl's developmental goal" (64). However, as Fraiman wittily observes, Elizabeth Bennet never "lapses into sheer Lydiacy."

This strong group of critics analyzing Austen's relationship to literary traditions was joined by another strong and influential voice—that of Nancy Armstrong, who uses Foucault's *History of Sexuality* to reassess the contribution of women and fiction to the making of modern culture. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Armstrong argues that Jane Austen's novels helped pave the way for the rise of the modern English middle class. Linking the production of a new female ideal to both the rise of the novel and the rise of the new middle classes in England, Armstrong insists that "political events cannot be understood apart from women's history, from the history of women's literature, or from changing representations of the household" (10). Modern culture "depends on a form of power that works through language . . . to constitute subjectivity," and it is novelists like Austen who reveal the power of the female domain granted by writing. Armstrong reads *Pride and Prejudice* as authorizing a particular form of domestic relations, which validates bourgeois authority and middle-class domination. She comments that "by relocating political authority at Pemberley, Darcy's ancestral home, and at considerable distance from the town where the Bennets' embarrassing relatives live . . . the novel maintains the continuity of traditional political authority while appearing to broaden its social base by granting Elizabeth authority of a strictly female kind"



(53). This is a power, indeed, to vouchsafe to women and the woman writer, but for many readers, it has been a dubious power that understands middle-class women no longer as the victims of oppression but as themselves instruments of oppression in emerging disciplinary regimes of power.

Other critics have taken up class issues in *Pride and Prejudice* from Marxist and materialist perspectives. Central articles include Edward Copeland's "The Economic Realities of Jane Austen's Day" (1993), David Holbrook's "What Was Mr. Darcy Worth?" (1984) and Edward J. Ahearn's "Radical Jane and the Other Emma" (1989), which sets out a Marxist argument related to Armstrong's Foucaultian one in recognizing Austen's pivotal role in establishing the dominance of the middle classes. Ahearn claims that *Pride and Prejudice*, along with *Madame Bovary*, frames the onset of the bourgeois order. He locates marriage in the novel as a problematic locus of women's happiness, in that it contains a conflict between romance and realism and a distrust of the language of passion. He writes: "*Pride and Prejudice* is scandalous in its presentation of marriage as the key to survival—survival in crude financial terms, in terms of the quality of life, in terms finally of life itself" (33). He sees Elizabeth's attraction to Pemberley as a sign of the problematic relationship between ownership and love. Pemberley is thus imbued with feelings of desire and loss and becomes a fetishized substitute for Darcy.

Class issues received prominent attention in critical analyses of *Pride and Prejudice* in the 1990s, a partial response to a burgeoning general interest in cultural studies. Alan Urquhart's "'Wit' and 'Impatience': The Elision of Class Difference in *Pride and Prejudice*" (1990–1991) looks at the way ethical issues obscure Elizabeth's rise in class and argues that the novel attempts unsuccessfully to "naturalize" virtue. Pointing to similar class motivations, Mona Scheuermann claims that Austen operates under a framework of "common sense": "Austen accepts the rules of her society, and her characters play out their stories within those rules, not against them" ("*Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice and Emma*," 200). Marriage is seen as a practical matter, not the result of a long-harbored fantasy. Elizabeth, for example, begins to appreciate Darcy through Pemberley, specifically by realizing that she could be mistress of it. This is not a mercenary consideration but a rational one, and regardless of Austen's irony toward it, marriage never "offends" class lines. Lisa Hopkins, in "Jane Austen and Money," takes a slightly different tack, arguing that in *Pride and Prejudice*, money becomes less tied to realism and more tied to romance, a shift in conception that Hopkins traces to the influence of Romanticism. Darcy's wealth, for instance, enables him to be cast in the role of a Prince Charming figure.

It is worth noting, too, in this context, that the emergence of cultural studies in the 1990s led to a new examination of capitalism, imperialism and colonialism in Jane Austen's novels. Oliver MacDonagh's *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (1991), reads Charlotte's marriage with Mr. Collins as a "career" alliance, one that culminates in Charlotte's satisfaction with the arrangement. Mar-

riage for pragmatic purposes is seen as obedience to social law. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* points to the way the English country house is built on West Indian slavery. His example is *Mansfield Park*, where Mr. Bartram's departure for the West Indies highlights the family's dependence on colonial ventures. Such approaches have not found an equally fertile ground in *Pride and Prejudice*, where fortunes are represented as made in the city of London, and Mr. Gardiner is condemned by Miss Bingley for living "within sight of his warehouses." Nonetheless, it is useful to be reminded of how the wealth invested in the country houses, so brilliantly depicted by Austen, depended on colonial expansion overseas and capitalist expansion at home.

The recent essays in *Jane Austen's Business: Her World and Her Profession* (1996), edited by Juliet McMaster and Bruce Stovel, also collectively tend to paint a more conservative Austen. Writing on *Pride and Prejudice*, McMaster focuses on rhetorical performance and referentiality as they relate to the speech of characters. The representations of Darcy and Elizabeth, McMaster argues, point to Austen's endorsement of plain speech and a relatively transparent referentiality.

If cultural studies and materialist approaches to *Pride and Prejudice*, which dominated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, seem more consistently to produce a conservative Jane Austen and to see only totalizing power relations at work, a few critics have turned to Austen's place within philosophical traditions to tease out, once again, a more subversive author. Maaja Stewart, "Wit and Knowledge of the World: *Pride and Prejudice*," negotiates between the conservative and subversive author. Stewart reads Elizabeth's wit and Darcy's judgment as a "disparity between the feeling of foregrounded immediate experience and the dominant judgment of value" (40). Elizabeth is helpless in the face of power structures, denoted by "patrilineal transmission of property, the social vulnerability of women not protected by men, and the social codes of propriety that deny women the ability to initiate action" (4). The reason she cannot properly balance sensibility and wit or wit and judgment is that these binaries are predicated on the power structures through which she is rendered helpless. Nonetheless, Stewart claims that through wit, language is used as an escape from oppressive situations by shifting one's perspective of these situations, an idea about language that Stewart draws from Locke and reads as potentially subversive because it opens up the fixed meanings of judgment. Claudia Brodsky Lacour reads Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* through Hegel's "Truth in Art." Arguing against a picture of the artist complicit in the perpetuation of power relations, Lacour claims that to read Austen that way is to efface the element of fictionality from fiction. She writes that "it is only at their most superficial level that narrative fictions may be equated simply with the stories they tell. The hybrid language and dynamic character of narrative call for more complicated forms of analysis" (600), one derived from Hegel's aesthetic theory, in which "art forms develop so as to 'disclose the truth in art': the particular as a prelude

to the universal" (602). For Lacour, Austen's originality lies not in inventing something new but rather in "representing the commonplace as it had never been comprehended before" (606).

Also in marked contrast to the spirit and tone of Marxist and Foucaultian studies of Austen is Gabriela Castellanos's *Laughter, War and Feminism: Elements of Carnival in Three of Jane Austen's Novels* (1994). Drawing on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Castellanos argues for a subversive Jane Austen, identifying as one ingredient of her fiction an iconoclastic laughter that is closer to popular gaiety than to the elitist ironic stance of many of her predecessors. She points to *Pride and Prejudice's* dialogic tendency, to the disruptive speech in the elegant, hypercorrect sentences. And she reads Elizabeth Bennet as a heroine who demonstrates the impossibility of unequivocal moral certainty just as *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates from beginning to end that "universally acknowledged truths" are suspect, "although they may be not only inescapable but necessary" (5).

New and recent feminist theoretical emphases on the body have led to readings of Austen that address more directly than do previous studies issues of eros and physical desire, and the body as a text through which to read that desire. In "The Fortunate Fall: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)," from his *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence* (1990), Robert Polhemus interprets *Pride and Prejudice* as a rewriting of Richardson's *Pamela*, especially as "falling in love transgresses orthodox moral categories" (31). Polhemus notes that the novel is largely about the mystery of female erotic power, pointing to Elizabeth's heightened sexual perception, in that she is aware exactly of how much or little a man attracts her. He also sees the father-daughter relationship in the novel as a sublimated incest, which shapes romantic love. Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy marks a successful transference of her incestual feelings. Mary Ann O'Farrell in her "Austen's Blush" (1994) and later book, *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (1996), reads the blush in *Pride and Prejudice* as part of an "erotics of embarrassment" in which "the sign of good manners" is converted by turns into "the sign of desire" (28).

Analyzing like Robert Polhemus familial bonds that find a healthy reinterpretation in marriage, Lori Lefkovitz examines "the Sage Author as Phallic Sister" in *Pride and Prejudice*. Lefkovitz cites Antigone and Ismene as the prototypes of relationships between sisters in nineteenth-century fiction; they anticipate the relationship between Elizabeth and Jane, where Elizabeth is portrayed as a sage, experienced reflector and exemplary sister, who also weakens the patriarchal position of the man she marries by providing Darcy's "sister with the model of sage discourse . . . that will free her of his paternal hold" (234). In another analysis of sibling relationships, Glenda A. Hudson's *Sibling Love and Incest in Jane Austen's Fiction* examines the intertwining of marital and sororal bonds in Austen's novel. Finally, Jean Ferguson Carr has turned her attention to the mother-daughter bond in *Pride and Prejudice*, noting that the similarities

between Elizabeth and Mrs. Bennet point to “contradictory proscriptions for women” (“The Polemics of Incomprehension: Mother and Daughter in *Pride and Prejudice*” [1991]).

Interest in the body and its experience of the world have also informed recent analyses of domestic interiors and women’s access to or confinement within particular spaces. Cynthia Wall’s “Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Acts” (1993) argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, domestic space was gendered into the masculine dining room and the feminine drawing room. She reads *Pride and Prejudice* as a novel in which “the central characters all work to define, protect, or resist the boundaries of inhabited space” (350). Elizabeth, in particular, pushes against these gendered boundaries, and even in the novel’s conclusion, although she returns to the drawing room, she still reserves the right to cross the boundaries of that space.

Even as I try to claim the return of a “retrenched” Austen in the dominant critical modes of the past decade, I have discovered sufficient critical diversity to put that claim in doubt. An emphasis on the conservative invites the subversive Austen to burst forth again. Unsurprisingly, in this light, one of the most recent articles on Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Susan Morrison’s “Of Woman Borne: Male Experience and Feminine Truth in Jane Austen’s Novels” (1994), returns to that old chestnut of Austen as social conservative or subversive feminist and explores her feminism within the framework of her “inadequate” representation of male characters, who are not as fully drawn as their female counterparts. For Morrison, men in the novels are relevant insofar as their experiences illuminate or confirm a “feminine” truth. Morrison writes, “Rather than viewing society from a militant feminist perspective or sentimentalizing the victimization of women in a way that adds a certain lustre to male domination and reinforces the masculine mystique, she succeeds (where others do not) in *making woman the narrative center*” (343).

What is astonishing and gratifying about surveying the critical terrain of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is that it reveals the extent to which the novel resists any final assessment and opens itself anew to the varied methodologies and perspectives that inform the critical and theoretical literature from year to year. We can look forward to new readings and analyses as the academy turns its attention to other questions and perspectives.

And it is not only the academic world that has found in *Pride and Prejudice* a fertile ground for its interests. The recent popularization of the novels by commercial television and major motion pictures reveals that Austen’s world, “this little bit (two inches wide) of Ivory” on which she works “with so fine a brush,” continues to speak eloquently to a broad audience, and it suggests a quintessential congruence between the concerns of her world and ours. In a novel like *Pride and Prejudice*, so beautifully presented on the Arts & Entertainment channel’s 1996 six-hour mini-series, that congruence evolves from Austen’s awareness of the alliance of money and love and the ways in which social relationships in flux must be mediated through the currency of manners. If we strip away the period settings

and costumes, we find that Austen's extraordinary moral clarity about the decency we owe to others and the dignity we owe to ourselves illuminates our own confusion and self-betrayal. The picture that emerges in the films and dramatizations is of a writer who is not distracted by whether something is legal in seeking to determine whether it is wrong or right. A writer who recognizes the seductions of capital and yet believes it possible to behave responsibly in the face of them. A writer who applauds self-command as a valuable index to character and who preserves the notion that some things in our life really *are* private. A writer who values what is, it appears, worth continuing to value.

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Fanny Price's "Customary"  
Subjectivity: Rereading the  
Individual in *Mansfield Park*  
Anne B. McGrail

Nobody, I believe, has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*.

—Lionel Trilling

*Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price has always gotten mixed reviews from readers. Jane Austen's mother thought she was "insipid" (Southam 68), and many have since added their voices to the chorus of disapproval. Tony Tanner calls her "weak and sickly . . . timid, silent, unassertive, shrinking and excessively vulnerable . . . [and] almost totally passive" (8). Nina Auerbach finds Fanny "silent" and "stubborn," a heroine who "appeals less than any of Austen's heroines" (104), and Joseph Litvak calls her "an ugly duckling" (23). These statements reflect readers' assumptions about characters in realist novels: that they should be beautiful, active and self-possessed individuals.

Since Ian Watt's influential study, *The Rise of the Novel*, readers have looked in novels for the possessive individual—that is, a man whose ownership of property in *himself* provides the model for ownership of his property and allows him to enter into market relations freely. For Watt, Daniel Defoe's famous character Robinson Crusoe exemplifies the self-reliance and accrual of possessions that distinguish individualism. Compared with Crusoe and other novelistic heroes and heroines, Fanny Price's inadequate self-possession seems like a sign of *Mansfield Park*'s failed design. What is the point of reading a novel that tells the story of a timid heroine who will not go after what she really wants? What is interesting about a young woman who seems to win love and a place in her adopted home only by default?

I suggest that we reread *Mansfield Park* with the understanding that not every-



one in the eighteenth century was an “individual” in the same way—even in a society increasingly dominated by the ideology of individualism. The lack of descriptive terms for subjects other than possessive individuals has caused many of us to read Fanny’s passivity and timidity as character flaws rather than as responses to the constitutive exclusions of individualism. Historians have argued that the possessive individual emerged out of a social and economic transformation in England. In C. B. Macpherson’s influential formulation, for example, precapitalist, customary status society, governed by tradition and customary law, was replaced by an evolving market capitalism, governed by commerce and a legal system developed to support it. Many of the rules and concepts governing customary culture—that is, the discourse of customary life—were not so much replaced by individualism as transferred into one of its constitutive realms—the domestic sphere. Rather than see Fanny as a failed individual, I propose we see her as a new kind of customary subject: a feminized and sentimentalized version of an all but disappearing customary culture. By understanding the features and conditions of this “customary subjectivity,” we may come to understand Fanny’s timidity, her weakness and her diffidence as one character’s expression of the historical conditions of individualism. Perhaps then we can shed our assumptions about what makes a heroine a likable individual.

Although many readers have accepted Macpherson’s classic formulation of the rise of commercial market society, it is clear that not everyone could be a possessive individual. For example, slaves did not own property in themselves, nor could they have possessions. And women in Fanny Price’s position did not own property, nor did they, like she, have much control over the material conditions of their lives. If we look closely at the role that property plays in Fanny’s narrative, we find that it differs significantly from that of “possessive individuals” such as Edmund or Sir Thomas. Rather than *own* property, Fanny makes *use* of other people’s property. This produces a different relation to the self and the world—that is, a different subjectivity. Fanny’s subjectivity more closely resembles precapitalist, customary society, in which possession was only one of several relations to property. This is the kind of society that Macpherson argues was replaced by possessive market society. Fanny Price’s character demonstrates how customary property relations could continue to operate in the home well after possessive market society emerged triumphant. Indeed, possessive individuals like Sir Thomas or Edmund depended on “customary” subjects like Fanny Price. Much of the literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries describes how a woman made a man’s house a “home” even when she did not own it. In using other individuals’ property while not owning it, customary subjects such as Fanny were subordinate to the possessive individual and dependent on his whims for property. This is crucial for understanding Fanny’s “irritating” frailty.

Domestic customary relations retained many of the features of precapitalist society: nonabsolute property relations, a system of obligations to owners and the rules of custom developed through consensus over time. When these features

moved into the home and were imbued with sentiment, they produced conflicting effects that caused pain for the new customary subject. For instance, nonabsolute property relations give Fanny access to (though not ownership of) Mansfield Park, but when others forget their responsibility to her, she is left without access to what she needs. Likewise, her living quarters function like common property; as with the "common" fields characteristic of customary culture, she has rights to use these rooms and what is in them, but so does the rest of her extended family.

These features of her access to property largely support her narrative, but they also can bring her narrative into crisis. As common space, her rooms can be entered by the inhabitants at Mansfield at any time, leaving her open to intrusion when she can least support it emotionally. Furthermore, while Fanny is more than happy to oblige those whose property she uses, competing obligations to different characters in the novel cause her to experience deep conflict. Finally, as her exile to Portsmouth demonstrates, in the home, the custom that permits her to live at Mansfield can be readily overturned by one man's decision, especially Sir Thomas's. This aspect of domestic customary life—the way in which customary "rights" are readily overturned by individuals on a whim—marks it as a subordinate aspect of a larger system: emergent capitalism. The customary constellation within the home that we witness in Fanny's narrative lacks the protection of consensus and tradition that had governed customary society; it reveals how inconsistent and strategic the possessive individual could be. Fanny's experience at Mansfield thus demonstrates that propertyless subjects bore the burden of individualism's contradictions in the new domestic sphere.

Before describing how Fanny's hesitancy and excessive sense of obligation reflect her customary narrative, I briefly discuss what I see as a discursive transformation of use rights from the field to the home. If we can read Fanny's timidity for what it reveals about the unrecognized conditions of the property relations between the sexes, we will be less annoyed with Fanny's character than intrigued by it.

## A HISTORY OF USE RIGHTS

In the eighteenth century, use rights allowed several people to use a common field for planting and perhaps for grazing a cow. As E. P. Thompson has discussed, customary society consisted of a set of nonabsolute property relations, a complex social web of obligations and responsibilities and custom itself, which governed these property relations. Use rights were "customary" in the sense that they evolved through local practice over time. Customary practice—in which several people have rights to use but not own or sell a piece of property—stood in marked contrast to absolute private property, the cornerstone of possessive individualism.

Sentiment played an important role in transforming use rights from public, legal rights to private, domestic rights. For more than a century prior to the

publication of Austen's novel, advocates of absolute private property sought to eradicate customary rights to property, to make all land private that had been used in common for generations; they did so by casting such rights into a sentimentalized past and figuring such rights as feminine. The local traditions and negotiations that sustained customary economies were impossible to maintain in a marketplace in which goods and services were exchangeable on the market. Outside the home, men competed in the market for profits and property. In the marketplace, the use of their property by others was seen as an undermining force constraining the free exchange of goods.

Customary culture and use rights thus seemed threatening in the commercial marketplace, but they were well suited for the domestic realm, where instead of subverting the possessive individual's absolute ownership, they could reflect his strength. Inside the bourgeois household, these nonabsolute property relations, or use rights, became part of a new cult of sentiment and domesticity. Precisely because women and dependents were seen as removed from the public economic realm of work, those same relations that had seemed threatening were instead reenvisioned as a complement to public commercial society; the division of the public-masculine realm from the private-feminine one was thus in part constructed through the distinction between home ownership and domestic use rights.

Within the home, men could share their property with their wives and dependents who were, in a sense, the very expression of his self-possession. Through recourse to a domestic "common" that was shared by everyone but owned only by the male head of household, these sentimentalized use "rights" and common property could coexist with absolute ownership. This was true of women and wives especially. Under the doctrine of coverture, the legal identity of the *feme covert* (or "covered woman") was subsumed into that of her husband. Women's use of property shared many of the features of the customary use rights that had preceded absolute ownership: they were nonabsolute, since a woman could sell property only rarely; they were subject to an explicit system of obligations and responsibilities (governed by law) as well as a more implicit system of affectional relations; and outside of specific properties given to a woman on her wedding day, her rights to property were "customary"—subject to tradition and negotiation. Because of the contingent nature of these use rights, they fell short of interfering with a possessive individual's "absolute" ownership. Thus, with recourse to the customs of an evolving domestic culture, a man's home could be both his castle and his common.

As an emergent site for sentiment, the home provided an extra-market space where property could circulate in a limited sense without the restrictions and competition of the marketplace. This juxtaposition of use rights to property with sentiment produced a new kind of gendered subject, one we can recognize in Fanny Price. Just as the values of individualism were epitomized in novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*, as Watt suggests, so did novels such as *Mansfield Park*

help to construct this new domestic subjectivity that could coexist with the individual.

To erode the legal validity of customary law was a crucial victory for advocates of absolute private property, the traces of which erosion we can observe in Fanny's difficulties in securing her use right. When use rights shifted from the discursive field of agriculture to that of domesticity and sentiment, they simultaneously underwent a shift from the status of rights, governed by the community, to that of privileges, decided on by individuals. Use rights invoked by commoners had always been a contested relation, but their status *as* rights offered some protection, protection absent in the home. A further constraint on the customary subject's exercise of use rights in the home was produced by their role as a sign of sentimental affection. As the material expression of domestic affection within the home, domestic use rights can be graciously accepted but not openly claimed—or at least not without meeting with social disapproval. The narrator's attitude toward Mrs. Norris's bold assertion of her use rights at Mansfield Park suggests that to bargain openly for others' property comes too close to the public bargaining of the marketplace. Their status as privileges and their sentimental quality thus make negotiations in the home for use rights a very tricky prospect.

## REREADING FANNY PRICE

Of course, no reader will see characters in *Mansfield Park* openly talk about Fanny's "use rights." As a pillar of domestic virtue defined against the acquisitiveness of Mary Crawford or Mrs. Norris, Fanny must behave as if she is pure feeling, utterly indifferent to material wealth. But time and again, the novel demonstrates that property is in fact essential to her narrative, and thus her subjectivity. This double bind between the prohibition against openly bargaining for property and her own need for use rights thus defines her not as a failed individual, but rather as a moderately successful customary subject. This is Fanny's achievement: to negotiate the narrow narrative space between property and propriety that the sentimental heroine could occupy within a dominant system that would exclude her.

Customary use rights had always been marginal aspects of the subsistence package of the dispossessed, and as we know, Fanny's dispossession is a motif in the novel from the start. A scene early in the novel helps us to see how her dispossession relates to her customary subjectivity at Mansfield. One day, her cousin Edmund finds Fanny "sitting crying on the attic stairs," unable to solve a conundrum brought about by her lack of property: her favorite brother William, who is back home in Portsmouth, will write to her only once she has written to him, but she owns no paper with which to write (13). Edmund comes to the rescue and furnishes her with paper, which makes Fanny happy and establishes him as her provider and a possessive individual. Fanny's lack of

property and her access to Edmund's mark her as a customary subject. It is significant that this first example of use rights involves pen and paper: Fanny literally writes her narrative with property not her own. Edmund's material support at this point is essential to her narrative, and "from this day Fanny grew more comfortable" (14).

Edmund gives Fanny property both as an expression of his attachment to her and also out of his consciousness of her different proprietary relation; he "perceive[s] her to be farther entitled to attention, by great sensibility of her situation, and great timidity" (14). In determining the conditions of her entitlement, he displays the confidence of the possessive individual. This confidence arises out of his ownership of the means of writing—itsself an extension of his father's patriarchal privilege of ownership. Fanny's relation to property, on the other hand, undergirds her diffidence: Fanny is entitled to Edmund's help only by never expecting anything at all. Dependence and her "affectionate heart" (14) qualify her for the use of his property. Many have read her profound disinheritance as a pathetic timidity when it is really the disavowal of expectation necessary for access to property.

In the competitive marketplace, such nonabsolute property relations had caused paranoia among property owners who saw the persistent assertion of customary use rights to their land as a threat to profit. The trace of this paranoia remains in the prohibition of openly claiming use rights; they are bestowed precisely in the absence of such assertion. Indeed, Fanny can hardly imagine that Edmund would share his property until he offers it. When Edmund has to "urge [Fanny's] claims" to the Bertrams' "kindness" (14), he demonstrates his own generous individualism even as he underscores her proper timidity. In a sense, to be a customary subject is momentarily to disavow agency altogether—to cry over a lack of paper, to throw one's hands up in a helpless gesture of dispossession. But this gesture then evokes the response from the possessive individual—and thus demonstrates the mutual construction of possession and dispossession. Such a dynamic oppresses Fanny and may also account for why readers find Fanny oppressive.

In displaying passivity over claims to property, Fanny shows herself a perfect conduct book heroine, but she also bears the cost of such perfection. For while Fanny's timidity entitles her to use rights, it also produces a double bind. When more than one person has a claim to the same property, Fanny can lose the competition. This double bind is a major effect of the juxtaposition of use rights with sentiment. Indeed, one of the most painful scenes in the novel revolves around Mary Crawford's triumphant entrance into equestrianism at Fanny's expense. After Fanny's old gray pony dies, Edmund boldly declares that she "must have a horse" (31). He is met with stiff opposition from Mrs. Norris, who is keen to distinguish Fanny from her cousins through property: she states that it would be "absolutely unnecessary, and even improper, that Fanny should have a regular lady's horse of her own in the style of her cousins" (33). So Edmund expresses his own subjectivity as a possessive individual by letting Fanny use

his property. He trades in his "useful roadhorse" for another, which he will let Fanny ride. Fanny is "then put in *almost* full possession of her" (32, my emphasis). Austen is careful to distinguish Edmund's ownership from Fanny's use here: "As the horse continued in name as well as fact, the property of Edmund, Mrs. Norris could tolerate its being for Fanny's use" (33).

But Fanny's use rights are put to the test when Mary Crawford arrives. Fanny's dispossession does prompt Edmund's generosity, but such dispossession is not the only prompt for the possessive individual's display of his property, as Edmund's flirtation with Mary demonstrates. Much of Fanny's suffering comes from the role that Edmund's desire for Mary plays in the distribution of property at Mansfield Park. Mary Crawford's entrance into Mansfield dramatizes the way that in the "customary" economy of the home, claims based on sexual desire compete with claims based on timidity, and timidity loses the struggle as a precondition of use rights. As a sentimental customary subject, Fanny must not openly compete for her use of the horse because competition is a market value. However, Mary's entrance produces an inevitable competition. So Fanny must paradoxically compete for property use with Mary Crawford while never acknowledging that such a competition exists at all.

When Edmund first asked Fanny to borrow the horse she had been using so that Mary Crawford could learn to ride it, Fanny "was almost overpowered with gratitude that he should be asking her leave for it" (59). At this point, Fanny displays the proper dispossession and gratitude that entitle her to use rights in the first place. But the same timidity that entitles her to use rights can also dispossess her of them. Edmund takes Fanny's gratitude as permission for four more days' riding with Mary Crawford, necessarily excluding Fanny. At this point, the horse becomes a multivalent figure for Edmund's possessive individualism: when Fanny rode it, it was a sign of Edmund's material generosity and sentimental attachment to her; when Mary rides it, it becomes a phallic extension of his desire for her.

Fanny becomes aware of the horse's different meanings as she watches Edmund's attentions shift to Mary—and along with them his property; she struggles "against discontent and envy for some days" (67). Standing on the lawn at Mansfield, she wistfully observes from a half-mile away as the "sounds of merriment" from the equestrian party drift up to her, betraying Edmund's preference for Mary's company: "she could not turn her eyes from the meadow, she could not help watching all that passed" (60). Fanny is compelled to watch her use rights pass to Mary, for she sees that at this moment, property and desire are fused. For Edmund, such fusion enhances his narrative; his possession of property extends the possibilities of sexual possession. But this fusion throws Fanny's narrative into crisis. To remain a sentimental heroine, she must pretend no competition exists, though her loss of use rights demonstrates otherwise. Her fixed, yearning gaze registers the lament of the customary subject in the face of the arbitrariness of domestic use rights.

Eventually, Edmund recognizes his neglect of Fanny: "He was ashamed to

think that for four days together she had not had the power of riding, and very seriously resolved, however unwilling to check the pleasure of Miss Crawford, that it should never happen again" (67). Edmund's recognition implicitly comments on Mary Crawford's behavior in contrast to Fanny's. Fanny's patient waiting and her dispossession are reasserted as prerequisites for use rights, while acquisitiveness is finally punished in Mary. Fanny's small triumph teaches *Mansfield Park's* readers an important lesson about women and property: the proper woman is *not* "possessive."

The competition and acquisitiveness that Mary Crawford displays were seen as an admirable quality in the male possessive individual, since it stood at the heart of capital's productive capacities. Bernard Mandeville's comment in *The Fable of the Bees* that private vice could promote public good became a commonplace of commercial society: appetite for consumption of goods made for a productive economy. But Austen's novel seems to say that this paradox does not hold true for women. Removed from the circulation of the marketplace, their private vice will stay private, since the division of labor that moved women further into domestic life and away from the commercial sphere short-circuits the process by which vice might be magically turned into "good." Thus, for all her beauty, wit and active capacity—her feminine "self-possession"—Mary's character is not one that Fanny can emulate to gain access to property. Mary's acquisitiveness and competitiveness—features of individualism—do not belong in the home.

As Fanny's adopted home, Mansfield Park becomes an emblem of her subjectivity. Just as horseback riding reveals the difference between the possessive individual and the customary subject, so does the estate itself reveal that difference. Critics such as Alistair Duckworth have seen the estate as an emblem of the possessive individual, but when we think of the estate as a set of relations rather than a thing, it becomes a more multivalent and even contradictory sign of subjectivity. As an emblem of individualism, Mansfield Park seems to project straightforwardly the confidence, independence and self-possession we see in Sir Thomas, for instance. But as an emblem of customary subjectivity, the estate supports a far more tenuous character, one subjected to constant negotiations within a home that brooks few conflicts, producing diffidence, dependency and dispossession.

Fanny's rooms at the margins of Mansfield Park provide a good example of the way in which the estate is as much a set of relations as a place. Fanny retires to the East room and white attic at the Mansfield estate to escape from Mrs. Norris's or her cousins' demands below stairs. Like the common cottager who uses wasteland that the lord of the manor does not want, Fanny uses these rooms at Mansfield because the Bertram family has no use for them. These rooms stand in marked contrast to Sir Thomas's study, and yet both spaces articulate relationships between property and personality. Fanny's rooms are like a common, while his *sanctum sanctorum* is like an enclosed plot, an emblem of his

final authority over Mansfield Park; the study confirms his status as a possessive individual and produces his confident authority.

Fanny's lack of confidence, on the other hand, is produced and reflected by the nonabsolute nature of her rights to property. Sir Thomas lets her use the rooms, the furnishings come from her cousins and gifts from everyone together produce a collection of property and thus a collection of sometimes competing obligations. As Fanny's rooms are common space—for her use but not really her haven—she suffers from this conditional quality. For example, during rehearsals for the play, when Fanny hopes to escape witnessing declarations of mutual affection between Mary and Edmund, she retreats to the East room. But the flirting couple follow her, and Fanny is "quite surprised" (151). When property and sentiment are merged in the home so much as to be indistinguishable—or at least recognized *only* as sentiment—the transgression of heart and hearth is one. Edmund and Mary do not recognize Fanny's right to privacy any more than they recognize her infatuation with Edmund.

Recovering from the invasion, Fanny "endeavors to show herself the mistress of the room by her civilities" (151), but Mrs. Norris's condition that "there never [be] a fire" in her room subverts her claims (136). When Fanny looks at the "bright bars of her empty grate with concern" (151), the cold fire reveals her dependence on and difference from Sir Thomas.

Cooing and flirting while Fanny painfully looks on, Mary and Edmund transform the East room into a second stage for the theatricals. Fanny's discomfort at witnessing the couple's courtship throws into relief one dilemma of the customary subject. She is not on her own terrain; hers is a privilege of use, and in a culture ruled through possession, she can only feign possession of space, but not command it. In this case, such lack of command over a space forces her to endure the theatrical re-creation of Mary and Edmund's desire—whether in Sir Thomas's study or in her own space. While the amateur "actors" usurp Sir Thomas's property only in his absence—they assume he is still in Antigua—Edmund and Mary do so in Fanny's presence, precisely because they do not recognize their entrance as transgressive. This scene so closely joins the inadequacy of Fanny's property rights to her apparent inadequacy as an object of desire that the two transgressions are expressed as one. At this moment, the tenuousness of her rights to property seems to express her subjectivity and sentiments: "Her spirits sank under the glow of theirs, and she felt herself becoming nearly nothing to both, to have any comfort in having been sought by either" (153). Materially dispossessed, she feels herself disappear, and she fades into the furniture.

For Henry Crawford, Rushworth and Sir Thomas, the estate is a space that bolsters their sense of ownership of their destinies. But a persistent sense of erosion and subtraction seems to pervade the customary subject's sense of self. If Fanny returns to her rooms to find solace there, she finds instead a threat, compromise or transgression, each linked to her tenuous hold on the space she



inhabits. These threats force her into temporary retreat. The possessive individual is defined by a forward movement, an ever-expanding progress, but the customary subject, in contrast, is characterized by this retreat. Because Fanny does not possess her rooms, their fluid boundaries cannot offer her an absolute haven from trespass.

Some critics are often puzzled by Fanny's refusal to act in the theatricals and see her response as a sign of her passivity. We might better understand her passivity as an expression of the customary subject's double bind. Because of the patchwork quality of her use rights, Fanny seems obliged to everyone at Mansfield Park. When her obligation to one character conflicts with that of another, she is thrown into a crisis.

Several of her obligations arise out of her furnishings for the East room, which were gleaned over time from the rest of the Mansfield house and which comprise Fanny's "nest of comforts." Like the space itself, the furnishings in the East room are a kind of cast-off collection of books, plants and gifts from which Fanny produces her chamber: "The room was most dear to her, and she would not have changed its furniture for the handsomest in the house" (137). Fanny's value for these objects is at odds with her cousins' acquisitiveness. Over time, Fanny's memories and sentiments are fused to these objects, constructing their meaning for her. Their wear and tear reflect and record Fanny's history as a customary subject:

Though what had originally been plain, had suffered the ill-usage of children—and its greatest elegancies and ornaments were a faded footstool of Julia's work, too ill done for the drawing-room, three transparencies, . . . a collection of family profiles thought unworthy of being anywhere else, over the mantle piece. (137)

Austen's description teaches readers how to look for a different—and for women, perhaps more valuable—economy of property within the home—one in which sentiment can imbue material goods with extra-market value. Fanny's sentimental attachment emphasizes the emotional qualities of objects and thus has made it difficult to recognize their status as property. Her subjectivity is reflected in her feelings for these worn-out "unworthy" objects, but also in the objects themselves. When she feels "agitated," she looks to them to "catch counsel" or to "inhale mental strength" from them (137). Such regard for threadbare objects is antithetical to the values of possessive individuals such as Rushworth, Maria's suitor, who seeks to display his ownership through destruction and rearrangement of his estate—what is his by patriarchal right of inheritance. The difference between Fanny's feelings for property and Rushworth's underscores the multivalence of the estate as emblem for different subjectivities. Fanny displays exemplary customary subjectivity by not being acquisitive: this cast-off collection and marginal living space are exactly where and what they should be, and her sense of self in the world is reflected in what is there.

The "props" in the East room support Fanny's refusal to act in the theatricals

by offering her a kind of comfort, but they also lead her to collapse into confusion over the relationship between property and proper behavior. Tom initiates the conflict when he asks Fanny to play the Cottager's Wife in *Lovers' Vows*: "You will be a very proper, little old woman," he glibly remarks, as if to help convince her (132). But she is terrified at the prospect of acting and also acutely aware of the trespass on Sir Thomas's property, and so she refuses. Making Tom's case for him, Mrs. Norris states: "I shall think her a very obstinate and ungrateful girl if she does not do what her aunts and cousins wish, very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is" (133). Mrs. Norris, who is herself an improper user of Sir Thomas's property, makes it clear that Fanny is obliged to her cousins and aunts because "of what she is"—that is, a dependent and a customary subject. But Mrs. Norris leaves out Fanny's other obligation to Sir Thomas; her own interests are best served by Fanny's going along with Tom and not the patriarch. This unspoken but conflicting obligation leads Fanny to retreat to her room.

But once there, rather than clarify her responsibility, the indeterminacy of relation between the room's objects and her debts of gratitude confuses Fanny. Juxtaposed, the room's furnishings and gifts from Tom and her cousins are indistinguishable in terms of property. None of these objects has the absolute quality of Sir Thomas's property—or the authority that seems to go with it. And Fanny is confused: Is what surrounds her in the East room "hers" by right of her legitimate claims to use? Is her own usefulness at Mansfield Park sufficient as repayment for the use of the East room and its properties? Or, as she looks around at the many gifts Tom has bestowed on her, does she "owe" him a debt of gratitude as a concession to one group of owners? And how can she avoid ignoring Sir Thomas wishes?

As she looked around her, the claims of her cousins to being obliged, were strengthened by the sign of present upon present that she had received from them and she grew bewildered as to the amount of debt which all those kind remembrances produced. (137)

Gifts, freely given, should not include a notion of a quantifiable debt; otherwise they would seem merely payment for future service. Thus Fanny is "bewildered as to the amount of the debt" that the objects around her seem to represent. Part of a fiscal economy, they might suggest certain action. Part of a sentimental economy, they mystify Fanny as to the proper course of action. This indebtedness is in direct conflict with her determination not to undermine the enclosure of Sir Thomas's study.

When she is finally worn down by the perseverance of the other actors in the play, resigning herself to the fact that "she must yield," it is in part due to this confused sense of property's link to propriety. Upon relenting, Fanny is "left to the tremors of a most palpitating heart" (155). Only Sir Thomas's early return from Antigua saves her from the double bind of trespassing on one individual's property to oblige another. This domestic contretemps helps us to see Fanny's

behavior, including her paralysis, as a response to a set of impossible choices emerging out of her status as an exemplary customary subject. She attempts to fulfill her obligations but finds that ultimately this is impossible.

But while the East room is thus both the scene of emotional turmoil and a crisis of conscience, it is Sir Thomas's entrance into her rooms to convince her to marry Henry Crawford that most powerfully draws the line between the ownership of the individual and the tenuous privileges of the customary subject.

Upon hearing that Fanny has turned down Henry Crawford's marriage proposal, Sir Thomas establishes himself as master and host of the East room: "Stopping short as he entered, [he] said, with much surprise, 'Why have you no fire to-day?' " (282). Sir Thomas is deeply shocked to find that *his* house is deficient: "Here must be some mistake. I understood that you had the use of this room by way of making you perfectly comfortable" (282). Discussion of his property and her propriety is closely linked. When Sir Thomas castigates her for her ingratitude to him in her refusal to marry according to his notions of prudence and propriety, he equates her submission to his wishes with proper gratitude: "You do not owe me the duty of a child. But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of ingratitude" (289). The implications of his statement raise the stakes of her gratitude. In his diatribe against her refusal, he makes it clear that he considers Fanny's future at least in part his to dispose of: "You have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you. You think only of yourself." (288)

But Fanny is steadfast in her refusal. As a sentimental heroine, she cannot act against her heart; she secretly loves Edmund and suspects Henry's motives. But for the customary subject, such devotion and discernment are luxuries she cannot afford. Her refusal dispossesses her even further: Sir Thomas exiles her from Mansfield to her birth home in Portsmouth. He intends to make her more conscious of the precariousness of her rights of use:

His prime motive in sending her away, had very little to do with the propriety of her seeing her parents again, and nothing at all with any idea of making her happy. He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he as certainly wished her to be heartily sick of [Portsmouth] before her visit ended. (334)

Sir Thomas's scheme implies that he intends to use Mansfield Park as property to convince her to submit: Portsmouth's inferiority will convince her of the material benefits of submission. The ease with which he is able to send her off upon the sole circumstance of her rebellion in the novel alerts us to the important differences between the possessive individual and the customary subject.

## CONCLUSION

Seeing modern possessive market society as in part constituted by customary values helps account for the way that women could survive economically while

being excluded from the constitutive features of commercial society—the contract, individual right and absolute property rights (see Pateman 47). *Mansfield Park*'s famously nasty aunt, Mrs. Norris, provides a good example of how fluid property relations operated for women within the home. After her husband dies, Mrs. Norris leaves the Mansfield living to which she had had a claim as the Reverend Norris's wife. She goes "first to the park and afterwards to a small house of Sir Thomas's in the village" (19). The fact that Mrs. Norris takes a perverse kind of pleasure in doing with less should not distract us from appreciating her reduced circumstances. Her situation demonstrates the fluidity of economic subjectivity for women: within the span of a lifetime, a woman could move from dependent to *femme sole* or independent woman. She might then become a *feme covert*, or "covered" woman, whose legal identity is subsumed into that of her husband, thus leaving her a legal nonentity. Sometimes, in widowhood, this same woman might become independent again. Even when "independent," however, as Susan Moler Okin has demonstrated, cultural restraints on women's mobility and agency complicated their "self-possession."

At the same time that Fanny's character challenges the monolithic model of possessive individualism, she also reveals the limitations of that challenge. Her timid and passive character—rejected by many of her readers as a failure to charm—registers the degree to which values of customary society were overridden by those of possessive market society. Once we see Fanny's timidity and passivity as aspects of her customary subjectivity, we are left with a heroine besieged, neglected and transgressed upon. Thus, while the novel seems to say that Fanny's exemplary behavior is rightly rewarded in the end—after all, Edmund does marry her and Sir Thomas recognizes her value—*Mansfield Park* also demonstrates the limitations of such a reward in a domestic customary culture always up for revision by the possessive individual.

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# The Critical History of *Mansfield Park*

*J. Pat Rogers*

*Mansfield Park* (*MP*) was slow to gain recognition as one of Jane Austen's most significant works. The novel was published in May 1814, and though the first edition sold out inside six months (*Letters* 261) it received no public reviews. The second edition was issued by John Murray in 1816 on a commission basis and did not earn enough to cover costs. Moreover, the book had been given a fairly cool reception by the Austen family, for what that is worth, and it must have been disappointing to its author to find that *MP* achieved less currency than the three other novels that appeared in her lifetime. This set a pattern that lasted for more than a hundred years. Victorian readers appear to have found the book less immediately engaging than the rest of the Austen canon, though a number of critics judged its morality worthy of praise. Scarcely two or three readings from the nineteenth century have anything more than historical interest. It is only in the twentieth century that *MP* has come to seem a central item in the oeuvre, and only in the past forty years that crucial debates on Austen (whether concerned with her ideas, technique or historical situation) have regularly focused on the novel.

For convenience, the story of evolving attitudes toward *MP* may be divided into four unequal parts: first, the immediate reception; second, the period between Austen's death in 1817 and 1900; third, the development of criticism in the first portion of the twentieth century, up to about 1970; and fourth, the recent reception history. As time goes on and critical coverage undergoes a huge increase, almost exponentially in the past three decades, it is necessary to proceed more and more selectively. This chapter has room only for the most influential and widely significant items, whether in books or articles. It does not attempt to list every item devoted to the novel, it omits general accounts that treat *MP* only briefly and it ignores unpublished dissertations.

The earliest recorded readers of the book were members of Austen's own family circle. She set down their views, as she was to do shortly afterward for *Emma*, around 1815 (see *Critical Heritage* 1:48–51). The general note is one of mild approval, with particular features marked out for praise but with a certain sense of letdown after the triumph of *Pride and Prejudice*, which had come out in 1813 (although some of the family may have known earlier versions many years before), and even after the less warmly received *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). While a few of the readers happily ranked *MP* above its predecessors, they were outnumbered by those who made adverse or limiting comparisons. Thus, Jane's mother is listed as having deposed, "Not liked it so well as P. & P.—Thought Fanny insipid.—Enjoyed M<sup>rs</sup> Norris." Her sister Cassandra "thought it quite as clever, tho' not so brilliant as P. & P.—Fond of Fanny. Delighted much in M<sup>rs</sup> Rushworth's stupidity." The division over Fanny's character here was to foreshadow much of the later critical debate into our own times. Mrs. Austen's views were directly contrary to those of Martha Lloyd, who "preferred [*MP*] altogether to either of the others." Male readers, including Jane's two eldest brothers, James and Edward, and her niece's husband, Benjamin Lefroy, singled out the Portsmouth episode for special commendation. In this they were joined by Benjamin's wife, Anna, and James Austen's wife, Mary. The most nakedly hostile reaction is that of Fanny Cage, the daughter of Edward's sister-in-law: she is recorded as giving the opinion, "did not much like it—not to be compared to P. & P.—nothing interesting in the Characters—Language poor. . . . Improved as it went on." Even Jane's much loved brother Charles did not like it "nearly so well as P. & P." and thought "it wanted Incident."

Those outside the immediate family were a little less willing to convey negative responses. The most pleasing verdict to the author may have been that of the Cookes; Mrs. Cooke was Jane's godmother, a cousin of Mrs. Austen, and a published novelist who lived in Surrey, where she was well known to Frances Burney. The record states, "M<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Cooke—very much pleased with it—particularly with the manner in which the Clergy are treated.—M<sup>r</sup> Cooke called it 'the most sensible Novel he had ever read.'—M<sup>rs</sup> Cooke wished for a good Matronly Character." The Cookes' daughter Mary also liked the book, although she felt that Fanny "ought to have been more determined on overcoming her own feelings, when she saw Edmund's attachment to Miss Crawford." It must have pleased Jane to find Rev. Samuel Cooke praise her treatment of the clergy, since this is the novel where the implications of a religious vocation are most thoroughly explored. Another glowing reference was supplied by the publisher of the first edition, Thomas Egerton, who praised the book "for it's Morality, & for being so equal a Composition.—No weak Parts." Others remarked that it avoided the vulgarity found in so many contemporary novels, and stressed the ability of the writer to take readers right into the family scene, so that they felt they had personally witnessed the events.

The Austen correspondence also preserves a few comments by family mem-

bers. In March 1814 Jane told Cassandra of the reactions of their brother Henry, as he read through the work and came to admire it more and more as he progressed. There is some adventitious interest here too, since Henry was by now well advanced in his naval career and could judge the depiction of William Price's struggle for promotion with considerable firsthand knowledge. More indicative of general attitudes is a comment by Reverend James Stanier Clarke, librarian to the prince regent, who had indicated to Jane that she might dedicate her next work, *Emma*, to his master. Her novels, "and in particular *Mansfield Park*," he wrote, "reflect the highest honour on your Genius & your Principles." The prince, he added, had "read & admired" all of her works. Austen replied cautiously, rejecting the suggestions for a possible subject which Clarke had superfluously offered, and stating that she was "very strongly haunted by the idea that to those Readers who have preferred P&P. [*Emma*] will appear inferior in Wit, & to those who have preferred MP. very inferior in good Sense" (*Letters* 296, 306). This is the clearest indication we ever get of how Austen perceived the differential reaction to these two books.

There was only one substantial discussion of Austen's fiction in her lifetime, and it is apt to our discussion that this did not mention *MP* at all. This was the famous review of *Emma* that Walter Scott wrote for the *Quarterly Review* in 1816 (see *Critical Heritage* 1: 58–69). Scott was at the pinnacle of his fame and achievement, with the earliest and greatest of his series of *Waverley* novels already under way. Until lately it has been common to deplore the limitations of Scott's essay, which adopts what can seem today a patronizing tone and a narrow sense of Austen's achievement. In recent years commentators have given Scott more credit for recognizing the merits of one who was almost an unknown writer, and for specifying some of her qualities as an artist of local and deliberately restricted focus. It remains a pity that Scott left *MP* totally out of account. Austen herself was certainly conscious of the lacuna. On April 1, 1816, she wrote to John Murray, publisher of the *Quarterly*, who had forwarded the review to her, "The Authoress of *Emma* has no reason I think to complain of her treatment in it—except in the total omission of *Mansfield Park*.—I cannot but be sorry that so clever a Man as the Reviewer of *Emma*, should consider it as unworthy of being noticed" (*Letters* 313). It is fair to conclude that Austen ranked *MP* highly enough among her works to believe that it should merit treatment on an equal footing with the other three novels, which had now reached print. If that is what she desired, her hopes were in vain. *MP* would be relegated to the lower levels of the pantheon for many years to come.

Notoriously, the study of Jane Austen proceeded slowly in the nineteenth century, and this is even truer of critical understanding than it is of the recovery of biographic facts. The impatience of Carlyle and Charlotte Brontë, the weary scorn of Mark Twain, the silence of most major writers and scholars—these have been rehearsed and sometimes accounted for (see, for example, Watt 5–7). But there is an even more conspicuous silence with regard to *MP*. Broadly speaking, the palm was awarded in this period to *Pride and Prejudice*, with the



place of *proxime accessit* going to *Emma*. This ranking order is confirmed by the number of editions on each side of the Atlantic, with *MP* still lagging behind *Sense and Sensibility* in fourth place (Page, "Orders" 96). It is not just that little space is given over to detailed analysis of *MP*. Rather, we sense in overall descriptions of Austen's work that the book was seen as anomalous, and critical generalizations tend to apply more obviously to what were regarded as more central (i.e., typical, but also salient) novels.

This is least true, fortunately, in the case of the most prominent studies. The first well-known essay in appreciation is that of Richard Whately, written by the future archbishop at the age of thirty-four in 1821. Not surprisingly, Whately finds it worth stating first that *MP* "contains some of Miss Austin's [*sic*] best moral lessons, as well as her most humorous descriptions." But although Whately sees the novel as serious and instructive, he has enough idea of Austen's artistry to recognize that we need to attend to the small details of ordering and managing the story—what critics a few decades later would call her "workmanship." In addition, Whately praises Austen for her psychological realism, and in particular for being willing to show women characters, including the heroines, as subject to inconstancy, prejudice and caprice. This may have been surprising in 1821, but it would have been scarcely less so in the high Victorian era, if we put aside a very few exceptional cases (notably in George Eliot). Regrettably, Whately had no immediate successor and no observable influence on the course of critical history. His assessment of Austen (*Critical Heritage* 87–105) is often regarded as the place where serious criticism begins, and this could be said in a narrower frame of his remarks on *MP*.

For the rest, we find little that is worthy of preservation in the early decades, unless we count the delightful (and not *altogether* imperceptive) comment by a certain Lady Frampton, "It is not much of a novel, more a history of a family party in the country" (quoted in *Critical Heritage* 1:12). The most famous mid-century discussion is probably that of G. H. Lewes, which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1859, but this is short on specifics. Although Lewes recommends new readers to start with *Pride and Prejudice* or *MP*, he relies on rather flaccid terms of approval: "Aunt Norris and Lady Bertram are perfect . . . the scenes at Portsmouth . . . are wonderfully truthful and vivid. The private theatricals, too, are very amusing; and the day spent at the Rushworth's is a masterpiece of art" (*Critical Heritage* 1:166). Up to a point, of course, this is true, and it needed to be said in the prevailing climate of vague appreciation, but it is bound to appear jejune in the light of later analyses of these same features in the book.

A reversion to the older attitudes can be seen in an essay that appeared in *Blackwood's* a decade later. This was the work of the novelist Margaret Oliphant, and in most respects it provides a wider range of convincing detail than its predecessors to sustain a high valuation of the novels. However, Oliphant concentrates on the three canonical texts (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*) and devotes very little space to the other three mature novels.

In her view *MP* is “the least striking in the whole series,” and though full of detached scenes and sentences “quite wonderful in their power of description,” the book is “dull and lengthy as a whole, and not agreeable” (*Critical Heritage* 1: 222). These strictures are hard to understand today, but it is the use of the phrase “not agreeable” that may astonish us most of all. Perhaps it is the very moral complexity we value, the very cold-eyed clarity and refusal to blink, the very willingness to enter into a world of muddy motives and repressed urges—it is perhaps these things that Oliphant would like to turn away from, as inappropriate, to an “agreeable” fiction of the day. (Yet we must pause before we leap to this conclusion, since Oliphant’s own novels do not provide unmitigated charm or cheerfulness.)

Characterized by Brian Southam as “one of the high points in the understanding of Jane Austen” (*Critical Heritage* 1:241), an essay by Richard Simpson in the *North British Review* in 1870 has acquired considerable posthumous repute. It has been seen as the first revelation of Austen as realist, skeptic, antiromantic, puncturer of pretension and artifice, ironic and detached commentator. The essay took the form of a review of James Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir*, the first significant contribution to Austen biography, and it is clear that Simpson has absorbed details of the life. It is this that enables him to see her as a careful artist, contriving her fictions with an almost Flaubertian dedication to the craft. He even remarks that Austen “was patient as Penelope at her web, unpicking at night much that she had laboriously stitched in the day” (*Critical Heritage* 1: 253), a simile drawn as much from contemporary female avocations as from mythology, but surely apt enough in this context.

Simpson allots only a few sentences to *MP* directly, but they fill out his general estimate of the author’s intentions. *MP* is “another attempt to show that true love is that which is founded on esteem, not on passion, and that passion should rather be the crown of the edifice than its foundation” (*Critical Heritage* 1:255). The insight cannot be supported by much close textual reasoning, granted the context in which Simpson was working. If he had been capable of such a thing, the readers of the *North British Review* would not have readily followed him through thickets of analysis. Austen may have been lucky to have the attention of a Simpson. The acknowledged leaders of criticism in this era, figures such as Leslie Stephen or John Morley, Matthew Arnold or Walter Bagehot, could have said very little more. Waiting in the wings, of course, was the young lion Henry James, and it was the sensibility of such writers that was gradually to transform our sense of *MP*.

As it happens, James made little explicit comment on *MP* or any of the other individual novels. His contribution lay rather in *obiter dicta* and brief general commendations. He was prepared to see Austen as a major talent who deserved a prominent place in the history of the novel, but he confined himself to vague terms of approbation, and he regretted the flood of Janeite industry and commercial spinoffs that came in the wake of Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir*. His younger contemporaries, such as Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster,

were more forthright. Woolf actually assumed that “of all writers Jane Austen is the one, so we should have thought, who had the least cause to complain of her critics,” since her chief admirers had been fellow novelists, as she noted in a review that first appeared in 1920. However, Woolf continues, this was too sanguine an assumption, because a succession of commentators had engaged in nitpicking reservations about such matters as Austen’s ability to portray the life of the higher gentry. These “geese” need to have their necks wrung by more sympathetic students of her art, or at the least to look carefully into the novels rather than engage in biographic gossip (Woolf, *Essays* 3:268–71). In a better-known essay, written in 1923, Woolf paid special attention to *Persuasion*, which was beginning to emerge from the shadows, but she also emphasizes “the depth, the beauty, the complexity” of the scenes on which Mary Crawford figures in *MP*. More generally, Woolf singles out for praise Austen’s skill as expressed in her ruthless demolition of fools and prigs: “Nothing remains of Julia and Maria Bertram when she has done with them; Lady Bertram is left ‘sitting and calling to Pug and trying to keep him from the flower-beds’ eternally. A divine justice is meted out.” Had she lived longer, the critic surmises, Austen would have deepened her art. Her satire, “while it played less incessantly, would have been stringent and severe. She would have been the forerunner of Henry James and Proust” (Woolf, *Common Reader* 140, 141, 143). This does not seem a very surprising reflection today, but it involves taking Austen at a level of seriousness that hardly existed fifty years earlier and was necessary before *MP* could attain a higher place in the canon.

This new and more astringent view of the writer is shared to a certain degree by Woolf’s friend and fellow novelist E. M. Forster. The evidence comes partly from three reviews collected in *Abinger Harvest* (1936), in which Forster declared himself a Janeite (145). It derives more significantly from scattered passages on Austen in Forster’s widely read study, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). He stressed the fullness of Austen’s rendition of the world, the depth of her characterization and the realism of her comic focus on domestic life. Like Woolf, he was struck by Lady Bertram, whom he termed a “flat” character who was yet “capable of rotundity” (Forster, *Aspects* 51). *MP* was an indirect beneficiary of this line of thinking, since it elevated Austen’s artistic qualities above mere entertainment (where other novels would always appear to have more immediate claims) and emphasized the maturity of her vision.

The most prominent contribution to Austen studies in this phase, outside those of the Bloomsbury group, is that of the Shakespearean scholar A. C. Bradley, with a lecture published in 1911. He was among the first to detect the strong impact of mainstream eighteenth-century writing on Austen and identified her debt to Samuel Johnson more clearly than any previous commentator. In some ways *MP* is the most Johnsonian of Austen’s books, and this was an important act in clearing the way for reassessment. Rather livelier is Reginald Farrer’s essay in the *Quarterly Review* (then still surviving, a century after Walter Scott’s pioneering discussion), which does justice to all of the six main novels then

accessible to readers. It is astonishing to say so, but scarcely any earlier critic had even taken the trouble to investigate every one of the novels, allotting reasonably fair shares of the account to each.

Although professionalized study of fiction was on the increase between the two world wars, it is customary to leap from the Woolf/Forster/Bradley era to the innovative work of Mary Lascelles and D. W. Harding at the outset of World War II. The book by Lascelles (1939) is universally regarded as the beginning of modern academic study, and it retains some currency even after the explosion of more sophisticated critical and theoretical approaches. By this date, too, the journal *Scrutiny* was well launched on its polemical ways. As well as some controversial articles by Q. D. Leavis on *Sense and Sensibility*, the magazine carried D. W. Harding's famous essay, "Regulated Hatred" (1940), which initiated the so-called subversive readings of Austen. More to our purpose, we finally reach a discussion in which *MP* is not just present in casual and contingent ways, but central to the entire argument. For Harding, *MP* "pays tribute to the virtuous fundamentals" of Austen's upbringing; it displays a kind of priggishness that is "the inevitable result of the curiously abortive attempt at humility that the novel represents." The book can be seen as a "*reductio ad absurdum* of the Cinderella theme," and (an idea that Harding seems to have been the first to entertain seriously, in advance of many recent critics) the ending is "ironically perfunctory" (Watt 175–76). For Harding, a professor of psychology, the elements of fantasy, role playing and self-definition achieve a new prominence in the narratives, which are granted an almost mythlike status. *MP* stands out because it seeks to endorse the traditional pieties that elsewhere Austen prefers to mock. In this sense Harding anticipates Amis and others in the subsequent phases, who regard *MP* as a betrayal of the author's habitual liberality of outlook.

Nothing as cogent appeared for many years to come. Harding's heir in some respects was Marvin Mudrick, whose book (1952) is distinguished as the most important American contribution to this date—an astounding fact when we consider how recent work has come to be dominated by the American academy. It is also the first study that is thoroughly academic, in the sense that its concerns are wholly textual (broadly, in the vein of New Criticism) and its methods dependent on a rigorous analytic framework largely divorced from historical contextualization. The method works best, perhaps, on *Pride and Prejudice*, although there is a virtuoso analysis of *Northanger Abbey*, the last of the "main" novels to enter routine critical discussion. Mudrick's key concept is irony, and although *MP* is not destitute of that quality, he seems less at ease with the element of evangelical orthodoxy and the avoidance (or at least scaling down) of detached authorial observation.

Another of the foundation documents, so far as contemporary criticism goes, was to appear in 1955. This was the eloquent and persuasive essay by Lionel Trilling, which relates *MP* to a broader moral discourse including Wordsworth, George Eliot, Dickens and James (but also Hegel and Nietzsche). It is almost

as though Austen had been belatedly admitted to the great tradition of the English novel—where she belonged, according to F. R. Leavis, but without any supporting argument in the latter’s account of that tradition. Trilling’s striking pronouncement, to the effect that *MP* is “a great novel, its greatness being commensurate with its power to offend” (Watt 127), is developed in suggestive ways. “There is scarcely one of our modern pieties that it does not offend,” Trilling declares, perhaps overestimating the centrality of the liberal humanist viewpoint from which he spoke. “Nobody, I believe, has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*” (128), he continues. This is a proposition that could be easily refuted, starting from the responses of some of Jane’s own family circle, such as Cassandra, Martha Lloyd and Benjamin Lefroy. However, Trilling makes a powerful case for seeing the book as undertaking something beyond the relatively easy charm of *Pride and Prejudice*: it is “an effort to encompass the grace of uncertainty and difficulty” (135). *Mansfield Park*, despite the crisis in authority it suffers, stands for a serious alternative to fashionable London and society mores. It is a “Great Good Place” where morality is elevated into a code of civilized living and can oppose the superficial attractions of the world outside. Flatly paraphrased like this, Trilling’s argument may appear implausible, but in its full articulation, it remains one of the most challenging readings of *MP* in existence.

One of the most discussed items in the entire critical history appeared shortly afterward. On the surface, it is a little hard to see why an essay by Kingsley Amis, which first appeared in the weekly magazine *The Spectator* in 1957, should have attracted such notice. It is very short, contains little by way of textual documentation and eschews many of the complexities that academic criticism was beginning to discern in *MP* by this time. We might suspect it is the notoriety of Amis as novelist and cultural critic that helped to give the article prominence—that, and the fact that Amis used this piece to provide the title of his first collection of literary essays, in which it was reprinted. The explanation may be a little more interesting. Amis seems to have been the first writer to express in a brief and effective way what was a generally held view: that Austen had somehow gone back on herself in *MP*. He takes a dim view of the hero and heroine: Fanny and Edmund are “both morally detestable” and social disasters to boot: “to invite Mr and Mrs Edmund Bertram round for the evening would not be lightly undertaken.” Fanny’s feelings are “made odious by a self-regard utterly unredeemed by any humour—is this still Jane Austen?” In his final question Amis generalizes this critique: “What became of that Jane Austen (if she ever existed) who set out bravely to correct conventional notions of the desirable and virtuous? From being their critic (if she ever was) she became their slave” (Watt 142–44). Most readers would not endorse all of this, and the parenthetic reservations seem unearned. But the essay continues to challenge us, not least because it is, unlike most contemporary discussion, funny, beautifully written and astringent—rather Austen-like, in fact.

The Austen industry began to flourish in the 1960s, with several good mon-

ographs devoted to particular topical or thematic approaches. Those that contain significant sections on *MP* include Babb, on dialogue; Litz, on form and feeling; and Bradbrook and Moler, on literary allusion and inheritance. The decade also saw the rise of multiauthored collections of criticism, which is now one of the major forms of Austen study. One of the first was a 1968 volume, Southam's *Essays*, which continues to hold some interest. It contains extensive coverage of *MP*, including an essay by Denis Donoghue and an important contribution by Tony Tanner. This started life as the introduction to the Penguin edition of *MP* in 1966, and also formed the basis for a chapter in Tanner's *Jane Austen* (1986). In its Penguin guise it was probably the most frequently cited discussion of the novel, in Britain especially, for two decades, not least in student papers. Its mode is partly sixties-ish psychological and sociological placing, partly historical contextualization and partly textual analysis. Tanner offers a dark version of Austen: "By the time of *Mansfield Park* much of the lightness and brightness has gone out of the world and, although Jane Austen's incomparable comic sense is as alive as ever, she now seems more aware of the real evils and real sufferings inextricably involved in life in society" (33). This emphasis on the oppressive nature of society struck many chords for readers over the next generation, and Tanner's is among the most effective attempts to provide a Jane Austen fit for the modern world.

The proliferation of paperback editions of Austen novels, such as the Penguin series to which Tanner contributed, was an example of the expansion of the subject. Another was the appearance of a full-length study devoted solely to *MP*: Fleischman's "reading" published in 1967. Collections of critical articles intended for student use also made their appearance, though probably the most distinguished was one of the earliest, edited by Ian Watt (1963). These developments were to grow ever more apparent in succeeding years.

From 1970 or thereabouts, the pace of scholarly work increases, and a number of changes can be detected in the nature of this work. There is a higher degree of specialization, with major contributions from critics who have tended to make Austen their main focus (whereas earlier we more typically encounter writers such as Trilling, Tanner, Donoghue and Amis, whose interests ranged much more widely). Second, the center of the subject moves unmistakably to the United States, despite some important contributions from Britain, Australia and elsewhere. A third factor is the gradual importation of theoretical and post-structuralist approaches, although Austen has failed to become the darling of postmodernism. Lastly, there has been a gradual shift from the earlier book-by-book approach to topically organized studies. It is true that some works on Austen had always adopted the second approach (that of Lascelles, for example), and true also that a number of recent works preserve the method of following issues through the individual novels chapter by chapter. However, the broad tendency is clear, and this means that a number of the best recent discussions of *MP* occur in dispersed sections of a given monograph.

The first really important study in this period came with Alastair M. Duck-

worth's *The Improvement of the Estate* (1971). This could be defined as the only monograph up to that date in which *MP* served as the prime and essential basis of a general case about Jane Austen. In fact, the book is organized into chapters on the seven main novels (by now, *Sanditon* had claimed admission to the central group). But it is unusual insofar as the chronological sequence is disrupted so that *MP* occupies the initial position. Duckworth starts from issues connected with landscape gardening and rural estate management, but he uncovers large ideological concerns in *MP* under this rubric, which are then traced as they are differently expressed in the other novels. Key notions are those of stability and legacy: the estate becomes "a metonym of an inherited culture endangered by forces from within and from without" (Duckworth 71). The ideological loyalties discerned are essentially conservative, though not necessarily reactionary. This has brought criticism from those who wish to discover a more radical and unsettling "thinker" within Austen's authorial rhetoric, but Duckworth has defended his findings in the introduction to a new paperback edition of his monograph (1994). The jury is still out on these issues, but even those who take a different line from Duckworth have been forced to acknowledge the scope of his work, as well as the grace of its writing and the civility of its tone.

As work on Austen proliferated, new areas opened up for study, with benefits for our understanding of *MP*. Detailed inquiries into Austen's language begin with works by Phillips (1970) and Page (1972); the interface between literary and linguistic concerns can be seen in works such as Tave (1973) and Stokes (1991). A topic that would scarcely have been considered fifty years ago, but now seems in the mainstream of contemporary criticism, is Wiltshire's survey of Austen in relation to medical and health issues. This considers some predictable topics (Fanny's physical weakness, for example, a topic that had engaged Trilling), but also less obvious themes, such as the ritual of coming out in society and the phenomenon of blushing. Wiltshire concludes that "the physical and emotional aspects of [Fanny's] being are seen as inextricably interrelated" (108). Then again, as a didactic novel, *MP* has been seen as connected to both eighteenth-century traditions such as advice manuals and nineteenth-century moral thought. Aspects of its ethical content have been discussed in a longer historical context by Fergus, Poovey and Yeazell among others, although *MP* is not a primary focus of the first two of these books. The burgeoning list of multiauthored volumes has produced several penetrating studies, including the provocative study of Austen's "dangerous charm" by Nina Auerbach (in Todd 208–23, which also contains an essay on feminist irony by Kirkham). A conspicuous recent example of this mode of scholarship—disregarding the informative but essentially encyclopedic manner of Grey's *Jane Austen Companion*—is the *Cambridge Companion*, which contains a section devoted to *MP* by John Wiltshire (59–66), stressing the innovative and creative use of physical settings in the novel.

Some works with an apparently specialized approach have been able to open up matters of general debate among readers of *MP*. For example, Oliver

MacDonagh follows Duckworth in placing *MP* at the head of his book, which relates each of the novels to particular aspects of social history. In the case of *MP*, this is the institution of religion, and the author is able to show how the text of *MP* is shot through with references to matters under vigorous theological (or at least ecclesiastical) debate in 1813. The chapter on *MP* in the study of Austen and memory by Jocelyn Harris (1989) contains an important description of the hidden presence of Richardson's *Grandison* in the later novel. This is perhaps the most convincing body of literary allusion that Harris discovers for any of the novels. Allusiveness had earlier been treated by Mohler and, in relation to other literary devices, by Lloyd Brown. Form at a larger level is considered by Julia Prewitt Brown and David Monaghan among others. Thompson explores aspects of economic and social reality as expressed in the idiom of the novels, with proposals like that of Henry Crawford to Fanny being a clue to Austen's sense of changing attitudes in the world around her. An apparently obvious topic, which has not been treated very fully, that of love in the novel, is most effectively handled by Juliet McMaster (1978).

It is in a slightly different area that the culture wars have largely been fought in the past twenty years. It would be better perhaps to say different areas, since overlapping concerns come into play. The debate concerns Austen's ideological loyalties—their nature as expressed in fiction rather than what can be presumed biographically. In one direction this extends to an evaluation of the novelist in relation to divisive political issues of her time. At the level of hard politics, this is best seen in the study by Roberts (1979) of Austen in the context of the French Revolution and the Revolutionary War. The critic's effort to see considerable awareness of these matters on the part of Austen works better on some texts than others, and *MP* is not the easiest of the books to fit into this framework. Others have sought to insert Austen into debates about manners and morality, and have confronted her work with every kind of contemporary document from Malthus to Hannah More. Some of these intellectual concerns are grouped together in another short book devoted wholly to *MP*, that of Isobel Armstrong (1988), which sees Austen as exploring a number of problematics, including debt and poverty. The shadow of Wordsworth lies behind much of the text of the novels.

It was Marilyn Butler who first enunciated Austen's location within the "war of ideas," and her treatment of this subject in 1975 has remained at the heart of this debate. (See also the new introduction by Butler to the paperback edition, 1987, refining her view of a species of Tory feminism to be found in Austen.) The chapter on *MP* in the original book describes this as "the most visibly ideological" of Austen's novels (Butler 219). However, unlike many recent commentators, Butler finds the implicit ideology to be conservative and anti-Jacobite. She aligns Austen with Burke in resisting the radical fervors of the revolutionary era and the untrammelled individualism that some of her contemporaries espoused. If we believe with Butler that Austen considered spontaneity dangerous and came to adopt an evangelical rigor in her moral outlook, then *MP* is ob-



viously a key document. Hence its centrality to the discussion which Butler's book has inspired.

A significant challenge was mounted by Margaret Kirkham in a book on Austen in relation to the feminism of her day (1983). The general thesis of this work is that "Austen's subject-matter is the central subject-matter of rational or Enlightenment feminisms and that her viewpoint on the moral nature and status of women, female education, marriage, authority and the family . . . is strikingly similar to that shown by Mary Wollstonecraft" (xi). Kirkham argues that *MP* does not lack irony, as critics such as Trilling and Amis had supposed, and that Fanny Price should be seen in relation to Rousseauesque heroines such as Sophie in *Emile*, as well as the "exemplary young women of the more sentimental kind of conduct-book" (101). By reading the novel against other rationalist and antisentimental texts, Kirkham reaches the view that *MP*, "far from being the work of conservative quietism that much twentieth-century criticism has turned it into, embodies Jane Austen's most ambitious and radical criticism of contemporary prejudice and in literature" (119). The novel is "about a benevolent patriarch who does not know that the rightful place of a woman is that of a 'partner in life' who ought to share in domestic government. It carries a further implication about 'government' in a wider sense" (120). The sting is in the tail here: many who would assent to the proposition regarding women's role in the management of the home would not so readily accept that Austen wishes to comment on political authority more widely. Kirkham was one of the increasing number of critics to take up the issue of slavery and suggest that Sir Thomas's role as a slave owner in Antigua raises questions about the comparable lack of liberty and equality that women in England faced. A slightly different version of this chapter appeared in Todd (231–47), with the conclusion that *MP* is not so much a piece of pure feminist propaganda as "a great comic novel, regulated by the sane laughter of an impish, rationalist feminist" (246).

It was natural that feminist criticism should be drawn toward Austen's work and that it should find new and unsuspected meanings in what had been usually read as socially unprogressive texts. No careful reader of the novels had ever doubted that Austen was acutely interested in women's lives and in the pressures brought to bear on them by the culture of the day. Equally, those who had looked attentively into her letters had recognized that she drew on a network of female relationships, friendships and alliances to resist some of the pompous rigidities of patriarchal society. However, it is only under the aegis of modern feminism that criticism has begun to strike out further, and to detect stronger expressions of resistance, which are sometimes seen to be fed by anger, resentment and bitterness—far from the passive acceptance of women's lot that was once assumed to be in place. Representative in various ways are Sulloway in 1989 and Kaplan in 1992: in particular, Kaplan investigates the ideology of domesticity in Austen's England and explores the network of female relationships that created an authentic "women's culture" unto which the novelist could tap. Unusually these days, Kaplan's procedure means that she gives more atten-

tion to *Pride and Prejudice*, not to mention *The Watsons* and *Lady Susan*, than to *MP*. Nonetheless, her view is that Austen was able to write as she did, and depart from the constraints of a “domestic ideal of womanhood,” because she could move from the concerns of the surrounding gentry to a social circle of women who supported her literary endeavors. This implies a degree of detachment from established values and patriarchal discourse, which makes a feminist reading of *MP* more cogent.

The most important of the new work, in moving from feminist concerns to radical rereading of the text, is probably that of Claudia Johnson (1988); it is also among the most interesting of the studies that implicitly provide an answer to Butler. In Johnson’s discussion (94–120), we are shown authority failing (as in the case of Sir Thomas) and Burkean positives challenged, while *MP* “never permits paternalistic discourse completely to conceal or to mystify ugly facts about power” (102). Like other recent critics, Johnson concludes that the novel is not as “placid” as it has often been thought. Her powerfully written chapter on *MP* represents an important strand in contemporary writing, which treats the “cozy” language of the ending as unsupported by the main fabric of the book. It should be added that Johnson has also been responsible for the most complete and informative version of the book ever published, in the Norton edition of *MP* (1998).

We have already noted the issue of slavery as a topic arrogating much more attention in late years. Kirkham was one of the first to make critical capital of the issue, but it was foregrounded much more prominently by Edward W. Said in an essay that first appeared in 1989. Said contends that *MP* prefigures Conrad and Forster in its intuition of the historical processes at work in imperialist expansion. Not all readers have been convinced by Said’s view, which has been repeated in other places, and they have found it hard to follow his argument that the “discreet, reticent appearances” of Antigua in the text acquire “a slightly greater density of meaning” through their very infrequency and obliquity (161). Said desires to set the house at the center of a whole arc of interests that span the globe: division over his work is largely centered on the degree to which these matters truly operate in the novelist’s mind. Said views Austen as caught up in Britain’s imperialist culture, though not culpably so. On the other hand, Brian Southam, “Silence of Bertrams” (1995), regards her as opposed, like Fanny, to the culture of the plantocracy. Other contributions to the debate are those of Stewart in 1993, positing a link between the absentee landlordism of the Caribbean proprietors with wider moral failings, and Lew in 1994, arguing that *Mansfield Park* serves as a microcosm of Britain and that imperialist imperatives come close to destroying the household (Sir Thomas “exiles” his niece to Portsmouth). It remains to be seen how succeeding readers will react to these and other views currently expressed. The judgments of our own day are generally the most controversial.

We can be certain that in time other concerns, at present neglected, will surface and claim insistent attention. The history of the reception of *MP* shows

that it has always been read according to the attitudes and preoccupations of the times. It is unlikely to be an accident that the current emphasis on a dark and troubled novel goes with a parallel tendency in biographic studies, whereby the happy family of traditional Austen studies has been replaced by an almost dysfunctional household riven by guilty secrets and hidden animosities. What the future will hold, we cannot know, but it is safe to say that *Mansfield Park* will continue to engage, to challenge and to enthrall readers as it has done for almost two hundred years. As long as there are serious readers of fiction, the book will endure.

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# Lampoon and Lampoonability: *Emma* and the Riddle of Popularity *Thomas Dabbs*

What is often strange and difficult to understand? If your answer is either English literature or Jane Austen's *Emma*, then you are only partly right. To be completely correct, you would have to say, too, that the way we talk about English literature is often far stranger and more difficult than anything Austen or any other English author ever wrote.

Let us try again with a multiple choice question:

Of the following, what is the stranger and more difficult to understand?

- A. "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (Austen 1).
- B. "The external system of sexual hierarchy is replicated within each of us and herein lies its power. Internalized cultural norms enforce the status quo" (Korba 141).

Choice A is, of course, the first line of Austen's *Emma* (1816). Choice B, far and away more difficult for a newcomer to literary studies to understand, was written by a modern feminist critic and quoted in an article on *Emma* in 1997.

The point here is not to bash feminism. One of the strongest and most necessary (and articulate) forces in cultural criticism during the past thirty or forty years has come from left feminist critics. Instead, the point is to try to understand what a new student of Austen might have to struggle through in order to develop a sound understanding and appreciation of Austen's works, specifically *Emma*.

What is suggested by the example is that it is that the greater source of difficulty is in coming to terms with literary study itself and not in reading literary texts. This is not to say that Austen's prose is simple. It most certainly

is not. However, if we take a quick tour of the historical and cultural circumstances that produced Austen's work and how those circumstances feed into the modern institution of literary teaching, we might be able to find better ways to understand Austen and also to understand why commentary on Austen has become so complex.

## AUSTEN AND THE NEW READER

Such literary works as *Emma* are, in our time, encrusted by a separate history that has been created beyond the intentions of the author and the initial readers. To help us with this point, one only has to think of The Who's "We Won't be Fooled Again," and how it was released as a countercultural, bad boy statement clearly favor of excess and social revolt. Less than thirty years later, the song has been used to sell computer equipment to people who have steady jobs and good credit ratings.

An important point that should be made here briefly and taken up later is that we have been taught to see Austen's works and The Who to fit into entirely different categories, the one being highly refined and polite, the other being reckless and impolite. In truth, both are in very similar categories insofar as both were produced initially to meet a popular demand—a distinct if not originally widespread market. Neither Austen nor The Who would be familiar to us today if this had not been the case. Neither would have had their works produced or distributed.

Unlike The Who, Austen requires that we go back further in history (but not so much in consciousness) to recover the psychocultural origins of her work and its distribution. She was born in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in a small, if not rural, town and, being a largely self-educated preacher's daughter, her life and writings seem cloistered from the massive social, political and economic changes that occurred in England during her time. Many critics have commented on how her influences in style and subject matter belong more to the more refined elements of the cultural period before her "time" rather than to the influences of her Romantic contemporaries. However, other able scholars have shown that the lines we draw between the neoclassical and the Romantic are not that clear.

That *Emma*'s protégé, Harriet Smith, can refer to contemporary gothic novels in her conversations with Emma makes the book in which she is a character seem out of sync with the then-current vogue. There are certainly no Franksteins or Heathcliffs in Highgate. From a cultural standpoint, it is difficult to place *Emma* in the same decade with the Byronic hero, or the radical metaphysics of Hegel, or the dark, melodramatic Edmund Kean playing Othello on the London stage.

We should not confuse ourselves, though, with period or genre distinctions that were placed on Austen's time after the fact. As Marilyn Butler has made abundantly clear, the early nineteenth century was not defined as the Romantic

period until the 1860s, and when one examines the diversities in writing during that period, it is difficult even now to draw an exact distinction under a general category called Romanticism (1).

To be sure, early nineteenth-century publishers were more aware of what might be sold than with supporting a yet-to-be defined sensibility of the general era. Many of these publishers were sputtering into the industrial period with old machines and antique notions of print, distribution and readership. Publishing concerns that were well adapted to producing fine editions to privileged readers were a little unsure what to do as paper was becoming cheaper, distribution routes were becoming more reliable and readerships (literacy rates) were growing.

Rogue publishers, though, were quick to come in with cheap editions of anything under the sun. Curiously, though the quality of print and paper dropped in certain editions, the growing public demand for reading material included vast supplies of what we now consider classic or quality writing. Edmund Kean, for instance, quickly edited cheap editions of old, what we now called classic, dramas in a series that reached 127 volumes. In one case, Dodsley's *Old Plays*, first brought out in the mid-eighteenth century, went through two massive cheap reprints in a ten-year period. "Beauties," or poetic excerpts that were an animal of the eighteenth-century penchant for collecting, were also quickly reproduced in volumes that aped the content but not the print quality of their predecessors. (One should remember, too, that this was the period of Charles Lamb's popular *Tales from Shakespeare*, an unapologetic and successful attempt to make Shakespeare accessible to many new readers.)

This large readership, this apparent appetite for quality writing and disregard for quality packaging suggests a consumer who was far different from the eighteenth-century collector of fine books. Many of these readers were comfortably middle class, but it is certain some of these readers were new and completely estranged from the upper or upper middle classes that Austen describes.

Indeed, as David Bromwich and others have pointed out, the interest in classic writing reached well into the working classes. Although the numbers were on the side of those who could afford new editions, the lower middle and working classes were not out of the mix completely. Austen's readership largely encompassed those who were from a class that could still afford fine books. Altick makes it very clear that the upsurge in the common reader did not occur in any significant way during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, noting that the cost of copyright editions (which would include *Emma*) was still too high for the lower and lower middle classes to afford. Moreover, the masses by and large were reading "penny shockers" and "sensational weekly papers" (Altick 240). As the popularity of cheap classic reprints indicates, though, Altick does allow some implicit growth in lower-income readers, who, if determined enough, might come across a writer on Austen's level from borrowed editions or some other means. According to Altick, "If millions read nothing but trash, scores of



thousands, no wealthier and with no more formal schooling, devoured serious fiction, poetry, essays, history, philosophy, theology, and biography” (240).

These points are made to argue that Austen was writing during a time when readership was changing, and she certainly would have been aware of this. Moreover, though her works might not find a significant working-class readership, they were certainly acquired by middle-class readers who were not, and could not aspire to be, part of the principal classes in or around those of the central characters in her fiction. In some cases, they may have been readers who were from far lower reaches of society than even Austen suspected.

One can only speculate as to why middle-, and, perhaps, even lower-income readers were so ardently interested in subject matter that today teachers would have to force students through with a whip. There were plenty of other things to read, so why indulge in reprints of *Middleton*? Why, after a hard day of physical labor, go to the Surrey Institute and hear Hazlitt lecture on Elizabethan poetry? Why, when surrounded by the sensational and gothic, indulge in polite renditions of the relatively inane crises of the gentry?

One possible answer is that these classic works were viewed as a part of newly open cultural turf that had been closed off from the general public, even the middle classes, before. As cheaper versions of the classics were released and more people had access to them, the newcomers understood these old texts not as literature per se but as class writing. Or at least they saw them as expressions that seemed valued by the upper classes. To learn these works may not put one in a well-appointed manor house, but it would bring one closer to the thoughts and reasoning of the upper classes. In a time when many were asking questions about why the social structure was the way it was, a look inside the minds of these folks who lived at the top would certainly be attractive fare.

As the readership grew, though, the issue of class or class tastes would certainly have given way to the powerful expressions one found in the texts themselves—expressions, no doubt, that did not necessarily support the sentiments of the very class that held fine editions dear (perhaps that were lost on many members of said class). If one is suddenly confronted with the works of Shakespeare, then other questions come into play, not least of which would be the revelation that Shakespeare caters to rollicking, popular sentiments rather than reinforcing stiff, refined tastes.

While Austen’s work might not seem in vogue with what we call the romantic movement, it certainly provides meaty consideration for a readership interested, perhaps even obsessed with, class structure and historic culture. Austen, who was not from the gentry but looking in with her predominantly middle-class readers, produces interesting subject matter for those who wish to join her in an exploration of upper-class behavior and sentiments. Indeed, Austen’s reception in her time might be the result of what looks to be a vast question-and-answer period that was being staged on the fly by middle-of-the-road readers. If it is given that the ability to ask and explore such questions is itself a challenge to the system (if the very naming of metaphysics as an entity suggests a chal-

lenge to the structure), then Austen's prose might be more a part of the radical front than it seems from our post facto reading of the prose.

In the light of the diverse readership that Austen's work probably drew in, it could be that too much emphasis has been put on upper-middle-class aspirations in relation to her fiction, and much too much ink has been dropped by left critics in hapless defense of Austen's intentions. In the end, it would be safe to say that Austen's readership, though not vast, though not significantly lower classes, were those who were not close enough to the characters in *Emma* to see themselves as being mirrored by the action or as becoming part of the class considered.

### READING EMMA'S READERSHIP

Those who have seen Robert Altman's *The Player*, based on the novel by Michael Milliken, remember how much fun it was to watch a dark critique of the Hollywood ending turn and end happily itself. The problem was, though, that the savvy lead man, who murders someone earlier in the movie, not only gets off but wins the woman of his dreams and lots more success and money.

Someone coming across this story one hundred years from now might be unsure what to make of the fact that the corrupt lead man trounces happily into the Hollywood hills with his true love. In such a case, it would be necessary to retrieve the cultural context of the book and movie for there to be an apt understanding of the story's artistry and message.

From the point of view of the original readers of *Emma*, the class affirmations that take place in the story are not as unchallenged as they might seem to us. First, the class being considered are what we might call country or landed gentry who, in a new economy, do not hold the power they once had. Though we might take issue with the exact nature of differences between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century genres, it is certain that Austen's readers were entirely conscious of the fact that Austen was presenting soon-to-be-fossilized elements of English culture.

The Revolution had already been fought in France and had its strong political advocates in England. A newfangled war was going on in Europe and threatening England, one that carried a new secret weapon called republican ideology. The new democratic thought was on the side of the merchant and manufacturing classes that were often quite unsympathetic to the pastoral sentiments of the country gentry.

Austen's readers therefore are being presented a picture not of a dominant, oppressive class—those more or less with the cash, the machines and the factories—but one that is of interest in its ability to hold on to the waning habits of prior times. Past times are represented in the way in which members of Emma's class passes time, and there must have been a stronger tinge of irony than we currently feel in certain obsessive concerns and activities that pop up throughout a contemporary story written slightly out of time. An entire essay

could be devoted to the philosophy of walking in and around Highgate, the directions the path should take, the timing of walks, the necessary aesthetic changes that should be made along the way. Of course, the habit of taking walks had not gone out by the time *Emma* was published, but such details as the focus on the smaller points of ambling in and around one's pristine grounds do signal some fun is being had at the expense of the novel's characters.

Emma and Harriet assemble riddles on meticulously pressed quartos, producing a fine edition of collected wisdom. These beauties, should the book be finished, would be perfect for the eighteenth-century library—the finely crafted riddles that supplement the editions of collected poetic excerpts. However, Emma's exquisite riddle book is clearly not well suited to the mass production techniques slowly being adopted by the early nineteenth-century publisher and again the activity, although charming, comes off arguably as a playful representation of characters who are stuck in another time. Extant from among Austen's personal papers are three finely crafted riddles that were quite similar to the one found in *Emma*. That Austen's rural, quasi-gentrified family enjoyed such amusements at family gatherings is not in question.

The portrait painting, the attentiveness to framing, indeed the use of these misspent efforts to draw Elton to Harriet, mirror the gentrified interests of the age of Gainsborough. Thus, it stretches the lampoon of Emma's shortcomings as a matchmaker (and Elton's lack of sense) toward a jab at the pretensions surrounding the whole portrait episode itself.

If one allows that Austen's work might contain a ubiquitous subtheme—a hidden vogue, so to speak—that tends to lampoon the antiquated habits of the very class it seems so overly concerned with, the result is a type of jocular deflation of the self-importance of the *dramatis personae*. Mr. Woodhouse, who in any reading is a xenophobic hypochondriac, comes off a little less charmingly eccentric and a little more absurd. Mr. Knightley, who seems to understand the subtexts of all that surrounds him, seems a little less wise in that he understands much that is foolish. Emma's character is deflated a bit, too, in that her salvation in self-revelation and marriage seem hyperbolic and pushed a bit into the same overdone region that *The Player* occupies. Moreover, her manipulation of Harriet seems crueler and her apologies to Harriet and others for her actions seem less substantial.

This point being made, it is clear that Austen was not writing conspicuous parody (as she was in *Northanger Abbey*), but attempting a serious introspection of the minds of the people she was portraying. However, by having some fun with the sentiments of this class, she may have been, consciously or not, providing a type of social reassurance for her readers. The new, public interest in class literature and the semiotic interested in English culture was a strong draw, perhaps because people were trying to lay to rest their insecurities by gathering a new form of introspective class and cultural knowledge.

Austen's works, including *Emma*, written as they were with precise, classic

prose and a narrative voice that suggests, even, a class difference from the author herself, sustains the elements of all that was then popular in the readers' market of the times. That *Emma* would occupy the same book shelf as *Frankenstein* is not so strange, given that both are works that serve a public need for revival of things old, whether they are thematically rooted in notions of dark gothic chaos or polite neoclassic reason. One might argue that *Frankenstein* is also futuristic, but that future, as modern science fiction reminds us, is merely a projected plane of thought and conceptualization. Indeed, *Star Wars* takes place in the past.

Perhaps a better example is the movie *Total Recall*, which takes place in a future when the atmosphere of Mars is created by the work of a technologically superior past. Even at the end of the movie, one is not certain whether all the action had simply been in the hero's mind. Considerations of future or past therefore are truly timeless in that the focus of all projections into time is platforms for self or social examinations in the present. Emma, in her story, must come to terms with the consequences her own class-based motives and means, but this is only at the fore of a larger social evaluation being carried out by Austen's readership as they reckon themselves against projected fictional differences in class and time.

We might conclude, then, that one staple of revolutionary thought and the social change that follows is an intense retrospective interest in stories out of time. That old writers serve a popular public need for self or class or community identification through such projections is evident in current revivals in film of Austen, Shakespeare and other classic writers. What is difficult about this reckoning is that Austen (following Shakespeare in spirit) was also serving the same public need for past reckoning in her own time. The absence of this understanding in our time has led to a bit of confusion.

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF UNKNOWING

Raymond Williams defined the term *popular* as that which is "well liked by many people." We tend to think, though, that literature is, by virtue of its status as literature, something that does not belong to popular culture. In fact, using Williams's definition (or our own common sense) much of what we consider literature, including Shakespeare, Dickens and, yes, Austen, was produced for the popular marketplace. Although *Emma* does not make Altick's best-seller list for the nineteenth century, the fact that it was published with a string of other similar novels indicates that the story was well liked by many people.

The classification of such authors as Austen as being literary did not occur until after the fact. More specifically, the idea of English literature was not fully conceptualized until English literature began being taught in schools during the second half of the nineteenth century. Cultural critics have bemoaned the consciousness (or false consciousness) that produced literary studies in the first place. This is unfair, though, because without strong institutional commitment,

these texts would not have survived as part of any consciousness (false or true); however, it is certain that we should constantly inspect the underlying values of any argument for the canonization of a particular author or text.

English became a discipline on the bases on broad conceptualizations that help the new student toward a way of understanding the body of works that have been chosen for consideration. Thus, the periodization that was set by early advocates of literary study, the idea that writers are represent by, say, Elizabethan or Neoclassical or Romantic characteristics, was put into place for cogency in a world already overflowing with writers and writing.

Once this process of conceptualization begins, once a canon of writers is defined on post facto terms, another separate debate begins in terms of the conceptualization rather than the specific tenets of the text being considered. Thus we have discussions about whether Austen is neoclassical or romantic. Such abstract considerations sometimes mask the exact historical parameters of Austen's writings and, like the example given with *The Who*, tend to place a work in a different cultural context.

We are often thrown into a world of difficulty, a world of superfluous riddling by a discipline devoted to preserve more straightforward encounters with the wisdom of the ages. Another problem arises when texts, by virtue of their status as being canonical, are held to contain eternal truths. No doubt they do, but those truths are better distilled from contextualization rather than simply abstracted from the text proper in order to support post facto constructs.

The modern feminist reading of *Emma* is one example of theorizing gone astray. The article itself argues for Emma's sexuality on the basis of modern debates over the nature of how feminine sexuality is expressed under male domination. The modern paradigm of feminine oppression, though, is yet another polemical debate placed on the text from a rhetorical standpoint no different from the neoclassic-romantic debate.

Emma's sexuality as a character in an Austen novel that, I argue, is replete with then current referential lampoons, cannot stand as exemplary for this or any other time. The sex or sexuality of the *grande dame* of xenophobic, class reasoning being dominated by, say, Knightley, that great interpreter of the antiquated, the high toned and the petty, seems in itself a lampoon of a very serious modern concern.

It would seem more appropriate to view Emma's sexuality from the standpoint of how the original female readers of the text juxtaposed their own sexual standards with the standard Emma represented. Just to throw out one conclusion from such a consideration, it might be that a portrait of the things that oppress Emma works in a therapeutic manner to placate middle-class anxieties over what those not living the good life might be missing. It might also serve to accentuate the irony of there being so much oppression in a class that seems from the outside to be free to do what it pleases. Or it might show (and this is my favorite) how much fun can be had by watching this particular class of people mediate their own, self-induced restrictions of habit. From the outside it does leave the

middle-class reader with a slightly smug sense of empowerment. Modern feminism, it seems, has abundant examples to draw from in order to establish the necessary historical precedents for an intellectual front. A decontextualized reading of Emma as a character, though, does not seem to contribute much to this effort.

The complexities, brought out by a 1997 article entitled “Improper and Dangerous Distinctions: Female Relationships and Erotic Domination in *Emma*” (Korba), are the result of the very mode of late Victorian thinking that is often scoffed at by people of the same left front that brought this type of title into being (alas, the type of title that is being lampooned by the title of this discussion). Were we to think things through, we might discover that simplistic feminist projections onto the character of Emma reify the novel in much the same way that it was originally reified and brought into an unfairly male-dominated canon, perhaps, some might add, as the happy result of wrong-headed reasoning.

Certainly if we survey the original concepts of English as a discipline, we see an effort to make sense from difficult, artistic texts in order that their importance be preserved for future ages. The survival of the discipline therefore requires the ability to simplify the complex rather than making the complex even more complex. This simplification can be achieved through a precise examination of reception that is used to bring light to Austen, to *Emma*, to what was popular and to magnificent, superb and memorable examples of writing worthy of preservation.

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“And Very Good Lists They  
Were”: Select Critical Readings of  
Jane Austen’s *Emma*  
*Richard McDonald*

Jane Austen is truly one of the greatest British authors of all times, and *Emma* is considered her best novel by many critics (including R. W. Chapman who edited scholarly editions of all Austen’s novels). Austen’s continued acclaim as a novelist is ensured by more than 180 years of praise from both critics and lay readers, but within her own lifetime her talents were seldom fully appreciated, and critics to this very day argue over elements of Austen’s artistry and intent.

Jane Austen began work on *Emma* in January 1814 and was finished writing by the end of March 1815. The novel was advertised for a December 1815 publication date, but the earliest published edition of *Emma* is dated 1816. Although *Emma* immediately was accepted as a success by some critics, only 1,250 of the initial 2,000 printed copies were sold in the first year, and the second edition was not issued until 1833. The original 1816 edition of the novel is preceded by a dedication to “His Royal Highness the Prince Regent,” an admirer of Austen’s writing. (Critics often speculate about Austen’s dedication of her book to the regent because of her professed dislike of him in her personal correspondence.) The definitive, scholarly edition of *Emma* is edited by R. W. Chapman and was first offered in 1923, but Chapman himself finds the 1816 text of *Emma* very reliable, and later editions, whether based on Chapman’s or the 1816 edition, make relatively few corrections to the text. As a result, there are a number of good editions of the novel, and many of them are augmented by historical and critical essays that can aid in a reader’s appreciation of the text and its critical history. I have found the editions by R. W. Chapman, Lionel Trilling and Stephen Parrish to be helpful, but most readers should notice no differences between the actual texts of almost any complete edition of the novel beyond a difference in the numbering of chapters. Newer editions tend to number the chapters sequentially up to fifty-five; older editions follow the original



text that restarts chapter numbers at one with the beginning of each of the three books within the novel. (All references to *Emma* in this chapter are from the 1988 reprint of the third edition of Chapman's text.) In addition to the numerous editions of the texts offered over time, there are some well-done movie versions of the novel (produced by the BBC, A&E and Miramax), but important nuances of narrating from multiple perspectives favorable to Emma are often sacrificed in the novel's conversion to film.

Of her plans for *Emma*, Jane Austen tells us, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like," but, of course, she was very much wrong. Her writing, which was respected prior to the publication of *Emma*, received almost instant support from a book review written for the *Quarterly Review* by Sir Walter Scott. Although a writer of action-packed romantic novels himself, Scott found a number of things to compliment in the very different style of his contemporary. He found that *Emma*, and Austen's writing in general, "proclaim[s] a knowledge of the human heart with a power and resolution to bring that knowledge to the service of honour and virtue" (qtd. in Southam, *Critical Heritage* 59). Later in the review Scott says, "Keeping close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life, she has produced sketches of such spirit and originality that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events" (63). Scott is commenting on the difference between the plots and characters of romance novels and the more realistic portrayal of people and events in Austen's style of writing. In his private journal Scott confesses, "The Big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of description and the sentiment, is denied to me" (qtd. in Watt 3). Austen was gratified by the review rendered by Scott, and she was obviously interested in the reactions her novels received. She kept a record of some of the opinions offered by family and friends about *Emma*.

Although Austen's talent was widely recognized, her writing differed greatly from the popular romantic fiction of her time. It may be that her differences catered to a more cultivated taste because, as B. C. Southam explains, before 1870, "Jane Austen was never thought of as a popular novelist, nor did she get much attention from Victorian critics and literary historians" (*Critical Heritage* 2). Ian Watt reports that the Romantics and Victorians disliked the order and control of character and plot in Austen's novels and found her concentration on "three or four families in a country village" sometimes admirable, but generally uninteresting and lacking in imagination. While Thomas Carlyle summarily dismissed any accomplishment of Austen by referring to her works as "dishwashings" (Watt 4), Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* that although Shakespeare has no equal or second, Jane Austen is among the authors who come closest (Chapman, *Critical Bibliography* 27), and Macaulay's opinion of Austen was seconded by George Henry Lewes in *Frazier's Magazine*

in 1847 (27). Lewes later calls Austen the “first and foremost” of women novelists (347).

Jane Austen may have been incorrect about creating a heroine whom no one but herself might like, but she did create a body of work that while helping to usher in realism continues to create critical disagreement, even today. Many critics incorporate these disparate opinions of Austen within their own criticism of her works. For Virginia Woolf, Austen portrayed only trivialities creating her “nest” out of the “twigs and straws” she found in her own backyard, but Woolf admits that although Austen’s novels are concerned with a very limited sphere of society, “never did any novelist make more use of an impeccable sense of human values. . . . She knew exactly what her powers were, and what they were fitted to deal with as material should be dealt with by a writer whose standard of finality was high” (335). For Woolf as for many more fervent Austen admirers, Jane Austen wrote (and knew) little about romance, emotion, intrigue, adventure or politics. Even Lewes acknowledges as one of Austen’s strengths that “never does she transcend her own actual experience” (Parrish 348), and Henry James, who is often seen as Austen’s successor in the area of realistic fiction, finds her style unremarkable and her literary value overestimated (353).

A. C. Bradley brings a more descriptive attitude to the discussion of the effect Austen has had in literary circles. He finds that as a result of Austen’s working at a time when romantic, imaginative writing was highly esteemed, her style was considered antiromantic and her subject matter far too civilized. She has more of the neoclassical style in her humorous and sometimes moral tales, more akin with a writer like Samuel Johnson than her contemporaries Wordsworth and Scott. But Bradley makes clear that Austen’s place among first-rate writers is primarily ensured by her abilities as a humorist who can bring to our attention “the foibles, illusions, self-contradictions of human nature” through the use of realistic characters. “Jane Austen regards the characters, good and bad alike with ironical amusement, because they never see the situation as it really is and as she sees it” (355). Bradley sees *Emma* as the perfect Austen novel, and certainly its successful ironic portrayal of characters has been noted by numerous critics. Reginald Farrer also sees *Emma* as “the climax of Jane Austen’s work,” and he locates the success of the novel in its presentation of character, particularly in the ironic portrayal of the self-assured yet self-unaware Emma. Because we recognize that Emma’s “absurdities,” “snobberies” and “mischievous ingenuities” eventually turn back on her and cause her reformation, our disapproval of her character is lessened and finally abates (Farrer 25).

Jane Austen’s faithful followers have occasionally felt the need to defend their love of Austen’s style and content. E. M. Forster announces himself “a Jane Austenite,” and Janeites are proud to revere “Miss Austen” or “Aunt Jane” in spite of the occasional flaws they admit exist in her writing. Responding to the cynical and sometimes trivial nature of Austen’s letters (which were published by Chapman in 1932), Forster posits that the “triviality,” “ill breeding”

and “sententiousness” of these letters reveal that Jane had “not enough subject matter on which to exercise her powers” (362). Austen’s work has been alternately praised and castigated on a number of fronts over the years, and the broad and consistent disagreement about her style, purpose and value makes clear that there is something—most probably some things—within her work that will ensure her reputation within the literary canon.

*Emma* is, among many other things, first and foremost a novel of education. It shares in the bildungsroman tradition of young protagonists who learn important life lessons from the events that occur within their stories. Emma has everything going for her: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich with a comfortable home and a happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (5). But early on it becomes evident that Emma has a lot to learn. She has had an overindulgent governess and has developed a propensity to expect everything “her own way” and “think a little too well of herself.” She is young and inexperienced and ripe to learn lessons about life and living.

Numerous critics have written on the education or moral enlightenment of Emma as the main theme of the novel. In 1954, C. S. Lewis discusses how much of Austen’s fiction is preoccupied with “undeception” or “awakening.” Her heroines “discover that they have been making mistakes both about themselves and about the world in which they live” (27). In *Emma* the result of the heroine’s recognition of her mistakes makes the happy ending possible. It is Emma’s last-minute “awakening” (whether actual or merely imagined) that allows so many critics to comment on the didacticism or moral instruction within the novel. Edgar Shannon, Jr., calls Austen “primarily a moral writer” and argues that because Austen presents her moral lessons in *Emma* “so astutely and so dramatically,” she makes great demands on her readers’ perceptiveness. He sees within *Emma* a novel that “discloses a valid progression of the heroine from callowness to mental and emotional maturity—a development psychologically consistent and technically consonant” (130–31). Shannon believes that *Emma* is Austen’s masterpiece because the heroine realistically goes from being young, selfish and inconsiderate to becoming a caring, responsible and mature adult. Although her overall change must wait until the concluding chapters of the novel, we see the seeds of that change develop throughout the course of the story. Mark Schorer discusses how the language used in the novel takes on a special relation to Austen’s overarching subject: Emma’s education “out of a condition of self-deception brought on by the shutters of pride into a condition of perception when that pride had been humbled through the exposure of the errors of judgement into which it has led her” (98). Schorer is particularly concerned with terms relating to economics, class and number or size. He discusses the work as one in which the social values of class and economics that Emma initially espouses are opposed to the moral values she must learn. Once she learns to reevaluate her attitudes toward class, economics and material articles,

she is able to become the moral character who deserves the novel’s happy ending.

In *Jane Austen and Her Art*, Mary Lascelles discusses Austen’s concern with moral development but argues that it is not merely Emma’s moral growth but the moral development of all Highbury that is being depicted in the novel. Lascelles finds the moral atmosphere of the entire village to be the novel’s focus. All of the other characters create a diverse moral climate in Highbury within which Emma must ultimately discover and assume her appropriate position. However, for critics like A. Walton Litz, the focus of *Emma* is predominantly Emma: “The basic movement of *Emma* is from delusion to self-recognition, from illusion to reality” (369). “Emma’s life is presented as a constant process of emotional miscalculations and rational corrections” (370). According to Litz, Emma is naive about both herself and the outside world; she must learn her own limitations and resist the temptation to remake her world within her imagination. Marilyn Butler shares many of Litz’s assertions. Butler calls *Emma* “the greatest novel of the period” and sees the protagonist’s mission as “to survey society, distinguishing the true values from the false; and in the light of this new ‘knowledge of reality,’ to school what is selfish, immature, or fallible in herself” (251). Butler argues that Austen situates Emma in a superior social position in order to allow her the freedom to “act out willful errors for which she must take entire moral responsibility” (251). By changing the nature of the typical heroine’s quest from a search for her own future husband to a search for a husband for someone else, Austen alleviates some of the hesitancy a young woman would need to exhibit (in the search for her own mate) and allows Emma to learn a powerful lesson. In the end, by manipulating not only her own life and fate but that of others, Emma learns a more sobering lesson, and probably a more permanent one.

Arnold Kettle disagrees with critics who see *Emma* as a story intended to impart a moral lesson; for Kettle, the subject of *Emma* is marriage. The work begins and ends with marriage, and marriage is a subject never far from central to the plot. Kettle argues that the difficulty with seeing *Emma* as a moral fable is that although the story deals intimately with moral issues, the moral is always inseparable from the events occurring within the story. There is little idealism in the story, and it is, in fact, the realistic portrayal of events that allows the reader to become emotionally involved with the moral issues touched on within the work. Critics may be able to apply the moral attitudes that they see depicted within the novel to their contemporary world (or Austen’s world), but the incidents of the novel are presented as realistically possible and integral to the unfolding of the story.

For Malcolm Bradbury, “Jane Austen is concerned with two kinds of world—the social world and the moral world—and their interaction, an interaction that is intimate, but also complete” (217). He finds that “the degree of social stability, the preciseness of social expectations, the limitations on eccentric behaviour or concealments of violent action, reinforce and make significant the moral order”

(220). The novel depicts a homogeneous world where societal roles are relatively fixed and certain types of action are accepted and others rejected, sometimes dependent on the social position of the characters. According to Bradbury, the fact that the novel revolves around marriages is important because social mobility is less likely after a young woman's marriage fixes her within a particular class. Additionally, Bradbury finds that the moral lives of the characters are linked with class as the story moves toward the depiction of one especially good marriage and considers other appropriate marriages as contrasting examples. Although Emma begins her development doubting the usefulness of marriage for herself, through the moral education she receives, she finally commits herself wholeheartedly to the social act of marriage.

Although a preponderance of the criticism of *Emma* discusses her marriage as the justifiable reward for her successful moral education, some critics doubt the ultimate felicity of Emma and Mr. Knightley's union and the permanence of Emma's moral rehabilitation. Marvin Mudrick discusses the importance of irony to *Emma* and finds irony even in the "happy" marriages of its conclusion. The novel's primary ironic feature is "the deceptiveness of surface," and "in Emma, Jane Austen has given surface the benefit of every alluring quality in the persons of the heroine and of Frank Churchill" (124). Mudrick claims that the beauty, wealth, position and other favorable circumstances bestowed on Emma and Frank have only led to "confusion and unhappiness"; this in itself is ironic, but the reader's continuous recognition that Emma is absolutely self-deceived and ultimately destined to fall in love and marry is also ironic. For Mudrick, the ironic portrayal of Emma as self-deceived tarnishes the happy ending. "Emma—in spite of her will and intelligence—cannot even begin to see clearly or steadily until Mr. Knightley tells her what is there" (105). Her reform has been promised and failed too often before. Her one momentarily successful reform cannot last her a lifetime. Mudrick's belief in Emma's eventual and inevitable return to meddling in others' affairs coincides with concerns about Emma's reform expressed by G. B. Stern in *Speaking of Jane Austen* and reiterates Edmund Wilson's objection: "What reason is there to believe that her marriage to Knightley would prevent her from going on as she had done before?" (39). Wilson particularly cites Emma's apparent infatuation with Harriet and preference for the company of women over men as grounds for the eventual return of her meddling tendencies. For Wilson, Mr. Knightley will never be able to satisfy Emma's desire to dominate malleable female characters.

Wayne Booth, who has his own questions about Emma's appropriateness as a Jane Austen heroine, takes Mudrick, Wilson and Stern to task for their disbelief in *Emma*'s happy ending. "Marriage to an intelligent, amiable, good, and attractive man is the best thing that can happen to this heroine, and the readers who do not experience it as such are, I am convinced, far from knowing what Jane Austen is about" (209). For Booth, Emma is "deficient in both generosity and self knowledge" (195), and the fact that the reader sympathizes with her is testimony to the technical artistry of Jane Austen. By narrating the story from

a position that shares the thoughts and sentiments of the main character, Emma's character flaws appear less detrimental. Booth astutely argues that if the novel were narrated from Jane Fairfax's, Mrs. Elton's or Robert Martin's perspective, we would have a completely different attitude toward Emma. Because we experience Emma's faults from a perspective within Emma's mind, not only are we able to forgive the faults we recognize, we are predisposed to overlook many of them. Austen's careful presentation of the story from a select set of points of view favorably inclined toward Emma makes Emma's ultimate reform seem more believable because we were always predisposed to see her succeed. Booth argues that Austen's desire to create suspense and mystery in the plot necessitates her concealing the secret engagement of Jane and Frank and, as a result, limits the reader's experience of irony. Nevertheless, he concedes that for Emma to be presented in the most favorable light, Jane Fairfax must play a limited role within the novel; Booth sees Jane as a character who is morally superior to Emma (200).

W. J. Harvey agrees with Booth about the seriousness of Austen's "they-married-and-lived-happily-ever-after" ending, finding it a necessary part in the very real reform of the novel's comic heroine. However, Harvey questions Booth's claims that Austen's concealment of Jane and Frank's engagement affects the readers' appreciation of novel's pervasive irony. In fact, Harvey argues that once we learn of the secret engagement, we are able to see that every scene involving Frank Churchill has contained a double meaning. For Harvey, if these double meanings had been made clear during readers' initial exposure to the story line, the irony would have been overpowering and seemed mechanical (237). Emma's presentation as one of numerous flawed characters within the novel and our awareness of her growing recognition of her own faults is what renders readers sympathetically inclined to believe in her reform.

In "The Education of Emma Woodhouse," R. E. Hughes also calls attention to the integral link between the moral education of Emma and the irony of the novel: "The underlying theme of this novel is the education of Emma Woodhouse and the recurrent irony is that Emma, who must become pupil, insists on acting as teacher" (70). For Hughes, the ending of Emma symbolizes her redemption from self-delusion. In order for Emma's education to be complete, she must learn that both love and the world at large are defined not by what she concocts within her own fancy but by external realities that she must acknowledge. Emma learns the lessons necessary for her reform through exposure to characters and situations that make clear specific truths about the real world and love. Mr. Elton teaches her about the economic considerations of marriage, and Mrs. Elton teaches her what a marriage founded on those concerns yields.

Additionally, the less-than-perfect relationship between Frank and Jane introduces the idea of marriage for reasons of affection into the novel. However, Emma, as heroine, is destined for a more perfect union than the other characters in the story; once she recognizes her need to learn compassion and genuine caring in the aftermath of her humiliation of Miss Bates, she is prepared to serve

as the exemplar of the near-perfect union possible between extraordinary characters like she and Mr. Knightley.

Christopher Gillie places the blame for Emma's persistent faults on her inability to behave responsibly within her social position. Emma "is wrong not because she is superficial, stupid, or heartless, but because her social position gives her a false perspective both of personal values and of her own nature" (124). (Mr. Knightley alludes to this abuse of power in his rebuke regarding Emma's treatment of Miss Bates, someone so far below Emma's status she can never deserve her scorn.) For Gillie, the inexperienced and naive Emma neither understands her own nor other people's feelings, and yet she sets out "to compose a real-life romantic novel centered on Harriet Smith" (118). Although Emma has no experience with love, she still tries to orchestrate another's love affair, and her inexperience with life makes her a willing dupe in the farcical intrigue concocted by Frank Churchill. Gillie admits that all of the story lines end comically, but not before the reader realizes that Jane, Harriet and Emma herself could be in danger of experiencing tragic endings.

In *Beyond Culture*, Lionel Trilling argues that although readers recognize and censure Emma's moral failings, we still like her. He posits that our predisposition to be accepting of her numerous faults depends on our knowing that, as vain and superior as Emma acts, she eventually becomes aware of her own vanity, and in the end—when her silly schemes are frustrated and her illusions exposed—she does not deny her faults or become bitter; instead, she becomes ashamed and penitent. Trilling finds that her open confessions of her faults and resolutions to change for the better are what make Emma acceptable to the reader. Although Henrietta Ten Harmsel also recognizes Emma's moral failings, she is not willing to place all the blame for Emma's irresponsible behavior on the shoulders of our spoiled heroine. It is not really surprising that Emma behaves like a spoiled child, since she is treated like a queen by many of the people of Highbury. Emma feels entitled to meddle (139). Mr. Woodhouse and Harriet consider Emma to be perfect (neither sees any of her faults), Mrs. Weston overlooks whatever faults she does perceive and even Mr. Knightley claims to love her in spite of her faults. Nevertheless, although readers may love Emma in spite of her faults, we are not blind to her ridiculous schemes. Her scheming is made believable because we know about her overindulgent childhood and the real loneliness she experiences after Miss Taylor leaves; her history and motivation make her actions psychologically believable. "By tracing through the psychological motivation of Emma's apparently ridiculous actions, one senses that she is not absurdly unreal but delightfully human" (Ten Harmsel 141). With the help of Mr. Knightley as her stern but loving mentor and her periodic brushes with reality, we see the inevitability and realism of her maturity into womanhood. For Ten Harmsel, Austen uses many of the conventions of eighteenth-century fiction: the quixotic heroine, the mentor lover, the Cinderella love story (Frank and Jane's wedding) and the deceiving villain (Frank Churchill), but her

careful handling of these conventions makes them believable and psychologically real.

In *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels*, Bernard Paris finds much that is psychologically believable in *Emma*, but he maintains that the novel's ending reflects not psychological growth and maturity but a regression to childhood. Although he admits that "both as a comedy and a novel of education, *Emma* encourages a favorable view of the protagonist's happiness and growth" (65), he finds that a close psychological study of Emma's character reveals that her change is not for the better and that her marriage to Mr. Knightley is a psychological regression. By the end of the story, the strong-willed heroine who has had too much freedom and power submits to the proper authority (represented by Knightley), and the moral order of Highbury is restored (66). After her experiences with Harriet and the incident at Box Hill, Emma becomes aware of the potentially disastrous effect her mistakes could have, and this crushes her pride and generates feelings of anxiety and self-contempt. She is no longer the self-confident, strong-willed girl she was, and so she attaches herself to the self-assured Mr. Knightley and regains her relative position in society by submitting to his authority and becoming his wife (Paris 73).

It may be difficult to ascertain Emma's underlying reasons for marrying Mr. Knightley, but Paris believes that Jane Austen intended Emma's reformation to be permanent and complete, if not happy. Nevertheless, there is something difficult in judging the motivations of Emma. Does she, as many critics argue, come to recognize the rightness and felicity of marrying Mr. Knightley and become a better person? Or does her marriage symbolize her failure to become a fully autonomous character? One of the main reasons for readers' disagreements about *Emma's* ending may be their recognition that Austen has carefully manipulated our attitudes toward Emma through her presentation of Emma's thought processes. For Stuart Tave, it is Emma's abuse of imagination that makes us feel for her. Whether we like her or not, Emma's indulgence of her own imaginative fancy, and use of it to reshape her world, partakes of a desire we all share. Moreover, Tave asserts that it is Emma's creative use of her imagination that allows her to misread the world, and "for all its power and all its desires Emma's imagination is weakest in understanding her own desires" (17). As a result, Emma does not know what she wants *until* she has gone through the trials of the novel and has arrived at her happy ending with Mr. Knightley.

One of the main difficulties in accepting the ending of *Emma* as happy is the apparent necessity and inevitability of her marriage to Mr. Knightley. We want to believe Emma when she says, "I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry," and "I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husbands house, as I am of Hartfield" (84), but Emma (even in her naive, unreformed state) recognizes that marriage for love would be a legitimate exception. Whether Emma's marriage symbolizes a step forward or backward for our self-assured heroine is the topic of much feminist criticism.



In “Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition,” Lloyd Brown identifies Jane Austen as writing within the feminist tradition as it existed in the eighteenth century and aligns her beliefs about marriage between equals and the potential strength of female characters with attitudes expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. For Brown, Austen’s writing questions masculine assumptions about society by showing characters acting outside narrow definitions of acceptable male and female behavior and by depicting the importance of the education of women. A good marriage does not symbolize the submission of a woman to male rule, but celebrates the union of compatible personalities, which further improves the individual characters.

June Dwyer recognizes Austen’s innovation in formulating Emma’s character: “Emma is Jane Austen’s exploration of what a nineteenth-century woman’s life would be like if she had the powers and privileges of a man” (89). But independence is a difficult thing for a young person, and although Emma exhibits the “confidence and presumption usually reserved for Austen’s male characters” (92), her inexperience causes her to take “the serious business of marriage too lightly” (91). There is significant turmoil within each of the courtships that makes possible the novel’s concluding marriages (Harriet’s, Jane’s and Emma’s), but eventually we come to see that each of the marriages is an appropriate union of personalities. Emma’s union is the most satisfying because it links two ultimately good characters whose personality traits lend support to each other: Emma brings out Mr. Knightley’s subdued passion, and he helps her refine her good sense. Their union is all the more appealing because, unlike some of the marriages that were necessitated by economic demands, Emma’s fate was not inevitable.

In *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Claudia Johnson similarly discusses Emma’s assumption of male roles within the novel, but she explains that the discomfort that some people feel at Emma’s taking charge of the plot is actually caused by the fact that she assumes the rights and the roles of a male character. For Johnson, “female authority is the subject of *Emma*” (122). Emma acts as a man would: “She does not think of herself as an incomplete or contingent being whose destiny is to be determined by the generous or blackguardly actions a man will make towards her” (124). Within the world of the novel, many women take on dominant and active roles. “With the exception of Mr. Knightley,” Johnson argues, “all the people in control are women” (126). And although the novel ultimately seems to favor male rule, the society depicted in *Emma* accepts the propriety of female rule. Johnson contends that in the end, Emma and Mr. Knightley happily live together and rule together as husband and wife.

In *Laughter, War, and Feminism*, Gabriela Castellanos concentrates her discussion of *Emma* on the carnivalesque inversion of power that exists within the novel. Emma, twenty-one years of age and inexperienced, is in charge of Hartfield and a leader in the wider community of Highbury. Because of the narrative’s closeness to Emma and the readers’ frequent access to her thoughts, we

end up identifying with a character whose actions and attitudes will be ironically disparaged throughout the story. However, all the characters of *Highbury*, from Harriet to Mr. Knightley, are occasionally open to ridicule, and through the course of the novel "we are taught not only to tolerate, but discover truths in the mouths of characters whose intelligence seems negligible, who would be despised from a worldly viewpoint" (182). *Emma* depicts women assuming powerful roles in resistance to patriarchal ideology, and although in the end Emma may take a more conventional position within society as Mrs. Knightley, the novel questions societal attitudes toward marriage, and (in the device of Mr. Knightley coming to live at Hartfield) the awkward contradictions between the claims of husband and father are exposed.

Jane Spencer recognizes an ultimate adherence to societal expectations as part of Austen's work, but she finds the author's emphasis on the intellectual and moral growth of the heroine to be a progressive use of the "reformed coquette" tradition. By depicting the actual learning and reformation process within her characters, Austen emphasizes the ability of women to learn and grow over the mere need for them to improve. Spencer argues that in *Emma*, "the tradition in the feminine didactic novel for rendering the thought process in narrative reaches its highest refinement" (175). As a result of readers' exposure to the thoughts of the heroine, we see most clearly the thinking powers of Emma, and this leads to a deeper understanding of woman's capacity to learn and hints at the potential for greater equality between women and men.

In an address delivered to the Jane Austen Society in 1983, "The True English Style," Mary Poovey asserts that it is precisely because Austen's fiction revolves so often around the idea of matrimony that her female characters have the opportunity for autonomy and empowerment: "In that brief period between marriageability and marriage, a woman was empowered as never before; not only could she wield her mighty 'negative' but she could enjoy the attentions of a man—or men—intent on impressing her" (393). Of course, the paradoxical loss of empowerment promised by the culmination of courtship (once married, a woman's power was gone) must be ignored, both in the case of romantic love and for the sake of a happy ending. Nevertheless, Emma sees quite clearly the limitation of marriage and recognizes the superiority of her current position to any she could hope to attain by marrying. She even acknowledges the importance of matrimony for a woman of limited means and involves herself in the economic considerations of finding a suitable match for Harriet. However, Emma's own awakening to romantic love is sudden and goes unexamined within the novel. Although we accept the rightness of Emma and Mr. Knightley's marriage, the topic of romantic love and its place in society creates just as many unanswered questions for the reader as do Emma's comments about the disadvantages of marriage.

Juliet McMaster (in contrast to Poovey's assertion that romantic love goes unexamined in *Emma*) contends that the love that results from Emma and Mr. Knightley's pupil-master relationship is an intelligent love—the type most val-

ued by Austen. For McMaster, Miss Taylor's removal to Randalls eliminates a significant impediment for Emma's concentrating on the lessons Mr. Knightley has to teach and establishes Mr. Knightley as Emma's primary moral instructor. Throughout the novel, Mr. Knightley evinces pride when Emma judges correctly and disappointment when she is mistaken. He is reforming her for their eventual union and rejoices in her moral accomplishments. McMaster argues that when Mr. Knightley is on the verge of kissing Emma's hand (Book III, Chapter IX) "that spontaneous and simultaneous clasp of hands in the moment of harmony between master and pupil, is a memorable image for the mutually passionate and joyful commitment implied in the pedagogic relationship in Jane Austen's novels" ("Pedagogy and Love" 412). To critics who find Austen too unfeeling and conventional, McMaster explains that it is through "custom and convention" that Austen's characters express their feelings. Austen does not avoid the expression of strong feeling; she merely presents them indirectly by hinting at the ecstasies or agonies under the surface of the character ("Love: Surface and Subsurface" 41).

In *Women's Friendships in Literature*, Janet Todd discusses *Emma* as a work wherein a variety of social friendships are presented and differing levels of friendship and the abuses thereof are investigated. Similarly, for Juliet Prewitt Brown, "Highbury is a system of interdependence, a community of people all talking to one another, affecting and changing one another: a collection of relationships" (46). Jane Austen carefully crafts the details of *Emma* so that all of the characters intersect in some way. Change within the story and change within Emma are made possible by the relationships of the characters. Emma experiences three sequential enlightenments about love within the novel (Elton, Churchill and Knightley), and we see the effects and importance of one character on another through our access to Emma's mind. Emma has to change both internally (her attitudes) and externally (her actions), and Mr. Knightley is the character who links the world of Highbury with Emma's internal struggle and eventually makes possible her maturation.

Like Brown, Ruth Perry wants to examine the importance of the relationship between characters within *Emma*, but for Perry, heterosexual marriage interferes with some of the most important relationships in the novel. Perry finds women's friendships "essential to the psychic survival" of women in a male-dominated society (128), and she shows how the necessity of marrying hinders many of the important friendships in the novel. (Miss Taylor leaves to become Mrs. Weston, Harriet is inconvenient as a rival for Mr. Knightley's love and Jane Fairfax is spirited away by her husband as soon as friendship between she and Emma becomes possible.) Perry reminds us that a similar importance for women's friendship existed in Austen's own life. Although Austen continued to write within a tradition that uses marriage as a symbol of a happy ending, *Emma* makes clear the impediments marriage creates for all-important female friendships.

In "A Comedy of Intimacy," Jan Fergus is particularly interested in the in-

timacy that the society of Highbury makes possible. She believes that intimacy is the "special intention" of *Emma*, and as such it demands a particular treatment of subject and character on the part of Austen. The detailed portrayal of the relatively small, closed world of Highbury allows characters to discuss and comment on one another: "Austen promotes intimacy between her readers and her characters by creating characters who are intimate with each other and whose speeches reflect their intimacy" (Fergus 101). It is the importance of the intimacy and openness established between characters that necessitates that concealed love (such as that between Jane and Frank) must be revealed.

James Thompson, too, focuses on the portrayal of intimacy with *Emma* and the preeminent importance of intimacy among equals for Jane Austen. Thompson asserts that Austen is the first English novelist fully to portray individuated characters, but he explains that this portrayal must occur at the expense of the extended family. No longer is the extended family a support system for the character; it becomes an obstacle to the individual's attainment of the private world of intimacy. Emma, although she has friends within the novel, must find herself very much alone before the conclusion of the story. She has had intimate relationships, but they have been with unequals: Miss Taylor and Harriet. Emma is denied the friendship of the one female character (Jane) who has the potential to be her equal, but she ends up with her perfect match (after her reformation), Mr. Knightley. Thompson asserts that the novel must end here because "true intimacy is quintessentially private, and so to represent it is to violate it" (121). Consequently, the perfect intimacy that will be achieved between Emma and Mr. Knightley will not and cannot be described, only hinted at in the promise of their felicitous future.

In "'Improper and Dangerous Distinctions': Female Relationships and Erotic Domination in *Emma*," Susan Korba discusses the issues of marriage and intimacy from the oft-alluded-to but seldom examined possibility of Emma's lesbianism. Numerous critics have noted Emma's fascination with Harriet and her desire to dominate other women. Korba agrees with earlier critics like Alex Page who feel confident calling Emma's feelings for Harriet homoerotic, but whereas Page argues that Emma's homoeroticism is an effect of the power created by her social position and her patient waiting for Mr. Right (Knightley), Korba sees the ultimate union of Emma and Mr. Knightley as occasioned by Emma's being cut off from any hope at attaining the true object of her desire: Jane Fairfax. Korba rightly notes that Emma's interest in Harriet wanes as her interest in Jane waxes, but it is difficult to read Emma's attachment to Jane (even unconsciously) as surpassing her suitability for marriage with Mr. Knightley.

Tony Tanner believes Emma's interest in Harriet is primarily a vicarious one. Emma hopes, through the feminine impulse toward matchmaking, to receive vicarious enjoyment as she dangles the "sexual bait" of Harriet in front of eligible men. The closeness and closed-ness of Highbury society leave little choice for characters in terms of finding a mate, and Emma, who feels herself above

such considerations, creates a false Harriet from her willful imagination. This “new” Harriet eventually threatens Emma’s own happiness, when Emma recognizes her own desire to make a match. Nevertheless, the novel upholds traditional attitudes toward class consciousness in the marriages of Robert Martin and Harriet, and Mr. Knightley and Emma. Even in the marriage of Frank and Jane, class concerns are shown to be immensely important. The novel ends with the appropriate matches restoring order to the community of Highbury, an order that had been threatened by Emma’s careless imagination and Frank’s careless attitude toward love.

In “‘Self Interest to Blind’: Jane Austen, *Emma*, and Myopia,” Cedric Watts claims that “Jane Austen was vigilantly clear sighted in observing the extent to which lives are governed by money—actual or prospective income” (128), and she “demystifies human relationships by emphasizing the extent to which motivation, conscious or unconscious, is provided by lucre” (131). Although Austen presents the rich minority as benefactors to the poor majority and the book ends in an affirmation of the class system, the near tragedy of Jane Fairfax brings the issue of social injustice into clear focus within the novel. David Aers shares many of Watts’s sentiments in his discussion of how Austen is fundamentally committed to the market norms of Highbury, but for Aers, Austen’s writing acknowledges the major problems of the ideology about which she writes. There is some fluidity of class accepted in Highbury—the Coles are new money, and even Robert Martin rents a big farm, has two parlors and keeps a maid—but all of the characters in the novel accept that there are certain class distinctions. The novel is not specifically about class or social distinctions but primarily about an acceptable norm of behavior for all classes, a norm that we see Emma initially transgress, but finally accept during her moral education. Aers asserts that much of Austen’s irony deals directly with Emma’s misapplication of class distinctions and her inability to judge correctly whom the respectable people in the novel are.

Alastair Duckworth, too, concedes that *Emma* is about class consciousness; there are serious social responsibilities that Emma must learn to accept (represented by Mr. Knightley). However, Emma is so egotistical that she is guilty of more than just social or moral selfishness; she seems unaware that other characters have as real an existence as she (156). Throughout the novel, Emma’s subjective truth is exposed to the reality of Highbury, and she becomes less of a threat to her society the more she accepts objective reality over her subjective creations. Her painting of Harriet, wherein she willfully alters Harriet’s stature, serves as a fitting example of her initial preference for the subjective, but although Emma is a flawed character, we recognize that she will eventually be reformed. We see similar faults (often exaggerated) in the other characters within the story. (Mrs. Elton’s snobbishness, Frank’s deceitfulness and Harriet’s naïveté are all good examples.)

Yasmine Gooneratne similarly discusses Emma’s selfish irresponsibility, but she focuses on its contribution to the comic effect of the novel: “*Emma* is a

work of comic art, indeed, as well as an exploration of moral standards and of social behavior. The events of a year educate and discipline its heroine, but her vanity is checked at its very source and partially redeemed by her own conscience" (137). Like Duckworth, Gooneratne sees *Emma* dealing with many of the same issues Austen examined in *Mansfield Park*, but presenting them within a more clearly comedic story. Emma, the individualistic heroine, is forced by loneliness to interact more with Highbury society, but her endeavors threaten to affect Mr. Elton, Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates, Harriet and herself negatively. Emma's only recourse is to repent her previous behavior. Once Emma comes to recognize the responsibility of her social position and her personal imperfections, she can change for the better. While portraying the development of Emma, according to Gooneratne, *Emma* introduces both the precarious situation of single women and the possibility of class fluidity.

In "Reading Characters: Self, Society, and Text in *Emma*," Joseph Litvak asserts that Emma "must exercise extraordinary ingenuity to keep her autonomous self intact" (90), and he posits that Emma's "moral education" by Mr. Knightley might be productively considered as a competition between two different interpretations of the self and society. For Litvak (as for a number of other more recent critics) the games, puzzles and charades within *Emma* convey important information about life in Highbury. Even Mr. Knightley, who remains purposefully aloof from the actual playing of the word game (Book III, Chapter V), has an interest in interpreting the novel's puzzles and determining their relationship to reality. Litvak finds that the resolution of the various puzzles and puzzling incidents prepares us for the novel's ending, wherein Mr. Knightley's style of interpretation seems to prevail and enable the happy union between himself and Emma, but (like Mudrick) Litvak finds that the novel's ending may not necessarily be a happy one because Emma is not really through with playing games her way. (Emma conceals the secret of Harriet's attachment to Knightley, revealing that she has not wholeheartedly adopted Mr. Knightley's open style of play.) Nevertheless, for Litvak, Emma and Mr. Knightley's relationship will be a happy one because the games that attracted them to each other never need to end.

Like Litvak, J.M.Q. Davies finds *Emma* a playful work, and he contends that one of the main reasons for the work's playfulness is "to tease readers into the realization that they too are participating in a sophisticated fictional game" (80). Like Mr. Elton's charade (Book I, Chapter IX) which Emma easily solves but immediately misapplies to Harriet (instead of herself), reading is a tricky business, especially when the surface meaning is easy to comprehend, but the underlying intent is difficult to discern. Emma uses some judgment and a good deal of guessing and speculation to resolve the riddles she encounters within the text, but the reader is meant to see that Mr. Knightley's more consistent reliance on careful judgment is the more reliable reading strategy.

A number of critics have noted how Austen's use of playful language makes establishing "truth" within the novel difficult. Richard Patterson on his dis-

cussion of the problematic nature of truth and certitude in *Emma* by quoting a scene from one of the book's final chapters: "Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken" (431). In a novel that features a heroine who misjudges reality and is predisposed to manufacture and believe her own version of the truth, it is easy to see truth and certitude (at least in one's *interpretation* of external circumstances) as one of the primary topics that *Emma* investigates. Many factors contribute to the impression that within *Emma*, truth becomes a relative term (457), especially since the individual characters' attempts to solidify a stable truth about their world mimics the readers' own search for a definitive understanding of the text. During the course of the novel, we see characters change their interpretation of evidence and reconsider previous beliefs in order to support their changing perceptions of what *is* the truth in the novel. This anxiety about stabilizing truth, evinced by the characters within the novel, ultimately enables Patterson to suggest that although within the novel truth may exist, a stable singular truth is past finding out (467).

As much as I may be inclined to agree with Patterson's assertions about the problematic nature of truth within *Emma*, I would also readily agree with the attitudes expressed by Alastair Duckworth in his "Jane Austen and the Conflict of Interpretations" wherein he argues for the superiority of critical approaches that are consonant with the historical realities of when Austen wrote. The ideas and attitudes historically accessible to Austen (which are many and varied) will most precisely reveal what Austen was trying to achieve in her work, a work that reflects not only the traditional attitudes of nineteenth-century England but dissenting attitudes as well.

David Monaghan may, however, offer the best advice of all about choosing a critical approach to Austen's work: "An understanding of Jane Austen's novels, I would argue, will be achieved, not by choosing between these various critical stances, but by adopting a more complex stance that reconciles their apparent contradictions" (in Todd 88). Although it may not be possible to reconcile the works of disparate critics in many cases, a broad understanding of the critical reception of Jane Austen's work affords us not only a richer reading of her novels but a better-informed understanding of the world at large.

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# Rereading Jane Austen: Dialogic Feminism in *Northanger Abbey* *Carole Gerster*

Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past.

—M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels gave men and women new ideas about the society they lived in, including a wide variety of ideas about how to understand themselves and behave toward one another. In an age of novel detractors, who feared the novel was dangerously influential, especially for impressionable women readers, Jane Austen declared herself an avid novel reader and admirer, and wrote her own novels in reaction to conservative ideas about gender roles and relations. Notable as her first mature work, *Northanger Abbey* reveals Austen's feminist impetus and intentions and demonstrates the strategies of parody and irony for which she is famous. In *Northanger Abbey* (completed as early as 1803, but withheld by publishers until posthumous publication in 1818), Austen revises established novel conventions to take issue with conservative ideas about women, defends novel readers and novels written by and about women and proposes a new feminist behavioral standard for novel heroes and heroines that she makes pointedly relevant to novel readers. With *Northanger Abbey*, Austen places herself in the midst of an ongoing dialogue within and between novels about women's true nature and proper role in order to engage other novelists and novel readers in dialogue and debate.

Feminist readings of *Northanger Abbey*, or any of Austen's other novels, are not universally acknowledged. Her novels have elicited widely diverse critical opinion. Some critics find Austen's novels staunchly feminist; others find them submissive to the status quo. The now widely accepted synthesis solution to this

critical impasse was offered in 1979 in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's oft-quoted *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Gilbert and Gubar seemed to resolve the critical controversy with their claim that Austen's novels, like other nineteenth-century women's writings, are, paradoxically, at once feminist and submissive. Arguing that Austen's novels subversively criticize but then submissively accept women's limited place in society, Gilbert and Gubar place Austen within the theory of palimpsest: that nineteenth-century women's writings contain subversive impulses but mask and ultimately dismiss them. Based in large part on their interpretation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Gilbert and Gubar find that nineteenth-century women's novels contain rebellious secondary female characters who serve as alter egos for both the novel's heroines and the women novelists themselves and who are, by novel's end, punished for their feminist impulses (73–78). This theory seemingly eliminates the either-or dichotomy but actually situates Austen on the conservative side of the controversy—as feminist only under the surface, in hidden meanings that are overridden by the end of the novel.

There is, however, another theory of the novel that also says novels contain dichotomous ideas, but does not regard nineteenth-century women writers as necessarily and ultimately conservative. Theories of the Russian novel theorist Mikhail Bakhtin reveal that novels are dialogic; they engage earlier texts, including earlier novels, in a variety of ways. Novels variously allude to, imitate, continue, update, challenge, parody, reinterpret and revise earlier texts and (in effect) engage them in dialogue in order to provoke reader response. Containing what Bakhtin calls a “mix of varied and opposing voices” (xxviii) rather than hidden meanings, Austen's *Northanger Abbey* includes conservative ideas about women, only to dismiss them in systematic and provocative ways, including irony, parody and the inclusion of secondary female characters who serve as foils (rather than alter egos) to the heroine and are systematically exposed (rather than punished) as both product and victim of male definitions of women.

Austen formed many of her ideas and learned much of her craft reacting to texts, particularly male-authored texts, that preceded her own. Austen's infamous irony and pointed parody took shape largely as a dialogic response to Samuel Richardson's ideas about women's proper behavior as expressed in his novels and in popular periodicals. Richardson's eighteenth-century novels, especially in his first novel, *Pamela or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), drew an unprecedentedly large number of readers and established conventions that could be easily imitated by novelists and quickly recognized by readers. Yet when Richardsonian conventions were most interestingly reused, it was not for purposes of imitation, but to promote ideas other than and even contrary to those that Richardson espoused. The best-known example is Henry Fielding's direct parody of Richardson's *Pamela*, in his novella *Shamela* (1741). Richardson's most famous heroine, Pamela Andrews, is a servant girl who must consistently defend her chastity against her wealthy employer's sexual advances. Pamela despises the

hero from his repeated rape attempts until the moment he sincerely proposes marriage; only then does she suddenly realize that she loves him. Pamela is rewarded with marriage to Mr. B, the wealthy would-be seducer turned guide and protector. In *Shamela*, Fielding directly parodies Richardson's *Pamela* by exaggerating Pamela's carefully cultivated reserve and guarded behavior as mere sham in order to snatch a wealthy husband. Fielding's charge is warranted, for within Richardson's novel, Pamela reveals the standards of behavior she follows. She says, "Men complain, I have heard, of women's reserves, yet slight them if they are not reserved" (*Pamela* 307), and she adheres to what she has heard. Fielding's *Shamela* admits she "pretended to be shy [and] pretended to be angry" and is convinced her behavior will make her the "mistress of a great estate" (*Shamela* 309, 320). In *Shamela* and again in *Joseph Andrews* (1842), Fielding's dialogic parodies of Pamela promote his own idea of natural rather than practiced modesty as a trait worthy to be admired in a woman and, in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* (1749), his heroines have no ambition to improve their status by marrying well. His heroines marry wealthy men, but they fall in love long before the heroes' true identities are revealed. Like Fielding, but to very different ends, Austen employs dialogic parody to reject Richardson's promotion of conscious innocence and to inspire readers to think differently about women and gender relations. Rather than have their own heroines act from conscious or even from natural modesty, Austen allows them to have sexual feelings, act on their feelings and be aware of the hero's socioeconomic status.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen brings her truly innocent—because country raised and socially ignorant—heroine, Catherine Morland, into genteel society in Bath, in order to show how Richardson's ideas about women are false to reality and to offer her own ideas about women's sexual nature and realistic courtly behavior. Austen adapts Fielding's use of an intrusive narrator to address the reader directly as a confessed author so there will be no mistake about her parodic intentions. The narrator opens the novel with a catalog of popular novel conventions and includes others throughout the novel to expose older representations as mere conventional means to imagine women and define her own protagonist, who emerges from the juxtapositions, as a new kind of heroine who falls "miserably short of the true heroic height" (40).

Like Fielding, Austen uses conventions unconventionally. The narrator announces that she is following the novel convention that a hero must be supplied if a young lady is to be considered a heroine (40) and has the hero, Henry Tilney, introduced to Catherine. Placed in a plot development that readers are invited to see as highly conventional, Austen's unconventional heroine exhibits behavior unexpected by readers. When, on parting from Henry, Catherine expresses her desire to see him again and to know him better, Austen creates a situation that allows her to expose Richardson's code of feminine decorum as unnatural, unnecessary and unrealistic. Even as the narrator mocks earlier omnipotent narrators for knowing exactly what is in women's minds, by admitting that she cannot be sure that Catherine thinks about Henry to the degree that she

dreams about him, readers are left in no doubt as to what Austen thinks about Richardsonian restrictions on women's behavior. The narrator hopes that any dream about Henry was only a slight one, "for if it be true, as a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is known to have dreamt of her" (50). Providing what Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia" and "double-voiced discourse" (262–63, 324) within a novel, Austen's parodic irony includes and reacts against the conservative view of women taken from an authority figure outside the novel. The "celebrated writer" Samuel Richardson, whose contribution in 1751 to what Ian Watt calls "the most popular of the *Ramblers*" (167), in fact wrote "that a young lady should be in love, and the love of the young gentleman undeclared, is a heterodoxy which prudence, and even policy must not allow" (letter to the *Rambler*). Austen's carefully targeted parody inflates Richardson's ideal of feminine passivity to show how unnaturally absurd it is, hold it up to ridicule and oppose it to Catherine's innocently natural behavior. Dreaming, like falling in love, Austen reminds her readers, is a natural reaction, which cannot be decorously orchestrated, and dreaming of a young man she is fond of exemplifies the new kind of unheroic and thus common and realistic behavior readers can expect from Catherine Morland.

Catherine's waking behavior is also in direct opposition to Richardson's rules of feminine decorum and corresponding characterizations. Unlike Richardson's Pamela, Catherine does not attempt to hide her feelings. As Henry snubs Catherine for neglecting her promise to walk with him, her feelings are "natural" rather than heroic. Instead of reacting in "conscious innocence" (108), Catherine is guilty of a Richardsonian heterodoxy by acting independent of artifice. Declaring to Henry, "I had ten thousand times rather have been with you" and "If Mr. Thorpe would only have stopped, I would have jumped out and run after you" (109), Catherine moves outside Richardsonian boundaries of the feminine role. Breaking the taboo that Richardson insists defines a woman worthy of men's attention, Catherine reveals that she is not immune to sexual feelings. For Austen, the prescribed double standard of sexual conduct is nonsense, and unrestricted behavior such as Catherine's is natural and sometimes necessary. To refute Richardson's notion that men reject women with desires of their own and that women must court affection by affectation, Austen notes that Henry has come to admire Catherine's freshness (97) and is impressed with Catherine's declaration of affection (109). In fact, when Henry in turn declares his love for Catherine, Austen's reactionary irony is again at play as she reveals that Henry's affection stemmed from Catherine's to the extent that "her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought" (40).

Austen makes her new standard of natural behavior pointedly relevant to readers as she distinguishes between behavior prescribed by Richardson and actual human experiences. Equating the world outside the novel with her own representation, Austen writes that while Henry's having fallen in love with Cath-

erine because she first revealed her feelings is new to romance, it cannot be as new a circumstance in “common life,” or the narrator will have to claim an overactive imagination (240). To suggest that there is nothing wildly imaginative about Catherine and Henry’s behavior, Austen compares it to real-life behavior recognizable to readers. By the end of *Northanger Abbey*, Henry’s earlier conclusion, based on his comparison between matrimony and dancing—that, in both, the man gets to choose the woman only to refuse (95)—is ironically reversed. As Catherine takes the initiative to act on her own feelings and is accordingly rewarded with marriage to someone she loves because of her supposed indecorous behavior, Austen reverses the conventional notion that men (and heroes) must be the active suitors and women (and heroines) mere passive objects of their desires. For Catherine, who does not see marriage and dancing as the same (95), as well as for Austen, marriage is no mere dancing matter.

Ignoring Austen’s irony, critics who find Austen rejecting feminist subversions in *Northanger Abbey* also find Catherine Morland guilty of judgment errors that must be corrected by the hero. To read Austen in terms of formula fiction, conventionalized expectations and cultural assumptions about women that her novels expose as false to reality is to ignore her feminist revisions through ironic reversals. Austen’s irony identifies her heroines’ mistakes as the same behavior that stereotypical heroines are praised and rewarded for: reliance on male approval. Initiating the convention, Richardson’s Pamela accepts Mr. B’s ideas about woman’s chastity and woman’s subordinate place and decides she will “serve him with a sincere obedience” for she believes that she has “nothing else to offer” (371). Catherine initially allows her own judgments about Henry’s father, General Tilney, to be corrected by Henry, but both must finally come to Catherine’s conclusion. Like Austen’s other heroines, Catherine makes mistakes, but she comes to self-knowledge and knowledge of the society she enters through experience and the exercise of her own judgment. In spite of the fact that Catherine is little used to making judgments for herself, she quickly sees through the schemes and false promises of her first suitor, John Thorpe, and declares him “disagreeable” (88). Unlike Richardson’s pious heroines and rake heroes, Catherine is not interested in the novel’s rake, Captain Tilney, nor he in her. Austen rejects, as Gilbert and Gubar note, “stories in which women simply defend their virtue against male advances” (199). Like Austen’s other heroines, Catherine is not tested for purity, but for her ability to think and judge aright from the authority of her own experiences, often in the face of opposing male wisdom. Catherine is also courted, as a daughter-in-law, by the powerful patriarch General Tilney, and it is his conventional views of women that the unconventional Catherine directly confronts and exposes. Henry, her chosen suitor, as Gilbert and Gubar note, treats Catherine like a stereotyped heroine (138), only to learn (as they fail to see) that she is not, and to join in Catherine’s rebellion against her father’s false views, as Austen parodies the notion of women as frail, dependent beings who require males to guide and define them.

As Henry attempts to play the conventional role of mentor to Catherine, Aus-

ten subtly alludes to Richardson's *Pamela* to undermine Henry's well-cultivated judgments in favor of Catherine's untutored ones. Henry is surprised to learn that Catherine, unlike Pamela and a plethora of novel heroines following Pamela, keeps no journal to record what she wears, whom she impresses with her appearance and what man distresses her. He presumes to know that she keeps such an account, what subjects she will discuss and even—like Richardson's Mr. B, who dictates Pamela's final account of him, in his rules to regulate her conduct—furnishes Catherine with a laudatory account of what she should say about him (48). Yet while Mr. B taunts Pamela by attacking the chastity he insists she maintain and forcing her to accept his test of her virtue and his image of worthy women, Henry teases Catherine only to affirm, finally, her disbelief in sex-linked characteristics. To her protest that she keeps no journal, Henry first claims superior knowledge, declaring that he knows how young ladies behave and that everyone knows the female talent for writing good letters comes from practice in journal writing. To Catherine's additional protest that women are not always superior letter writers, Henry then claims that men are the superior writers, reasoning that women have little to say and pay little attention to such things as grammar. When Catherine is offended, Henry must give the only answer left to him that in everything where taste is involved, "excellence is pretty well divided between the sexes" (49). Austen's gender equality advocacy is not subtle. Guided by Catherine, Henry comes to the conclusion that those supposed feminine accomplishments in letter writing, music and drawing (all of which Catherine is deficient) are a matter of cultivated taste to which members of either sex can be trained rather than a matter of sexual predisposition.

Austen also directly alludes to another woman's novel to help undermine Henry's supposed superior judgments. Catherine's first mistake is her early reliance on Henry for instruction. Because she claims to know nothing about drawing or cultivated taste and is embarrassed about her ignorance, Henry's lecture on the picturesque prompts her to see beauty wherever Henry sees beauty (125). This episode provides Austen the opportunity to challenge ideas about feminine vanity and inferiority. Austen reverses the charge of female vanity by identifying it as the province of men who wish to keep women ignorant so they might be guided with a superior male wisdom. Her charge of male vanity includes reference to Frances Burney's novel, *Camilla* (1796), in order to link the author of another woman author with her own and to define both as exposes of a self-enhancing male attitude toward women: "To [Burney's] treatment of the subject I will only add in justice to men, that [although to most men] imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, [a few more reasonable men desire nothing more] in women than ignorance" (125). Until Henry recognizes Catherine's good judgment, Austen follows Burney's lead in depicting the "advantages of natural folly" (125) in a woman, for Catherine is not well informed, and Henry takes advantage of her ignorance to minister to his vanity.

Henry's ideas of what is natural and what is cultivated are contrasted with

Catherine's ideas, so that readers have no doubt whose judgment to accept. When Catherine's attention to Henry's knowledgeable instruction regarding the picturesque is so attentive that he believe he has helped her cultivate a good deal of "natural taste," Austen mocks Henry's idea of natural taste as adherence to the rearrangement of nature according to the rules of "foregrounds, distances, and second distances—side screens and perspectives—lights and shades" and, ironically, defines it as nonsense compared to Catherine's actual natural taste. What Henry teaches Catherine seems to go against every notion of beauty she has, so that, following Henry's ideas, it seems as if the view from the top of a high hill no longer affords a good view and clear blue sky no longer indicates a nice day (125). For Catherine to continue to see the world through Henry Tilney's trained eye would give her, Austen suggests, an absurdly artificial view, as well as continue to subject her to his paternal attitude toward women. Instead, Austen ironically reverses reader expectations to find a heroine governed by the hero. Catherine absorbs Henry's instructions only to the point that in his absence she cannot recognize the picturesque even when she sees it (1811). And stimulated by her reading of another woman's novel, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Catherine directly confronts sexist notions of male supremacy and female subordination.

Critics who see the gothic portion of *Northanger Abbey* as a flaw in Austen's novel often contend that the realistically depicted Catherine turns out to be a stereotyped heroine after all. But here again Austen's irony is effectively at work as, in Bakhtin fashion, her feminist stance takes the form of evoking, in order to negate reader expectation to find a heroine who must learn not to be influenced by novels and to accept reality as defined by the hero. Austen's use of gothic fantasy is not, as many critics would have it, a parody of the gothic romance, although, as a feminist, Austen revises Radcliffe as well as Richardson. As she reveals elsewhere in the novel, her satire is not directed at novels or even romances per se, but at a male-defined reality that provides the stereotypes of women who inhabit those novels. In her famous Chapter 5 defense of the novel, Austen begins by attacking the convention of condemning novels while writing one. And Austen's critique of male-authored history, first expressed in her youthful burlesque, "History of England" (1791), also finds expression in Catherine's dissatisfaction with history as wars and quarrels between religious leaders and kings, with all the men "so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all," even though she realizes that much of it "must be invention," which elsewhere delights her (123). The hero's sister, Eleanor Tilney, responds that she is satisfied with historians' inventions because she knows invention is mixed with fact and because she believes that historians must be depended on for things that cannot be observed for oneself (123). Combined, the narrator's defense of novels, Catherine's critique of male-based history and Eleanor's belief in personal observation define Austen's feminist position in depicting Catherine at Northanger Abbey.

The gothic episode ironically reverses the long-popular comic portrayal of



what Ian Watt terms the “novel reading girl” (152), a portrayal imitated by Richardson with Mr. B condemning Pamela for reading novels and romances and accusing her of being influenced to the point of creating “inventions” about him that have the “pretty air of romance” (268). The portrayal remained popular in novels familiar to Austen. It was used by Richardson’s contemporary, Charlotte Lennox, in *The Female Quixote* (1752), wherein the heroine imagines she is being pursued by men, including “an impious Ravisher” (20), and is eventually rescued from her delusions by a suitor who offers conventional courtship and marriage. The portrayal is given to a secondary character in Frances Burney’s *Camilla* (1796), Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) and Mary Brunton’s *Self Control* (1811) as foils to the heroine become avid novel readers and fall victim to their overworked imaginations. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen once again makes her heroine the novel reader, but where Lennox imitates Richardson, Austen revises him. While Richardson’s Mr. B dismisses what he sees as Pamela’s assessment of him as a romance villain, and Richardson’s narrative confirms his judgment that he is not really a villain, Austen’s Catherine makes the same assessment of General Tilney, and Austen’s narrative confirms her judgment.

Austen’s depiction of Catherine at Northanger Abbey is her defense of the “novel reading girl.” Catherine’s inventions about General Tilney are grounded in facts and take on the air of a Radcliffe romance because his conventional views of women are as far from reality as those of the conventional novel villain. Unlike John Thorpe, who refuses to read novels written by women because they are stupid and filled with “unnatural stuff” (69–70), Catherine, Eleanor and Henry are all avid novel readers who especially enjoy Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*. But Henry, who read *Udolpho* with his hair standing on end for two days (121), is like Mr. B in that he does not take novels or novel-reading young women seriously. When Catherine refers to the horrors in a new novel shortly to come out of London and Eleanor understands her to mean horrors of life, Henry insists on distinct differences. Henry takes the occasion to expound on the unwarranted fears of his sister and the general weakness of women, who, he says, “may want observation, discernment, judgment” (127). Although Henry has his self-enhancing notions about women corrected, Austen’s novel is more than a dismissal about stereotypes. Catherine’s gothic fantasy is Austen’s reevaluation of the relationship between the novel and life, as seen from the perspective and authority of women’s stories. While Catherine’s mother often reads Richardson’s novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, because new books are not readily available, Catherine is to be educated with the help of a woman’s novel. As Catherine says, *Grandison* is not at all like *Udolpho* (62). Austen shows Catherine’s imagination engaged in exploring abnormalities concealed beneath the polite social surface—not to revive Radcliffe’s gothic horrors but to provide a woman’s perspective on social structures that regulate behavior between the sexes, present a new image of woman capable of judging for herself and convince readers that women’s novels are a means of education for men and women.

In her defense of the novel, Austen reveals that by having Catherine read Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, and thus allowing Radcliffe's heroine to be "patronized" by the heroine of her own novel, she seeks to reverse the trend of dismissing the important work of the novelist. She cites the novels of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth to justify her claims for the novel's importance. Whereas Richardson wrote his novels expressly as antidote to women's romances, Austen writes to reclaim a female literary tradition and deny that women are victims of their own imaginings. Foreshadowing her intentions in the narrative proper, Austen's defense of the novel deliberately undermines reader expectations for male expertise about women with her claim that women's novels are examples of intellectual achievement and originality incompatible with the myth of female inferiority. Rejecting stories told by the hundreds of abridgers of the history of England and authors who publish lines from Milton, Pope and Prior, Austen offers her feminist critique of the male-authored and -perpetuated literary tradition of stories invented about women for which her own (and her heroine's) alternative stories criticize and correct (58). Austen's defense of the novel reclaims the novel genre, begun by women before Richardson, for women, and refutes men's self-aggrandizing ideas about women in order to authorize women's ideas about themselves.

Catherine is not a deluded reader of romantic fiction, but she is misled by Henry in his descriptions of the Abbey before they arrive. Ready to reject the gothic horrors Henry's teasing description of Northanger Abbey has prepared her to experience (164–66), Catherine is nevertheless frightened when a large chest rouses her curiosity and an old-fashioned cabinet precisely matches Henry's description. Her explorations lead her to discover for herself neatly folded linen in the chest (170) and a laundry bill in the cabinet (177), instead of the ancient manuscript Henry had suggested she would find. Catherine corrects her own erroneous expectations and takes blame for the absurdity of her fantasy, while recognizing that her error stemmed from taking Henry seriously (170, 178). Like Radcliffe before her, Austen dismisses gothic horrors with rational explanations, here derived from Catherine's own self-regulating perceptions. Like the heroine Emily in *Udolpho*, Catherine's fears are based on more than a heightened female sensibility, and, like Emily, Catherine learns to conquer them and to cope with real disaster.

When Catherine seriously exercises her propensity to view the world in terms of Radcliffe's novel and begins to perceive gothic terrors beyond what Henry has prepared her for in her independent judgments about General Tilney, critics see her as a deluded female Quixote who mistakes life for a romance until she is properly corrected and humbled by the hero. Here, Austen's irony is pointed directly at reader expectations. Readers are invited to see Catherine as deluded and then to have to correct their own expectations. Just as her own observations allow Catherine to correct her absurd expectations, it is her own experiences and observations, which cannot be dismissed in her suspicions about General Tilney. Henry's description of gothic mysteries depicted in a cabinet containing

a manuscript of the memoirs of the “wretched Mathilda” is mocking, but Henry is too amused by Catherine’s interest to finish his story and suggests that she complete it herself (166). In doing so, Catherine reappropriates Henry’s unfinished variation of Radcliffe’s story in order to tell Mrs. Tilney’s and her own. When Catherine learns of Mrs. Tilney’s early death, it is not a fictitious Mathilda, but the woes of Henry’s dead mother that Catherine’s informed fancy pursues and brings to the light. She has experienced how General Tilney continually stifles his children’s spirits to the degree that when they are together, only he speaks (163); how he commands Eleanor to give her opinion but will not let her speak (180); and how she is herself relieved whenever he leaves their company (183). Catherine finds proofs of the General’s having also been a cruel and unkind husband when he shuns his dead wife’s favorite walk and when she learns that he does not value his wife’s portrait (183–84). Challenging male authority, she rejects what her chaperone’s husband, Mr. Allen, had told her while still in Bath: that novel villains are unlike life because they are “unnatural” (185). Catherine begins to notice that the General reminds her of Montoni, the sinister villain of *Udolpho* (who also courts the heroine for another man, to his own advantage, by bringing her to an ancient abbey), and to entertain the possibility that Mrs. Tilney’s premature death has been brought on by the General, or even that she still lived, locked away for reasons unknown (190–91).

In searching Mrs. Tilney’s room for proof of the General’s villainy, only to find a well-appointed, modern apartment, Catherine’s common sense again tells her she has been mistaken in her expectations of finding the fragmented manuscript depicted by Henry, but she maintains her suspicions about the General and now surmises that he would not leave evidence of his crimes lying about (195–96). Catherine senses the gothic villainy behind the General’s lavish modernizations of the Abbey. The gothic illusions Catherine dismisses are again those Henry had prepared her for, but like the General’s villainy, Catherine’s ideas about him do not disappear. The imagined horrors of Catherine’s gothic fancy turn out to be no less than the real horrors of what Henry takes to be civilized order.

It is, in fact, Henry, in his cautions to Catherine to dismiss her fantasies, who ironically reveals that the social world commanded by the General corresponds with her apprehensions of its evils. Austen’s multiple ironies exemplify the kind of Bakhtinian double-voice discourse within the novel that “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions . . . dialogically interrelated” (324). In Henry’s cautions to dismiss her suspicions that the General was cruel to or even locked up or killed his wife, he questions Catherine’s judgment simply because of the country and the age they live in, their education and their laws, and he asks her to consult her own “understanding,” her own sense of “the probable” and her “own observation” (199). As Henry unintentionally suggests, the General is allowed to be a tyrant

because the country and age found justification in the subordination of women, offered women the nominal education of feminine accomplishments while subjecting them to the counsels of superior male knowledge and defined married women as legally nonexistent and men as legal owners of their wives and children. The socially conventional Henry also inadvertently reminds the reader, with caution to Catherine to consult her own understanding and observation, that she has observed and understood the General's behavior. And it is Henry who adds to the readers' understanding with his admission that his mother often "had much to bear," for his father's "temper injured her" and he had loved her only "as well as it was possible for him to" (199).

Austen revises Radcliffe's novel, not to imitate or dismiss it, but to make it pointedly relevant. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, "Austen brilliantly relocates the villain of the exotic, faraway gothic locale here, now, in England" (136). And Mrs. Tilney had suffered from marriage to a tyrant who is allowed to lord over his wife and children by laws and customs of the age. For Austen, gothic conversions serve to show the dark underside of the familiar. Henry's correction to Catherine functions to thwart reader expectations for a love-mentor. As Eleanor has earlier revealed—following Henry's attempt to restrict Catherine's use of the word *nice* to mean "neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement"—the mocked mentor Henry is "more nice than wise" (123).

Initially, Catherine makes the mistake of following Pamela's submissive behavior, as she rejects conclusions drawn from her own experiences in reading and in life in order to accept Henry's correctives. Blaming herself for submitting to a delusion (201), the whole of which could be traced to her reading, Catherine clears the General from her suspicions to the point of maintaining only that he is not very nice and resolves to act henceforth with good sense and continue to be improved by Henry (202–203). Yet when Catherine's "visions of romance" are over (201) and the "anxieties of common life" succeed them (201, 203), Austen's story fully vindicates Catherine's initial judgments about the General. Like Catherine's observation-informed gothic fantasy, Austen's novel confounds realism and romance by having the General enact the role of the stereotypical villain Catherine found him to be. Catherine refuses to be misled by her imagination (221), only to have General Tilney order her "driven from the house" (232). What Henry considered mere fancy turns out to have "reality and substance," for Catherine's anxiety is shown to have "foundation in fact" and her "fears in probability" as she must face the "actual and natural evil" of the General's patriarchal authority (225). By carefully employing the conventions the intrusive narrator mocked throughout the novel, Austen demonstrates that the General's views of and behavior toward women are as morally unjust and absurd as those of conventional novel villains. It is not a wicked woman, but General Tilney who enacts the villainous role of attempting to reduce the heroine to wretchedness by taking her letters, "ruining her character" and "turning her out doors" (42). It is not the novel's rake, Captain Tilney, but the General who forces Catherine into a "travelling chaise and four" (141). And it is not Cathe-

rine's father but the General who locks up his daughter (37). Eleanor Tilney is not only locked up at Northanger Abbey and prevented from marrying the man of her choice, but must follow her father's orders to send Catherine off (223).

Austen's ironies abound at the novel's end. With Catherine's judgment vindicated, Henry must reassess his earlier position. As he attempts to explain his father's conduct, he must accept Catherine's interpretation that "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or maligned his cruelty" (243). What Catherine learns from Henry's instruction is, ironically, that even he and Eleanor may have flaws (202). Instead of the heroine's recognizing the hero's good sense and adhering to his views, Catherine's rebellion from convention is followed by Henry's, as he acts as bold as Catherine in defying his father's orders to reject her (243). Catherine's fantasy about General Tilney demonstrates her ability to judge aright, but the General's own fantasies about Catherine are exposed as invention without foundation in fact. His changing beliefs about her—first that she is wealthy and thus a potential economic asset, which leads to his courting her as a wife for his son, and then that she is destitute and thus a social climbing inferior, which leads to his ill treatment of her and expulsion from his home—are based not on observation and understanding, but on the fanciful inventions of the one person in the novel who does not read novels (especially women's novels), Catherine's rejected suitor, John Thorpe. Like the General, Thorpe wishes only to advance his own fortunes by connection with a wealthy woman and passes on erroneous information to feed his own vanity (241). In what is at once a final parodic twist on Richardson's *Pamela* plot and an ironic rejoinder to Fielding, it is the villainous General and the rejected suitor, rather than the heroine, who are guilty of unfounded illusions and are exposed as inconstant, fickle, social-climbing (male) Shamelas.

In keeping with her parodic revisions, Austen revises the conventional secondary women characters who typically serve as foils to the heroine, in contrasting them with her comparatively plain-looking and independent-minded heroine. Contrary to conventional depictions, Catherine, at her best, is only "almost pretty" (38) and makes independent decisions while Eleanor Tilney is beautiful and elegant and serves the dictates of her father. More like the typical novel heroine than the heroine's foil, Eleanor is submissively silenced by the same patriarchal authority against which Catherine rebels. And while Catherine openly reveals her feelings about Henry, until Eleanor cannot help but have knowledge of Catherine's feelings (92), Eleanor is silent about her own feelings to the point of not even mentioning the suitor who is not allowed to address her. She waits with patient passivity for her hero to be, like Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, sufficiently raised about her in social and economic status to become a suitable bridegroom. With Catherine's apt description of Eleanor as a young lady with white beads surrounding her head (77), Austen crowns this angelic foil with a halo. Although Eleanor is not reduced to an exemplar of feminine chastity, she represents the prevailing feminine ideal. She,

unlike Catherine, is acted upon rather than acting for herself. Unlike an Austen heroine, Eleanor exerts no influence and is not held up as a model for imitation. Neither is she criticized. Austen's rejection of feminine passivity offers no criticism of women, but instead critiques patriarchal paternalism and the recommended code of feminine behavior popularized by Richardson. Placing Eleanor as a foil to Catherine, Austen demonstrates injustices suffered by women and offers her heroine as an alternative role model. Unlike Richardson, Austen does not sentimentalize suffering but, from a feminist perspective, examines what it means to be conventionally feminine. Eleanor's "habitual suffering" (246) is neither laughable nor laudable. Catherine refuses to suffer even during the brief time she thinks she has wrongly accused General Tilney; she instead simply resolves to act henceforth with good sense and decides that all she can do is forgive herself and be happy (202). Austen shows Eleanor suffering, not to prove her worth but to reveal that she is a victim of the dictates and silencing demands of her father.

As a second foil to Catherine, Isabella Thorpe, like Shamela, affects an angelic demeanor, playing the prescribed feminine role in order to entrap a rich husband. In constant pursuit of men she claims to be ignoring (63–64, 68, 90, 154), Isabella's mercenary motives merit Catherine's charge of "inconsistency and fickleness" (205). Contrasted with Isabella's "decided pretension" (76), Catherine is, as Henry and Eleanor recognize, everything that Isabella is not: "open, artless, guileless" (207). Isabella lacks the self-defining autonomy of Austen's heroines, for she defines herself only through her ability to attract men in a way that will answer to male definitions of proper womanhood. Unlike Richardson's consciously innocent Pamela, Isabella is not rewarded with marriage, and unlike Fielding's consciously hypocritical Shamela, Isabella is not dismissed without explanation. Austen reveals that, like Eleanor, Isabella is both a product and a victim of male definitions of women. Isabella, not Catherine, is the deluded victim of romance, but not because she is an impressionable novel-reading girl. As Austen reveals in her parodic allusion to Richardson's Pamela Andrews, Isabella adopts the opinions of a special friend, a "Miss Andrews" (61, 62), and behaves accordingly. Isabella helps highlight Catherine as a new kind of heroine who acts beyond the typically allotted role of attracting and pleasing men and who likes other women. The beautiful Isabella is parodied as rival to her prototype, as she tells Catherine about Miss Andrews's beauty and how she feared Catherine's brother would fall in love with Miss Andrews instead of Isabella (132). To Catherine, who is deliberately slow in reaching her conclusion, Isabella is a false friend, interested only in her own advancement (114), whose exaggerated professions of attachment cannot match the genuine friendship shared by Catherine and Eleanor (163). Although readers are not asked to condone Isabella's behavior, Austen does not depict her dependent situation—her status of having neither consequence nor fortune, her need to marry to escape future impoverishment and her brother's ill treatment—to suggest that if she does not marry she will have to be dependent on a brother who would consider

her a troublesome burden. The novel also accepts Isabella's recognition that in spite of what romance novels claim, everyone needs money (153).

Consistent with Austen's revolt against restrictive definitions of women and with her efforts to represent women as individuals rather than fixed types, even her foils run counter to conventional stereotypes and challenge cherished assumptions about women. Eleanor is aware of her own powerlessness and its cause. Confined and silenced, she drops her reserve only with Catherine, finding voice to express her sense of injustice, as she scorns her subservience in recognizing that she is not a real mistress of the abbey and has no power of her own (223). In undermining established notions of idealized feminine passivity, Austen's irony is at work to challenge gender role stereotypes. Until Catherine's presence in his house exposes the General's cruelty, both Eleanor and Henry passively comply with his commanding authority. Austen again challenges gender role stereotypes when Catherine recognizes that Isabella's mischief is equaled by Captain Tilney's (218). Like Isabella, who abandons James Morland for the wealthier Captain Tilney, the equally fickle, equally inconstant Captain abandons Isabella for the wealthier Charlotte Davis (216).

Following the standard *Pamela* plot, Austen also provides marriages for her heroines, only to revise traditional interpretations of what marriage means. Critics often find that Catherine's marriage undermines her earlier critique of patriarchy. Gilbert and Gubar note that Catherine, "in true heroic style," like Pamela and "like so many of Pamela's daughters," marries "the man of her dreams and is thereby elevated to his rank" (132) because marriage "is the only accessible form of self-definition for girls in her society" (127). They fail to see how Austen's ideas about marriage emerge from juxtaposition with conventional heroines' marriages and how Catherine's marriage emphasizes the importance of intelligent choice for a humane rather than a hierarchical relationship.

The marriage of an Austen heroine is, like the heroine herself, largely defined by juxtaposition against conventional representations. In *Northanger Abbey*, Eleanor Tilney's marriage to a man of title and fortune provides the expected fairy-tale ending, made conventional by the novels of Richardson and Fielding, and is parodied as mere convention and contrasted with the marriage of Catherine and Henry. In dialogic parody, Austen mocks—as the kind of "probable circumstance" Fielding created to bring heroine, hero, and readers to the inevitable happy ending—how Eleanor's suitor, rather than Catherine's, is unexpectedly and suddenly sufficiently raised above her in social and economic status to be accepted by General Tilney as bridegroom for his daughter and to make the General momentarily good humored enough to allow his son to marry Catherine (246). Deliberately emphasizing Eleanor's marriage as a contrived *deus ex machina*, Austen mocks rule-bound convention by refusing to present Eleanor's husband in person; she notes that "the rules" of convention do not allow her to present a new character at the end of the narrative (247). The mocked fairy-tale ending allows Austen to ridicule General Tilney's patriarchal attitude. He sees his daughter as an extension of her husband and defines her worth in terms of

her husband's wealth and title. Continually boasting about his material possessions, he defines his daughter as a mere object of exchange, who has only now become a valuable possession. He has loved her so well as when he can call her "Your ladyship" (246–47).

Included for readers to recognize as the romanticized artifice, against which the real is measured, Eleanor's marriage precedes Catherine's. Catherine never finds or marries wealth and title. Catherine does not even rise to reside in Northanger Abbey, for she marries the younger son, whose home and wealth, compared to his older brother's, are modest. Henry's attitude—while waiting at the newly built, unfinished and aptly named Woodston for his father's approval to marry Catherine, in making some improvements to his home and waiting for her help to complete them (246)—reflects Austen's positive view of marriage as a shared partnership. Austen eschews the standard conduct book, morality-lesson conclusion expected in novels by ending *Northanger Abbey* with a direct address to readers, asking them to decide whether the novel has attempted to "recommend parental tyranny, or reward finial disobedience" (248). In her deconstruction of the typical novel ending, Austen makes it clear that readers can choose both parental tyranny and filial disobedience, since General Tilney's tyrannical orders to separate Catherine and Henry (247) lead to a disobedient secret correspondence between them (246) that allows them to strengthen their knowledge of and attachment to one another (248). In an Austen novel, the heroine's marriage is not to a ruling superior; it takes place realistically in a patriarchal society yet offers an unexpected alternative. With perseverance, a younger generation can recognize, critique and successfully oppose patriarchal tyranny.

Rather than imitating the conventional passive and pious heroines who inspire men to control their supposedly otherwise uncontrollable carnal appetites, Austen's heroines actively expose social inequities and are held up as models for imitation. The "liberties" Catherine's imagination dares to take regarding General Tilney (201) are inspired by reading another woman's novel. Catherine, as a novel reader who takes women's novels seriously, serves as a role model for Austen's readers, who might also begin to challenge traditional wisdom regarding women's role and relations between the sexes.

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*Austen's Northanger Abbey:*  
A Bibliographic Study  
*James R. Keller*

*Northanger Abbey* may be accurately characterized as one of Jane Austen's problem novels—those works demonstrating a great deal of merit, enough to warrant the attention and delight of readers and critics for nearly two centuries, but nevertheless possessing flaws that cannot remain unnoticed by the discerning reader familiar with her later, more polished works: *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. The multiple scholarly responses to *Northanger Abbey* have in most cases been possessed of a single-mindedness uncharacteristic of scholarship. Yet they seem unable to resolve the problem of the novel's aesthetic unity with any finality, the overwhelming majority of critics preoccupied with the real or fancied connection between the Bath and Northanger sections of the novel. After nearly a century of this ongoing debate, still no solution impends. There is, however, room for a fair amount of critical nuance within this tedious debate, and it is here that we must find material worthy of recounting.

*Northanger Abbey* was the first written of Austen's novels, and yet, not surprisingly, it was the last published. There can be little doubt that the author was somewhat dissatisfied with the literary product. The portion of *Northanger* that has proved the most problematic is the parody of gothic romance in the second volume of the work, and it is this section of the completed novel that most clearly reveals the lingering influence of the burlesque, a technique that defines her juvenalia (Southam 280). The novel's original composition has been accurately dated to 1798–1799, and it is speculated that revisions continued periodically over the next two decades: 1803, 1809 and 1816. The publication of the novel in 1818 was five months after Austen's death in 1817. Moreover, it was published along with *Persuasion*, another of Austen's works fraught with difficulties. The late publication seems to have been anticipated by the author before her death: the initial volume contains an authorial preface in which she apolo-

gizes for those elements of the novel that, to the contemporary reader, must seem dated. Here, she obliquely refers to the novel's gothic motif, a remnant of the vogue for gothic romance in the 1790s. The novel, originally entitled *Susan: A Novel in 2 Volumes*, was sold to a country publisher, Crosby and Company, for a mere ten pounds early in Austen's career, but the work never saw a printing. Austen's brother Henry repurchased the novel and resold it after Austen's death (Chapman 74).

The responses of her contemporaries to the publication of the novel were a mixture of admiration and disappointment. There was a recognition of a portion of Austen's usual brilliance in the final two novels, published together, but there was also a realization that the novels lacked the polish of her previously published work. An 1818 review in the *British Critic* praised the novel, advising readers that it was "one of the very best of Miss Austen's productions" and well worth their time (Southam 83). Another reviewer simply remarked that the two novels had been published together and that *Northanger Abbey* was the superior work. Austen's contemporaries admired her skill in creating authentic representations of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century middle class. They praised the modesty of her subject matter—her preoccupation with the events of domestic life. One reviewer remarks that her skill lies entirely in her "talent for observation" and her reliable portrayal of human behavior (Southam 81). Her characters share all of the minor imperfections of humanity; she never resorts to exaggeration in her account of human virtues or flaws (Southam 18).

The negative observations of her contemporary readers focus primarily on her treatment of General Tilney and the Abbey portion of the novel. In a letter written to a friend in 1818, novelist Maria Edgeworth remarks that the general is not realistically drawn, and another commentator laments the "considerable want of delicacy" in the Abbey scene, going on to observe that Austen has not employed her usual sensitivity in the portrayal of General Tilney (Southam 17). A still more critical view of her work came considerably later in the century when one reader complained that *Northanger Abbey* "on the whole is crude, the interest insufficient, the story incompletely worked out" (Southam 204). A broad critique of Austen's early novels concludes that she is not so careful in drawing a parallel between iniquity and moral deficiency as she is later in her career (Southam 262). Although her readership diminished for a brief time immediately after her death in 1817, Austen's readers gradually increased during the fifty years between the printing of her last two novels and the publication of a biography by her nephew Austen-Leigh in 1870 (Southam 21). In 1862, Julia Kavanagh devoted a chapter of her critical work, *English Women of Letters*, to Austen's novels. Here she applauds the author's realistic portrayal of the events of common life but offers some stinging criticism of *Northanger Abbey* (Southam 177).

Austen's reputation began to grow following the publication of the *Memoir* in 1870 and has continued to appreciate, arriving at the current fascination with her work. However, *Northanger Abbey*, despite the author's now universally

recognized merit, has continued as the focus of scholarly admonition. This is not to say the novel has not been appreciated for its strengths, but academics cannot seem to shuffle off their preoccupation with the novel's aesthetic unity, and even studies that make a pretense to a new and refreshing approach to the text frequently end up relating the subject matter to the incompatibility of the two volumes of the text and the obvious inferiority of the second.

The novel is the story of an unextraordinary young woman named Catherine Morland who tries to make her way through the trials and pitfalls of the late eighteenth-century courtship rituals. Leaving her country home, she accompanies family friends, the Allens, to Bath, where she makes an assortment of acquaintances of both good and bad character, specifically two families—the Thorpes and the Tilneys. Catherine must learn to discern the not-so-subtle variations in the ambitions, values and motivations of these two groups. This dilemma leads to the long-expected alignment of Catherine with the Tilneys and the surprisingly poor treatment of her by the Tilney patriarch. Of course, obstacles are eventually surmounted, misunderstandings clarified and objections overcome, opening the way for the marriage of Catherine with the Tilney son, Henry.

The problem of aesthetic unity in the novel arises from the attempted parody of gothic romance in the second volume of the work. The narrative seems to get off track for a period while the author burlesques the common elements of late eighteenth-century gothic and specifically Anne Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*. The narrative processes set in motion in Bath, the same processes that are intended to bring Catherine Moreland into the arms of Henry Tilney, are suspended as Catherine explores her fears of Northanger Abbey, fears based on her familiarity with gothic fiction. Her imaginative reactions to the new setting are based on assumptions derived from a steady diet of bad sentimental novels. Only after she is chastised by Henry for her uncharitable assumptions about General Tilney's character is the narrative able to progress to the expected conclusion. The preoccupation with gothic burlesque in the Northanger segment of the novel creates a stark and aesthetically unsettling contrast with the realism of the first portion of the work, and whereas several critics have sought to explain away this problem by suggesting that the two halves of the novel are an intentional contrast between realism and gothicism, the structure and development of the novel remain problematic in the minds of most Austen scholars.

There are a plethora of critical positions inspired by the debate over the work's unity. Academics have, in this debate, shown themselves persistent regarding the question and resourceful, if not tedious, about its answer. The commentary on this subject can be rather comfortably divided into two camps: those who, by some critical sleight of hand, wish to rescue the novel from outright condemnation and dismissal and those who are comfortable with the conclusion that the novel is flawed. Mary Lascelles, in *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939), comments that the parody of the Northanger segment of the novel, particularly Catherine's suspicions of General Tilney's character, is not adequately integrated into the narrative. The gothic parody does not contribute to the advancement of

the plot, nor does the crisis or conclusion of the novel rely on or even acknowledge the significance of this material (59, 64). Marvin Mudrick, in his book *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952), maintains that the author has intentionally created a contrast and an aesthetic disharmony between the two halves of the narrative in order to demonstrate the superiority of one set of aesthetic principles over another. If the two halves of the novel signify the contrast between the realistic and gothic literary genres, respectively, then the novel must be prioritizing and advocating the former over the latter. The burlesque of the gothic is intended to demonstrate the inferiority of gothicism and burlesque as a literary style.

Another critic devoted to the redemption of the novel is Andrew Wright, author of *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure* (1953). Wright contends that the novel is intended to be a parody, a rejection of gothicism, and that the realism in the first portion of it is calculated to intensify the ridicule and make the burlesque of gothicism and Anne Radcliffe in particular shine more brightly (96). Frank J. Kearful, in "Satire and Form of the Novel: The Problem of Aesthetic Unity in *Northanger Abbey*" (1965), argues that Austen has created an intentional disharmony between the two halves of the novel to demonstrate the fundamental fictionality of all novels, to emphasize the paradox that even realism is not realistic. Kearful asserts that the author is intentionally trying to undermine novelistic expectations for realism and satire in order to remind readers that neither genre has more legitimacy than the other; indeed, both are mere inventions (514).

A scholar ready to acknowledge and embrace the apparent flaws in the novel's development and structure is Kenneth L. Moler. In *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (1968), Moler identifies the true damage to the narrative development to be a flaw in the characterization of Catherine Morland, who is both a realistic portrait and an instrument for the advancement of the parody in the novel. Thus the movement of the novel, which focuses on the education of Catherine Morland, is disrupted by the burlesque (21).

The portion of the novel that has proved so troublesome to readers is the author's decision to include a parody of gothic novelistic conventions popularized in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Catherine Morland, upon her removal to Northanger Abbey with the Tilney family, becomes overwrought with fear and dread inspired by the imposing structure of the edifice and the austere and domineering qualities of General Tilney, the family patriarch. She allows her imagination to carry her to many preposterous conclusions regarding the content of the castle and the General's personal history. She is filled with anticipation as she explores a chest of drawers in her chamber, assuming that it contains evidence of the family's haunted past; however, upon investigating the cabinet, she discovers that it contains nothing more insidious and revealing than a laundry list. She is prone to wild speculation over the General's relationship with his dead wife, convincing herself that he murdered his own spouse. Henry Tilney eventually discovers Catherine's conjectures and chastises her for her

presumptions. Each time that Catherine makes assumptions based on her knowledge of gothic conventions, she is proved wrong, and the legitimacy of the gothic is undermined.

Most studies of the gothic as it is manifest in *Northanger Abbey* are intended to achieve a conciliation between the realistic and the romantic portions of the novel, to accommodate the two volumes of the novel. In "Translating the Monstrous: *Northanger Abbey*" (1975) George Levine argues that the comic burlesque of gothic conventions in the novel is actually a validation of the very same aesthetic principles that it seems to undermine (336). What is dismissed as exaggeration in the gothic—the monstrousness of the characters' behavior—is manifest in a more subtle and mundane form in the novel, so the values of the gothic are not disproved but only shown to be inflated and exaggerated. Catherine Morland, like the gothic heroine, desires to marry above her station, and she does eventually and inevitably marry the hero. Moreover, she behaves with the naiveté of the gothic heroine. The validation of the gothic is not confined exclusively to her, but is extended to the other characters as well, particularly to General Tilney, who is shown to be almost as monstrous as the romantic villain. After Catherine's suspicions of his character are disproved by Henry, they are once again validated in an entirely different way. When he unceremoniously turns her out of the Abbey unaccompanied, she asserts that with her suspicions he had murdered his wife, she had only slightly misconstrued the extent of his cruelty. Thus Catherine learns that "monstrosity is actually human," but more prosaic than the gothic romance implies (339).

Waldo S. Glock, in his study "Catherine Morland's Gothic Delusions: A Defense of *Northanger Abbey*" (1978), argues that the two volumes of the novel are actually unified, the latter acting as a counterpoint to the events of the Bath episode, the gothic creating a contrast intended to illustrate the intellectual growth of Catherine. The author demonstrates through the gothic that Catherine has grown and matured by rejecting the imagination in favor of good sense (46). Catherine discovers that the true source of evil is not the fantastic or the supernatural, but human frailties, such as greed (37). Thus the gothic elements of the novel reveal the destructiveness of excess of imagination (36). Glock goes on to argue for the novel's unity by indicating that the gothic hysteria Catherine experiences at *Northanger* is prepared for in the Blaize Castle episode from the first volume of the novel (41).

Arguing against the idea that *Northanger Abbey* is the final blow to the gothic literary traditions of the eighteenth century, Syndy McMillen Conger, in "Austen's Sense and Radcliffe's Sensibility" (1987), maintains that Austen never actually rejects Ann Radcliffe's style, but instead transforms it (22). Radcliffe's novels *The Italian* and the *Mysteries of Udolpho* have traditionally been regarded as the focus of unrelenting scorn and ridicule in Austen's novel, and it is certainly true that the novel parodies Radcliffe's work, the latter even by name. However, Conger suggests that the rejection of Radcliffe's sentimentality is not as complete as scholars have long believed. According to Conger, it is true that

Austen demonstrates the “inapplicability” of the gothic sentiments in the mundane world (18–19) and that Catherine “acts out a confrontation with . . . the Gothic’s special subjective appeal,” eventually being taught to discriminate between the attributes of sentimental fiction and reality (18, 21). However, Conger does not postulate a complete elimination of gothic sentiment but instead identifies a “transfiguration” of these emotions in Catherine’s departure from the Abbey, where Eleanor and Catherine reveal a Radcliffian sensibility as they make their teary farewells and try to remain strong for and generous toward each other (21).

Maria Jerinic’s “In Defense of the Gothic: Rereading *Northanger Abbey*” (1995) includes a unique historicist understanding of the gothic conventions in the novel. Jerinic argues against the notion that women’s appreciation of the gothic is a bad influence. She offers an account of the eighteenth-century fear of the potential moral corruption wrought by novel reading, a fear particularly associated with women’s reading (139). Catherine’s problem is not that she reads, but that she accepts men’s perceptions of what she reads. Her reading is encouraged within the novel. She is, after all, compared favorably to those women in the novel who do no reading (138). Moreover, contrary to the perceptions of countless critics, Jerinic contends that Catherine’s reading of gothic novels does not after all create any romantic delusions until she hears Henry Tilney’s perspective of her reading list. In her interaction with the boorish and unpleasant John Thorpe, she reveals no hidden desire to be courted or abducted, and she has the opportunity for both during her time in Bath (140). She does become irrational in her hunt for gothic intrigue at Northanger, but only after Henry has put the idea in her head with his mockery of gothic romance on the trip from Bath to Northanger. Even when her judgment is subdued by fear, she is not entirely wrong in her perceptions of men, particularly the General. Although he may not have killed his own wife, he is certainly harsh and ungracious in his treatment of Catherine when he thinks she has deceived him (141). Jerinic suggests that the real danger lies not in women’s fascination with gothic romance, but in their acceptance of men’s interpretation of women’s reading interests (143).

Perhaps the most common concern involving Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, apart from the examination of the aesthetic unity, has been the discussion of the educational motif. Austen goes to great lengths in her first chapter to describe the plainness of her heroine, Catherine Morland, emphasizing her simplicity and naiveté, yet at the conclusion of the novel, the reader has to concede that Catherine has grown as a person through her experiences, especially when one considers the lessons learned from her rash and hysterical reaction to the environment at Northanger. In addition, there are those revelations of character that she gains through her interaction with her companions at Bath. She must learn of the pettiness, ambition and greed of her friends Isabella and John Thorpe. The novel’s emphasis on the movement from innocence to knowledge places it clearly within the parameters of the classic bildungsroman, or coming-of-age narrative.

John K. Mathison, in "Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction" (1957), blends the educational theme with a reader response motif, maintaining that the lessons of Catherine Morland are also instructions for the reader. Catherine's maturity increases through her experiences at Bath and Northanger until the end of the novel, when she has achieved adulthood and prepares to marry (142). The heroine learns through interaction with her friends. For instance, she acquires an understanding of personal responsibility when she is barred from her walk with the Tilneys by John Thorpe (146). At the Abbey, she matures through her rejection of the gothic, which she construes as "shallow" (147). Similarly, the reader is taught, through Catherine's experience, to identify the attributes of good fiction and to reject the gothic for its extravagant passions and melodramatic incidents, adopting a style, like Austen's, more faithful to the events of common life (150).

Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (1962), perceives Catherine as torn between reality and imagination in this "novel of education" (86). For Babb, Henry Tilney is Catherine's designated teacher in both the Bath sections and the Northanger portion, and his lesson has two parts. At Bath he teaches her about social interaction, and at Northanger he enlightens her about her own behavior (88). In the first volume of the novel, Catherine must learn to discern the petty and self-centered motivations of the Thorpes, whom she at first misconstrues, assuming that they are motivated like herself by "friendship and honor." Only through lengthy interaction with them does she discover that their true motivations are not so noble: they are driven by greed and ambition (86). In the Northanger sections of the novel, Catherine is taught to distinguish between her reasonable and passionate inclinations and to opt for reason (106). This discovery is brought about through her rejection of the romantic assumptions that she has acquired while reading gothic novels and through the helpful intervention of Henry.

In *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (1968), Kenneth L. Moler draws a parallel between Austen's novel and the work of Fanny Burney, suggesting that the two authors share a similar theme: the young woman's initiation into polite society (Moler 21). However, Moler perceives *Northanger Abbey* as a parody of the novel of introduction, popularized by writers such as Burney. He sees the female quixotism manifest by Catherine at the Abbey as the clearest sign of this parody. The perils and mistakes of the traditional ingenue are exaggerated in the hysterical behavior and wild surmises of Catherine at Northanger (38). Moreover, Moler suggests that Catherine's true lesson is not that she should judge only by reason, but that she should recognize that reason cannot always lead her correctly. Despite Henry's having disabused her of her imaginative conceptions of the General's character, despite the exposure of her irrationality, she is nevertheless proved partially correct in her rash assumptions. The general really is a villain, only not the kind that she foolishly assumed (39).

Alastair M. Duckworth, in *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (1971), agrees with his predecessors that *Northanger Abbey* "is a novel of education, but one in which Catherine learns to make 'moral choices.'"



Duckworth sees Catherine's moral growth as having three tests in the first volume of the novel: the invitation to Claverton Down, the Blaize Castle incident and the Clifton incident. Through these three events, she is taught to resist social temptation to immoral and ungracious behavior (94–95). Her education in propriety culminates when she perceives the not-so-subtle artifice of Isabella's letter, wherein the writer requests that Catherine appeal to her brother James on Isabella's behalf, the same brother whom Isabella previously rejected because he was not sufficiently wealthy (95). Eventually Catherine has to learn that even well-intentioned people can offend if they allow themselves to be guided and manipulated by selfish and unscrupulous acquaintances (100).

Darrel Mansell discusses the dialectical construction of the novel, emphasizing the opposition's creation of and influence on Catherine's choices as she grows into adulthood. His book, *The Novels of Jane Austen: An Interpretation* (1973), polarizes Catherine's choices, embodying them in the opposition between the Thorpes and the Tilneys (34). More specifically, Mansell sees the dialectical construction of the novel as pivoting on the contrast between fact and imagination, and even more specifically between three particularly imaginative constructions of Catherine that must be disproved by factuality. Catherine misconstrues the character of Isabella, Northanger and Henry (34). In each of these cases she is disabused of her wrongful assumption by representation of actual reality, such as instructive letters (28). By learning to choose among these antitheses, she develops her personal morality (36). Moreover, she learns that reality is a mixture of good and bad, not simply one or the other, and that the Tilney family is an example of this moral complexity containing both the virtuous Henry and Eleanor and the reprehensible General and Captain Tilney (45).

Walter E. Anderson, author of "From Northanger to Woodston: Catherine's Education to Common Life" (1984), suggests that Austen's novel is unified by the theme of education—that the novel is more about education than about romance. Instead of following the traditional progress of the romance narrative in which the obstacles that come between the potential lovers remain central (497), the narrative of *Northanger Abbey* focuses only briefly on such obstacles to love and prefers instead to follow the course of Catherine's maturation, her realization of the superiority of the real over the imaginary (507). The priority of the theme of education over the romance can be seen most clearly at the end of the novel, where the author devotes only a few brief pages to the description of the potential union between Henry and Catherine. In a romance narrative, this would have been the climactic moment, but Austen gives it only a cursory and summary treatment because the true focus is the lessons Catherine learns at Bath and Northanger. Indeed, the marriage functions in the story as a "reward" of Catherine's growth "rather than a goal" of the narrative (498).

Other recent studies have interrogated the idea that *Northanger Abbey* is a simple bildungsroman. Birthe Tandrup, in the article "A Trap of Misreading: Free Indirect Style and the Critique of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*" (1983), suggests that the novel is not Catherine Moreland's education but the reader's.

The novel cannot be a traditional bildungsroman because the reader is not led to identify exclusively with Catherine's point of view, but instead with the author's. The author's "moral and social framework" precedes that of the character (82). One of the clearest manifestations of this viewpoint is Austen's use of the technique employed extensively in her mature novels, free indirect speech, in which she combines first- and third-person points of view in a single sentence to suggest the authorial intrusion into and control of the character's consciousness (84). In "Guessing for Ourselves in *Northanger Abbey*" (1986), Susan Morgan attacks the idea that the novel is one of education and questions the assumption that one can arrive at a settled judgment about the novel or the characters. People are too complex to be evaluated on the basis of a transcendent and final set of criteria; evaluation is a process, not a conclusion (114). Catherine learns that she needs to make her own judgments and that she should trust her instincts, rejecting sets of conventions such as the literary gothic (118). Henry urges her to evaluate for herself when he finds her on the stair outside his father's room (121): "What have you been judging from?"

Another vein of scholarship addressing *Northanger Abbey* relates specifically to the experience of the reader and draws a parallel between the readers of the novel and the readers in the novel. The book itself contains an overt critique of reading when Catherine defends the practice and Henry concurs. Both characters admit to being avid readers of the literary genre. Thus the author invites a comparison between these two fictional personages and those who read about them. Cynthia Griffin discusses the relationship between the readers in and of the novel in her article "The Development of Realism in Jane Austen's Early Novels" (1963). Griffin perceives *Northanger* as "an extensive examination of the process of novel-reading" (39). The reader of *Northanger* is to learn from the examples of good and bad readers in the novel. This contrast pivots primarily on the opposition between Henry and Catherine as good and bad readers, respectively (42). The education of Catherine in reading is the *Northanger* reader's lesson as well. While Catherine must learn to distinguish between fiction and reality and must be disabused of her expectations about the gothic novel, the reader must follow the same path. Griffin also notes that Austen is constantly sabotaging the reader's ability to distinguish between fiction and reality by not providing closure in some of the novel's most compelling ontological questions. For example, Austen is not at all clear in her portrayal of General Tilney's villainy. Just as quickly as the General is absolved of any fault in his wife's death, he is shown to be a gothic tyrant of an entirely different nature for sending Catherine home unaccompanied, unannounced and unprovided for (43). Julia Prewitt Brown, in *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (1979), recognizes the resemblance between the fictional and the real readers as well. Just as Catherine becomes overly fearful and imaginative while visiting the Abbey, the reader of *Northanger* is encouraged to become excessively passionate about the fate of Catherine, yet the author then undercuts that sentiment in the same way she defuses Catherine's hysterical speculations about the Gen-

eral and the Abbey (52). The reader is consistently forced to see Catherine as she is rather than as we want or have been trained to see her—as the heroine of a gothic/sentimental novel (53). Eric Rothstein, in “The Lessons of *Northanger Abbey*” (1974) argues in a similar fashion about the novel. He suggests that the reader undergoes a lesson in novel reading. Like Catherine, the reader is encouraged to make assumptions based on previous reading experiences and to expect particular features from a gothic novel. The novel then draws attention to the reading process by subverting that same activity. The reader is reminded that the act of reading includes the resolution of textual problems and the augmentation of actual events with expectations based on “a priori structures” derived from previous experiences with the genre (27).

Still another issue that has received a good deal of attention from the critics is Austen’s use of parody in the novel. These studies focus primarily on the second volume of the work in which the elements of the gothic romance are satirized. Everett Zimmerman, “The Function of Parody in *Northanger Abbey*” (1969), reminds the reader that parody is not always ridicule; “sometimes it is a tribute” (54–55). Zimmerman claims that *Northanger Abbey* ultimately endorses the same literary standards that it mocks (58). The reader is invited and encouraged to perceive Catherine as the sentimental heroine in order to create a contrast with the traditional heroine’s excesses and, more broadly, with the extravagances of the gothic-sentimental genre. The author creates just enough similarities to provoke an analysis of the differences. The subsequent opposition “emphasizes” Catherine’s “ordinariness” (58). The author employs the sentimental conventions to identify Catherine with the heroine, but also to disassociate her with its overindulgences (62). In “*Northanger Abbey* and the Limits of Parody” (1988), Tara Ghoshal Wallace takes the analysis of parody in the novel a step further than Zimmerman by arguing that the true subject of the parody is parody itself (262). Thus, Austen’s project is not so simple as to assert the basic superiority of the novel of psychological realism over the gothic novel. Wallace maintains that the evidence of this theory is inherent in the author’s treatment of the character Henry Tilney (262). At first, the reader is invited to identify Henry’s point of view with the author’s point of view. When Henry derides Bath’s social customs or the attributes of the gothic romance, the reader is tempted to believe that he speaks for Austen, but the author gradually disassociates herself with the viewpoint of Henry and even subjects his mockery to her scrutiny (263). Wallace argues that the author so distances herself from Tilney’s parody that she even suggests that his mockery of the gothic conventions on the way to *Northanger* might be responsible for Catherine’s subsequent hysteria, since she has shown no such propensities to overwrought passion before she hears Henry’s mocking portrait of the Abbey (269).

Two additional critical positions on *Northanger Abbey* have received a substantial amount of attention: feminism and historicism. In “Vindicating *Northanger Abbey*: Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Gothic Feminism” (1995), Diane Hoeveler notes the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideas about the

education of women: women are to have feminine charms but to think like men (118). Moreover, through literary genres such as the gothic romance, women are educated as victims, who must earn their place through suffering. Hoeveler theorizes that Henry Tilney's role in the novel is to teach Catherine to think like a man (125). Moreover, the movement of the novel suggests that she becomes worthy of him only after she has been sufficiently victimized (122). Gary Kelly offers a contextual study of Austen's feminism in "Jane Austen, Romantic Feminism, and Civil Society" (1995). Kelly sees the novel as a representation of Austen's paradoxical view of women in postrevolutionary civil society. He argues that the novel is a critique of the "trivialization" and the "marginalization" of women in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century society, but it is also an implicit acceptance of the exclusive designation of women to the domestic and the local spheres (32). An additional historicist study worthy of recounting here is "General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*" (1978) by Robert Hopkins. This article addresses the political context of the novel's composition. It delineates the legal proceedings taken against illegal pamphleteers in the late eighteenth century, particularly those protesting continued land enclosure, and suggests that General Tilney is one of the inquisitors in the search for sedition (220).

I have abstracted only a sampling of the scholarship addressing Austen's *Northanger Abbey* with emphasis on that produced in the second half of the twentieth century. Certainly a sufficient number of studies have now been written, offering a resolution to the question of the novel's unity, that the reader disturbed by the seeming disjunctive volumes can be assured that the work can be unified with a sufficient amount of imagination and scholarly finesse, but the real question may lie in scholarship itself, in the process of reading: Why are scholars addicted to resolution and closure? Why does a realistic novel require an imaginary unity? Experience is generally not unified but random. In a sense, one might argue that the true unifying feature of the novel is the debate over its unity. Not only has the discussion enthralled the majority of critics, but it has also offered a venue for the comprehensive examination of the work. Most details and portions of the novel have been exploited by and annexed to the legion of solutions. The dispute has provided a center and a focus for any informed reading of the work.

Even in the midst of the scholarly obsession and broil, there has been some nuance in the commentary. Whereas virtually everyone addressing the novel feels it incumbent to offer at least an acknowledgment of the problem, some theorists manage to free themselves from the fray and offer a perspective that accepts implicitly the novel's merits and seeks to elucidate other portions of the text. The library of academic studies on *Northanger Abbey* includes discussions of the gothic tradition, Catherine's education, theories of parody and theories of feminism. These must be enough to keep the scholarly discussion of the novel interesting.

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## *Persuasion's* Box of Contradictions *Claudia Stein*

As late twentieth-century readers, we lead such fast-paced lives, bombarded with sound bites and the demand of technological devices, that we may wish to escape into what we perceive as familiar narratives. Feeling too old for childhood fairy tales or too erudite for modern romance novels, we may plunge into an early nineteenth-century novel with a recognizable courtship and marriage plot. However, those choosing Jane Austen's last novel, *Persuasion*, will quickly see that insisting on a comfortable pattern, boxing the narrative up, will lead to only dissonance and contradictions.

One familiar formula that we may assume *Persuasion* follows is Cinderella, the most popular fairy tale, with more than three hundred variants (Cox xxv), first appearing in written form in China in the ninth century A.D. The French version, by Charles Perrault, collected in his *Histoires ou contes du temps passeu* in 1697, is the one best known by today's readers. A young woman mistreated by her stepmother and stepsister is rescued (through no effort of her own) by marriage to a handsome, dashing and wealthy man to live happily ever after. D. W. Harding in his introduction to *Persuasion* makes the case that the novel is a variant of the Cinderella story. However, Jane Austen is a more complex writer than that. Tony Tanner in *Jane Austen* notes, "If in some ways Jane Austen's vision is complicit with the dominant ideology of her class, in other ways it transcends it" (6). In similar fashion, Austen's *Persuasion* contains some elements of the Cinderella myth, such as the isolated heroine and the ending of marriage; however, in most ways, the novel goes far beyond the fairy tale to present a woman and a man with human foibles who grow and mature, actively make choices, decide they are soulmates and move toward a future that has a chance—though not an assurance—of being happy. Twentieth-century readers can be rewarded by going beyond the facile Cinderella interpretation of *Per-*



*suasion* to the story behind the dynamic union of Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth.

Though more complex, *Persuasion* does contain some of the plot elements of the Cinderella story. One of the features of Perrault's version, and essential to all of the Cinderella tales, is "the ill-treated heroine" (Cox xxv). The circumstances of Austen's Anne Elliot qualify her as this unfortunate heroine. At the start of the novel, Austen reveals that Anne, age twenty-seven, lives with a neglectful father, who has squandered his money, and a sister who, along with her father, is "cold and self-obsessed" (Gard 193). Like Cinderella, Anne has lost her mother, who died when Anne was fourteen; Anne is forced by her solitude and isolation, at least at first, to "stand almost outside, certainly a little apart from, the world which the action of the novel depicts" (Lewis 30). Roger Gard, in *Emma and Persuasion*, points out a distinguishing feature of *Persuasion* relevant to Anne's displacement, the "emphasis on change of place": Anne "is a lonely and sympathetic traveler" between small English communities (72). She must adapt to moving from Kellynch Hall, her childhood home; to Uppercross, her sister Mary's home; to Bath, where her family had relocated due to debt.

The other Cinderella plot element in *Persuasion* lies in the marriage of Anne and Frederick at novel's end. However, both the process of the couple's getting there and a rather ambiguous ending (especially for an Austen novel) create a substantial deviation from the happily-ever-after fairy tale.

Although readers might be convinced that Anne's status as a family outcast and later as a new bride render her a Cinderella, her characterization proves far more complicated. Harding refers to Anne Elliot as the "most mature and profound of Cinderellas" (8); however, his statement is actually an oxymoron. Women in fairy tales, Cinderella as a case in point, are neither mature nor profound. Rosemary Minard, in *Womenfolk and Fairy Tales*, comments on the stereotyping of females in fairy tales: "For the most part female characters, if they are not witches or fairies or wicked stepmothers, are insipid beauties, awaiting passively for Prince Charming" (viii). Cinderella, in particular, contributes little to her release: "A Cinderella certainly doesn't show much gumption by merely accepting the abuse of her stepmother and stepsisters. She would still be scrubbing was it not for her fairy godmother" (Minard viii). Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, says that Perrault's Cinderella is "sugar-sweet and insipidly good, and she completely lacks initiative (which probably accounts for Disney's choosing Perrault's version of 'Cinderella' as the basis for his rendering of the story)" (251). Even as a fantasy, this character is a feminist's nightmare. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that Cinderella is the antithesis to the "self-assertive" woman (343); Collette Dowling, in *The Cinderella Complex*, uses Cinderella as a metaphor for female dependency; Jane Yolen, in "America's Cinderella," says, "Cinderella is the weepy, sentimentalized pretty girl incapable of helping herself" (300).

In contrast to Cinderella, Anne Elliot is not an empty-headed, vapid, pretty-as-a-picture fairy tale heroine; instead, she “begins the novel with self-knowledge” (Benson 118). The maturity that Harding describes is hers due to suffering brought about by a decision she made eight years before when she turned down a proposal from her true love, Captain Wentworth, a naval officer. Lady Russell, a family friend and surrogate mother for Anne, “lovable but not perfect” (Harding 9), had insisted that Anne refrain from marrying Frederick because he did not have enough money or a proper social rank. Lady Russell fits somewhere between the extreme labels of evil stepmother and a benevolent fairy godmother. Anne loves her and defers to her advice, but later admits that her godmother’s judgment was flawed. Anne’s father was also opposed to the union, thinking it a “degrading alliance” (46). As part of the landed gentry, Sir Walter has a prejudice toward sailors, like Wentworth, because they are “persons of obscure birth” (39). Upon rejection by Anne, Wentworth swiftly departed on a ship, and Anne’s youthful glow left with him: “Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect” (48).

Anne’s mistake, her “over-anxious caution” (50) at being persuaded by her father and godmother, makes her appear more human and sympathetic than the perfect Cinderella, and it allows her room to grow: “She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning” (50). When Wentworth returns to England more prosperous after years at sea, Anne becomes aware of her abiding love for him: she feels “agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery” (203). Remarking on Anne’s progress, Marvin Mudrick argues that she “grows through and out of prison”: “She has grown to understand just how rare a lover Wentworth is, but she has learned, even more somberly, how rare love is” (236). In contrast, though romantic love may be assumed to exist in Cinderella, Bettelheim points out that nowhere in Perrault’s tale is it mentioned (276).

In the early chapters Wentworth is cold and distant toward her, so Anne does not dare express her feelings. Instead, as Jan Fergus notes in “Sex and Social Life in Austen’s Novels,” “Much is expressed in this novel by blushes and looks” (66). Although not as dramatic as the shift from rags to spectacular ball gown, Anne’s facial change from pale and languishing to blushing is a sign of what Fergus calls a “recovery of her own sexuality”: “a kind of sexual reawakening, feeling herself once again a sexually attractive woman” (Fergus 67). A gentleman passing Anne in the street notices her glow:

They ascended and passed him; and as they passed, Anne’s face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration which she could not be insensible of. She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, her pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it also produced. It was evident that the gentleman (completely a gentleman in manner), admired her exceedingly. (126)

Part of Anne's renewal of hope and confidence in herself has to do with attention from other admirers, a complication that Cinderella does not face. Actually, this contact with other men, and their contrast with her beloved Wentworth, serves only to strengthen Anne's feelings toward him. Captain Benwick, a naval officer who is devastated by the death of his fiancée less than a year ago, is a shy and sensitive man who expresses his neediness by "drawing near" (131), Anne to discuss poetry. Anne gives him "all her attention as long as attention was possible" (131), and she feels "an increasing goodwill towards him, and a pleasure in thinking that it might, perhaps, be the occasion of continuing their acquaintance" (138). Still, Anne recognizes Benwick's shallowness; thus, her contact with him seems to be motivated by compassion and a need for diversion from the pain of thinking about Wentworth. When she discovers that Benwick and Louisa are engaged, she is relieved because she was under the impression that Wentworth had feelings for Louise. Benwick's alliance leaves Wentworth "unshackled and free"; in response, Anne has "some feelings which she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy!" (194).

Another of Anne's suitors, Sir Walter Elliot, appears on the surface to be a Prince Charming. He seems stable, grounded as heir to Sir Walter's land. As a widower of seven months, Mr. Elliot is eligible for remarriage. William Magee points out that through him "Anne could revive her dear mother's title of Lady Elliot Wickham" (203). At first, Mr. Elliot's manners as a gentleman endear Anne (as well as Lady Russell and Sir Walter) to him as an "agreeable and estimable man":

Everything united in him: good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour, without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in everything essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid; never run away with by spirits or by selfishness, which fancied itself strong feeling; and yet, with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life, which characters of fancied enthusiasm and violent agitation seldom really possess. (170–171)

However, he values rank and connection higher than does Anne, and after a month's acquaintance, she finds that though he is "rational, discreet, polished . . . he was not open" (186). He is a pleaser, "too generally agreeable" with "never any burst of feeling, any warm of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others" (186). Anne decides that above all else "warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still" (186); these are all characteristics that Mr. Elliot does not possess.

Proved to be a good judge of bad character, Anne's suspicions about Mr. Elliot are validated when Mrs. Smith reveals that he has cheated her and her husband and is "a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-

blooded being, who thinks only of himself" (227). It becomes clear to Anne that Mr. Elliot, though attracted to her, is most concerned about securing the title to Kellynch Hall. Magee notes that even before this revelation, Anne had sensed that Mr. Elliot "toadies to the loveless social goals of class status and wealth in marriage," and to her credit she "waits instead for the man who appreciates her worth and loves her as a person, even though by doing so she abandons the class of the landing gentry" (203). Some critics, such as Marilyn Butler in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, argue that Mr. Elliot's characterization is flimsy and unconvincing: "Failure to define the tempter-figure is surely the most significant of the failures of *Persuasion*" (280). Mr. Elliot is probably so unconvincing because Anne's love for Wentworth is so convincing that the former hardly seems a threat. However, Mr. Elliot does serve to show Anne, and the readers, what a match for her is *not*. Also, Mr. Elliot's presence and the possibility of Anne's choosing him worry Wentworth and make him appreciate her.

Anne is further guided as to the type of marriage she wants by observing married couples around her. Anne has the advantage over Cinderella, who has no marriages to use as comparison. Some of the marriages within her family show Anne what she does not want. She was exposed to her parents' marriage until she was fourteen. Her mother, Lady Elliot, a wife for seventeen years (until her death) to a "conceited, silly" man (25), was an "excellent . . . sensible and amiable" (24) woman who, though "not the very happiest being in the world, herself, had found in her duties, her friends, and her children, to attach to life" (24). Conspicuously absent from this list of attachments is her husband; evidently Lady Elliot's choice of a marriage partner was not the best. Another marriage that Anne observes is that of her younger sister, Mary, and her husband, Charles Musgrove. In this relationship Charles is "civil and agreeable," and "in sense and temper he was undoubtedly superior to his wife" (63), while Mary, as noted by Margaret Drabble, is "somewhat dim-witted, selfish, mildly hypochondriac" and "self-pitying" (vi). So although Charles and Mary "might pass for the happy couple" (64), Anne admits that "a more equal match" and "a woman of real understanding" (63) would be to Charles's benefit. The lesson that Anne may learn from the Elliots and the Musgroves is to choose a marriage partner who is like herself—giving and not self-absorbed.

A third marriage may serve as yet another warning. It is the marriage of Mrs. Smith, not a blood relative, who is a former boarding-school friend of Anne. Although Anne does not observe firsthand her friend's marriage, Mrs. Smith tells Anne enough about her husband to give her pause. Mrs. Smith had married "a man of fortune" (177), but he had squandered their money (partly by being gullible enough to entrust Mr. Elliot with his finances). At his death two years previous, Mr. Smith had left his twenty-nine-year-old arthritic widow nearly destitute. He had been "a man of warm feelings, easy temper" but "careless habits, and not strong understanding" (237). Anne concludes, "The husband had not been what he ought" (181). This example might make Wentworth, who has

managed to make, and keep, quite a bit of money in the eight years Anne has known him, look responsible in comparison.

In addition to providing another case study in marriage choices, Anne's relationship with Mrs. Smith serves as a way for Austen to show Anne's increasingly independent thought and her compassion for those less fortunate. In contrast, Cinderella toils not out of choice, or necessarily out of selflessness, but because she is compelled by her unrelenting stepmother and stepsister. Anne's service is much more deliberate. According to Margaret Kirkman in *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction*, Anne's care of Mrs. Smith "represents an enlargement of Austen's treatment of female obligation and friendship," "an extended 'sisterhood', not based on 'blood' but on extra-familial ties between women" (150). This network of female friends, unavailable to Cinderella, is a source of growth for Anne: "Anne grows, or demonstrates her maturity, through the development of her relationship with women outside her family" (Kirkman 151). Anne makes frequent visits to console Mrs. Smith, who is isolated from the social activities of Bath because of her illness and her lack of status; on one occasion Anne's promise to visit with Mrs. Smith conflicts with a visit that her father expects her to make to Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple, a high-society cousin. At that time Walter Elliot ridicules his daughter's interest in someone like Mrs. Smith with no title or money to recommend her: "Upon my word, Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Everything that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you" (182). Out of respect for her father, Anne makes "no reply" but "Anne kept her appointment" with her friend (182). Christine Gibbs, in "Absent Fathers: An Examination of Father-Daughter Relationships in Jane Austen's Novels," says of Anne at this juncture, "Her mind and opinions are all her own, and when she quietly ignores her father's disapproval of her visits to her impoverished school friend, Mrs. Smith, Jane Austen makes it clear that the disobedience is morally justified, and that it is Sir Walter whose morals are unsound" (49). In her quiet way, Anne is beginning to stand up for herself, risking not only her father's displeasure but her society's as well.

Admiral and Mrs. Croft are also risk takers and independent souls; in addition, their marriage is one of Austen's "rare portraits[s] of a mature and happy marriage" (Drabble x). Their connection with Anne is twofold: the Crofts rent out Kellynch Hall when Anne's father can no longer afford to keep it up, and Mrs. Croft is the sister of Frederick Wentworth. During the fifteen years of her marriage, Mrs. Croft joined her husband on his ships, crossing the Atlantic four times and traveling to the West Indies, and she claims to be happiest when on board with the Admiral. The practice of women on board is a controversial one in naval circles in 1814, as evidenced by Mrs. Croft's disagreement with her brother. Wentworth argues that women are too fragile to make ocean voyages on his ships, but Mrs. Croft takes him to task by saying that while on board she has never "suffered in body or mind" (91). She says that she was ill and worried only when on land waiting for the Admiral's return from the North

Seas: "but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience" (91).

With Mrs. Croft, Austen offers an exceptional early nineteenth-century portrait of an independent woman, married or not. Tanner coins Mrs. Croft "a new kind of woman in Jane Austen's world" (232). Claudia Johnson, in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, notes that Mrs. Croft "prefers warships to the most comfortable manors in the kingdom, throwing overboard as needless weight the excellencies of the proper lady" (153). Similarly, Jacelyn Harris, in "Jane Austen and the Burden of the (Male) Past: The Case Re-Examined," argues that "against the assumption that women are physically weak Austen sets Mrs. Croft, a model of female health, strength, and adaptability who shares the reins of power with her husband" (94). Dissenters, such as Alistar Duckworth, claim that "Croft is hardly an 'independent' woman" because she is her "husband's partner" but not his "equal" (88). In agreement is Nina Auerbach, who says that Mrs. Croft, though an exception in Austen's portrayal of women, has only "benign" power because the Admiral commands the ships on which he allows his wife passage and "Mrs. Croft has no children and no household to run" (198). Certainly Mrs. Croft does not achieve "the autonomy that modern feminism, with reason, demands" (Duckworth 87); however, Austen was not writing with the benefit of modern feminism, nor was Mrs. Croft living during the modern era. Within the context of her time and her previous novels, Austen's creation of Mrs. Croft should be recognized as being partly responsible for "a new point in her [Austen's] treatment of men and women as moral equals, no matter how different their lives and their opportunity of independent action" (Kirkman 146).

Anne seems to know just how unique both of the Crofts are and closely observes their interaction as a couple, concluding that they are "a most attractive picture of happiness": "She [Anne] always watched them as long as she could; delighted to fancy she understood what they might be talking of, as they walked along in happy independence" (194–195). Part of the attraction for Anne is their love of each other's company: "They brought their country habit of being almost always together. He was ordered to walk, to keep off the gout, and Mrs. Croft seemed to go shares with him in everything and to walk for her life, to do him good" (194).

The Crofts represent not only an alternative to the unfortunate marriages in *Persuasion* but also an alternative to the lifestyle of the landed gentry. Rather than being land lovers, literally bound by their ties to the land, as are Sir Walter and Lady Russell, the Crofts are not possessive of property. Although they are temporarily ensconced in Anne's childhood home, the Crofts do not behave as usurpers. When Anne comes to visit Kellynch Hall, Admiral Croft empathizes with her: "'Now, this must be very bad for you,' said her, suddenly rousing from a little reverie, 'to be coming and finding us here—I had not recollected it before, I declare—but it must be very bad.—But now, do not stand upon ceremony.—Get up and go over all the rooms in the house if you like it'" (149).

His generosity delighted Anne, who notes, “His goodness of heart and simplicity of character were irresistible” (149). Mrs. Croft, hardy and ruddy from “being almost as much at sea as her husband,” is as comfortable in her own skin and as generous as the Admiral: “Her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust in herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour” (69).

In contrast to the life of the landed gentry, the Crofts show naval life to be more adventurous and less confining. In terms of the time contemporary to the novel—1814—the English navy had just been gloriously victorious against the French, and Napoleon had been exiled to the island of Elba. Tanner notes that the navy “had saved England, while the ruling aristocratic class had done nothing” (229). Austen’s knowledge of the navy came firsthand: two of her brothers rose to the rank of admiral in the English navy (Drabble viii). Austen shines a positive light on this rising new class: “a brave new world of meritocracy rather than privilege” (Harris 94); “a world in which individual merit can rise” (Drabble xix). Johnson remarks on the “narrow and unwholesome confinement” of landed life, which Austen criticizes not only “because it promotes mediocrity or ignorance, but rather because its insularity is psychologically damaging, especially for women” (158). Johnson also comments on “Mrs. Croft’s example as a wife,” which “suggests that life on the high seas, for all its dangers, is to be preferred to the ‘safety’ of helpless immobility she experienced when she lived conventionally [when her husband was away]” (160). Thus, Mrs. Croft has given Anne an invaluable gift: “a charming little pre-view of what it might be like to be married to a Navy man” (Gard, *Emma and Persuasion* 72). Since Cinderella begins in “once upon a time” and identifies no specific place, no such texture can exist, and the only preview of the future afforded Cinderella is several parties at the castle, where she must observe little movement beyond a minuet or two.

Frederick Wentworth, the naval officer in question as far as Anne is concerned, is no more a Prince Charming than she is a Cinderella. Prince Charming is wealthy, perfect and of noble birth. On the other hand, Wentworth has acquired his own fortune, has had nothing handed to him and is human (he makes mistakes), which, as is the case with Anne, gives him room for improvement and growth.

Rejection, which Prince Charming does not experience, gives Wentworth the opportunity to mature. When the novel opens, Wentworth has still not forgiven Anne for jilting him eight years before. He feels “she had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him” (81). In his mind, Anne never should have listened to and been persuaded by Lady Russell. He believes that her decision was the result of “overpersuasion,” “weakness” and “timidity” (81). His rigidity and pride had prevented him from writing to Anne even though he considered doing so two years after he was rejected. Anne later admits that had he written at that time, she would have reversed her decision. When William returns to England after years at sea, he is unaware of Anne’s feelings for him and so claims to be

“quite ready to make a foolish match. Anybody between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking. A little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments to the navy, and I am a lost man” (82). His qualification for a mate is “‘a strong mind, with sweetness of manner’” (82).

Wentworth, like Anne with Benwick and Elliot, has the opportunity to compare others with his first choice. On the other hand, Prince Charming's choice of Cinderella is untested, unless we count her stepsisters' trying on the glass slipper, a test that represents an extremely superficial means of comparison. Wentworth, in contrast, has enough contact with one woman, other than Anne, to become acquainted with her. He has several long conversations (which Anne overhears) with Louise Musgrove, Charles's sister. Wentworth's words to Louise reveal how Anne's decision has colored the way he views what he wants in a wife. Louise claims to be not “easily persuaded” for, she says, “When I have made up my mind, I have made it” (107). Wentworth, having experienced Anne's yielding nature, applauds Louise's “character of decision and firmness”; he says to her, “My first wish for all whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louise Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind” (108). To illustrate his point about firmness of character, Wentworth pulls a hazel nut off a nearby tree and tells Louise that it is a happy little nut because its strength and hardness have prevented its demise.

Wentworth must reconsider his values when Louise's habit of having her own way, which Wentworth has found so beguiling, almost contributes to her death. Several gentlemen and ladies—including Anne, Wentworth and Louise—are taking a walk near the ocean at Lyme when Louise decides that rather than descend a steep pair of stairs carefully like the others, she will jump down them. When Wentworth counsels her against it, she smiles and says, “I am determined I will” (131). Wentworth is unable to catch her, and she falls, knocked unconscious, so breathless that all fear her dead. Reflecting on Louise's action, Tanner points out, “There lies the ‘nut’ of ‘decision and firmness’! . . . Is such a character trait of determined wilfulness a virtue or a rashness? Is it a real strength or an egotistical rashness (she not only causes damage to herself but great anguish and a lot of trouble to other people)?” (233–34). When Wentworth cries out in total despair for help with Louise, Anne is the level-headed one who takes charge. Wentworth must realize his mistake in devaluing Anne, for when everyone discusses who will nurse Louise back to health, he quickly says that there is “no one so proper, so capable as Anne” (36).

The event of Louise's fall, the last chapter of the first volume, constitutes a turning point in the novel because by taking practical action, Anne proves to be a somebody; she “stops being the underdog” (Gard, *Jane Austen's Novels* 196). Stuart Tave, in *Some Words of Jane Austen*, says Anne's “heroism and fortitude” and “greatness of action” bring her and Wentworth together (284). Tanner makes a convincing case that “it is the apparently yielding but actually steadfast Anne who becomes the authority to whom others turn,” and that “Wentworth's ‘nut’



lies sufficiently crushed to make us (and him) realize that she [Louise] would be in no way an appropriate wife for him” (235). Anne’s “strength of character” is much more complex than Louise’s because Anne combines “flexibility and firmness, the rights of self with the obligations of selflessness” (Tanner 235). With Louise as a foil to Anne, Wentworth learns “to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind” (272). Wentworth realizes that it is Anne who has the qualities that he loves and admires.

Some of the suspense in the novel comes from the possibility of a second-chance for its hero and heroine. An opportunity already lost eight years before seems to heighten the necessity of reconciliation. Cinderella could also be said to have a second-chance plot because the prince loses Cinderella at the ball with only her glass slipper to identify her; however, only a few days pass between the loss of Cinderella and her being found by the prince, hardly enough time to constitute the “wiser and more seasoned resolution” (79) that Laura Mooneyham White, in “Jane Austen and the Marriage Plot: Questions of Persistence,” claims for Anne and Frederick. White argues that “only after the disruption represented by separation or divorce” (79) can these protagonists appreciate each other: “Wentworth must lose his pride and Anne must surrender some of her prudence” (80). Once these two lovers are more mature, they can more appropriately value each other.

To effect a reconciliation, each must discover how the other feels. Anne grows confident about Wentworth’s love for her by two events. When she hears that he is not marrying Louise, Anne knows that she has a chance with Wentworth herself. In addition, at a concert attended by Anne, Elliot and Wentworth, Anne realizes that Wentworth is jealous of the small attention she pays to Elliot. The problem remaining is that Wentworth has been falsely informed that Anne is to marry Elliot. Recognition of her love is paramount. Anne laments, “How was the truth to reach him? . . . Would he ever learn her real sentiments?” (219).

In all Cinderella tales, the dilemma of finding the heroine is always resolved in the same way: she is recognized “by means of a shoe” (Cox xxv). The alternate title for Perrault’s Cinderella is “*La Petite pantoufle de verre*” or “The Little Glass Slipper,” indicating the importance of the slipper in the tale. In *Transforming the Cinderella Dream*, Huang Mei notes that the slipper in Perrault’s Cinderella is “an emblem of Cinderella’s true identity as a noble lady” because “the size and beauty of the slipper imply a delicate physique and an elegant style that are usually related to upper-class female life” (3). Since the ancient Chinese Cinderella is the earliest version, the Chinese practice of binding women’s feet is relevant here. The bound small foot “marked the woman’s obedience to the existing order and promised her future dependence on the man” (Mei 4). Referring to this Chinese custom, Mei argues that “this patriarchal suggestion in regard to the ideal of human perfection is obviously what Perrault has deliberately picked when he chooses to place a tiny slipper in the center of the narrative as the only token of Cinderella’s identity” (4). This patriarchal

means of identifying the bride-to-be fits well in a tale that has as its center a submissive woman, but the heroine of *Persuasion* must identify herself in her own voice and in her own way.

Instead of dropping a glass slipper, Anne reveals her love by words to another, which she makes sure that Wentworth overhears. Harris agrees that "in defiance of female passivity, Austen lets Anne propose to Wentworth by means of the constancy debate" (94). This scene takes place within the novel's last two chapters, which Austen revised to put Anne in charge, taking her out of the passive situation of "listening to Frederick's proposal" (Magee 206). Finally, Anne is the one being listened to instead of the other way around.

Anne's constancy debate is with Captain Harville, the brother of Benwick's deceased fiancée, Fanny, while Wentworth sits at a nearby desk writing. Harville is distraught that in less than a year, Benwick is forsaking Fanny's memory and replacing her with another. Anne tells him that women are more steadfast and loyal than men because they are confined at home while men in their careers have more distraction: "Continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions" (263). Anne also claims for women more tender feelings than those of men. Harville counters by noting that both fiction and nonfiction document "women's fickleness," concluding with the afterthought, "But perhaps you will say, these are all written by men" (264). Anne replies with this bold statement about male privilege: "Perhaps I shall.—Yes, yes, if you please, no references to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything" (264).

Tony Tanner, in a particularly insightful interpretation of the debate scene, points out that Anne speaks for herself, and other women in her society, who have suffered from male writing and dominance (240). Ironically, when Wentworth hears Anne speaking passionately and convincingly about women's love, he becomes hopeful and frantically drops his pen. Tanner states that whether conscious or not, "Wentworth's 'slip' in dropping the pen at that moment is perhaps the most important signal—or unvoiced communication—in his entire relationship with Anne" (241) because he has "(let go of, lost his grip on) that instrument which is at once a tool and a symbol of men's dominance over women; the means by which they rule women's destinies" (241). Instead of a female dropping her slipper, the symbol of female dependence, here is a male dropping his pen, the symbol of male power. Tanner recognizes Wentworth's willingness to create a whole new world with Anne: "It is as if he is open to a more equal (unscripted) relationship in which the old patterns of dominance and deference are abandoned, deleted—dropped" (241).

As Anne finishes her conversation with Harville, Wentworth picks up his pen and scribbles a letter to Anne, expressing his constancy: "Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved no one but you" (567). When he leaves the letter with Anne and hurries away, she reads it with "overpowering happiness" (268).

Offered a second chance, Anne acts on her own this time, without the authority or coercion of her family. When she and Wentworth meet on the street shortly after her reading of his letter, “there they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure everything, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement” (271). Austen explains that actually their seasoned love seems dearer than their original attraction: “There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their reunion than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other’s character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting” (271). Surely, the barely acquainted Cinderella and Prince Charming could not have been so sweetly united.

If the fairy tale happily-ever-after ending means assured bliss, *Persuasion* does not qualify for such a closed status, though its ending does hold promise. Unlike Cinderella, Anne on two counts has chosen an unconventional route for marriage. Magee points out that Anne has rejected “socially desirable matches in favor of one based firmly on reciprocal and durable love” (207). By denying Benwick and Elliot and deciding on Wentworth, Anne is taking a chance on true love. Also, since Anne has chosen a naval man for a husband, the marriage will not be one “grounded in property” (Tanner 245), the way the marriages before her have been. With Wentworth, the possibility exists that he could be called to active combat: “His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness [between Wentworth and Anne] less; the dread of a future war all that could dim their sunshine” (283). The novel’s last sentence indicates that Anne “has to ‘pay’ for her marital happiness in a way unknown to any previous Jane Austen heroine” (Tanner 245): “She glorified in being a sailor’s wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (283). However, this possibility of “alarm” “is indefinite and in the future—an integral part of her happy marriage, out of an old society and into a new one, far away from the abandoned ‘paternal abode’” (Tanner 245).

As open ended as Anne’s future may be, such a risk could be an energizing revolution for Anne. Margaret Drabble characterizes Anne’s new life as one full of “color, activity, interest and change [for] she is released from the ‘quiet, confined’ female existence in which, as she says, ‘our feelings prey upon us,’ into the glory of being a sailor’s wife” (xix). Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar note, “No longer confined to a female community of childbearing and childrearing activities portrayed as dreary and dangerous in both Austen’s novels and her letters, Anne triumphs in a marriage that represents the union of traditional male and female spheres” (181). As “open and problematic” (Litz 231) as the ending of *Persuasion* is, if we remember Anne at the novel’s beginning—unappreciated, under her father’s thumb, closed within four walls—and Wentworth—dejected and foolish lover desperately scouring the countryside for a match—then the ending appears joyful. Anne and Frederick Wentworth sail freely into

the sunset, bolstered over any rough seas by their love, respect and admiration for each other.

By reading *Persuasion* with open minds and active imaginations, we can wish so much more for Anne and Wentworth, and for ourselves, than being identified by foot size, choosing partners by their attire, or forever attending balls within stuffy castle walls. Does that really sound “happily ever after”? Do we want to read about a mannequin Cinderella and Prince Charming or living and breathing characters? Putting our fairy tale mentalities aside, we only benefit by agreeing to be “at sea” for the duration of the novel with Austen at the helm.

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## Degrees of Maturity: The Bibliographic History of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Laura Cooner Lambdin and  
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It is well documented that Jane Austen's final novel, *Persuasion*, was completed in 1816 while she suffered from an illness, now believed to have been Addison's disease, which eventually took her life on July 18, 1817. Austen's brother Henry saw *Persuasion* to publication in late 1817 so that their sister, Cassandra, who was left the bulk of Jane's estate, might enjoy greater financial benefits. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in the preface to her 1995 edition of *Persuasion*, notes that early critics found the text to be melancholy and often attributed this gloomy mood to Austen's prolonged illness. Foremost among the themes discussed by the initial readers were the disconsolation of mortality, a subject that made the book more serious and elegiac in tone than Austen's previous works; gone was much of the lightheartedness of Austen's earlier novels. The gloominess has suggested to many readers that Austen may have realized that she was finishing her final text. Early critics also found elements of romanticism, attacks on social conventions and criticism of the aristocracy (Spacks ix). In short, although *Persuasion* has the elements one expects to find in a Jane Austen novel, the presentation is atypical in its darkness of tone and the additional theme of life's mutability.

After *Persuasion*'s initial printing, many periodicals lavished the work with praise. *Gentleman's Magazine* generally approved of the novel's ingenious tone; the *British Critic*, noted in 1817 that the point of *Persuasion* is that young people should marry according to their own judgments and accede to their own inclinations (Handley 14). The novel's interest for early audiences centered on the social customs of the age. In 1821 Richard Whately, in *Quarterly Review*, praised the work for its imaginative accuracy. He deemed *Persuasion* to be exemplary in what he perceived as a new style of novel, wherein the characters and stories of the works are rendered by the author as more authentic than had previously been the norm. He found particularly intriguing Austen's attention

to minute details that enhance the reader's instruction through amusement; by using a light, comedic tone, Austen provided a profitable study of human nature, and thus Whately found *Persuasion* to be among the best of Austen's novels, benefiting from the author's maturity (Southam 24). This sort of discussion of the final triumph of a grown-up writer is the attitude that dominated discussions of the novel for the next several decades.

By 1863, Julia Kavanaugh, in *English Women of Letters*, noted in *Persuasion* two sides of human character not so clear in Austen's other works: tenderness and sadness. Kavanaugh focused on the tortuous life of the unloved, despite the novel's happy conclusion. She echoed Whately's response concerning the accuracy of the characters' words and actions. Kavanaugh concluded that the tender and sad sides are the elements of *Persuasion* that set it apart from Austen's earlier novels (Southam 25). Clearly the early critical pattern was dependent on study of character and reality. Goldwin Smith, in *Life of Jane Austen* (1890), escalated such attention by noting that the title itself alludes to the influences that come together and mandate an old lover to return to his paramour. Smith concluded that as a whole, the work is not as well constructed as some of Austen's others, but in parts it reflects her best writing. Again, this is due to the author's true, insightful depiction of character.

There was some variance in the early criticism. Some twenty years before, in 1870, Richard Simpson strayed a bit from the norm when he observed *Persuasion* to contain the opposite themes of Austen's earlier novels. By allowing Anne Elliot to be both intellectual and passionate, distinctly more multidimensional than the usual heartless talking heads or compassionate losers of the previous novels, Austen changed her typical character pattern. It is this perspective that also engaged Margaret Oliphant in her *Literary History of England in the End of the Eighteenth and Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (1882), when she found *Persuasion* to contain in Anne Elliot a character who is intriguing because she is composed as a total human being rather than as a vehicle for the author's point. Oliphant found *Persuasion* to be "the best amusing of Miss Austen's books, but perhaps not the most interesting" (141).

This maturation of Austen's writing style is the emphasis of Geraldine Edith Mitton's 1905 work, *Jane Austen and Her Times*. Mitton found the serious tone to be ironically, somewhat sweet, especially in the character of Anne Elliot, whom she notes as the most complete of all Austen's heroines. In this vein, W. D. Howells, in his 1901 *Heroines of Fiction*, was also happy with Austen's characterization, especially with regard to Anne Eliot, except that "never was there a heroine so little self-assertive" (144). While explaining his reading as overtly personal, Howells expanded his observation to include the novel's originality, especially when compared to Austen's earlier works.

At the turn of the century, the criticism of *Persuasion* began to focus on what Spacks (x) deems "stereotypical feminine elements." This, she felt, was especially true in regard to "feeling" and its implication in everyday life, also noting that in the twentieth century, another shift started when responders began to

examine *Persuasion* in context with Austen's peers, as well as the major political events of her time, such as the Napoleonic wars. Thus the critical impetus shifted more toward sociopolitical readings.

A. C. Bradley, in his 1911 article, "Jane Austen," noted that "her inmost mind lay in her religion—a religion powerful in her life and not difficult to trace in her novels, but quiet, untheoretical, and rarely openly expressed" (29). Bradley wrote that he liked *Persuasion*, although he felt that *Mansfield Park* was Austen's best. However, not all of the early reviews of *Persuasion* are as favorable. In 1917 Reginald Farrer called *Persuasion* an uneven work that was somewhat fitful. He believed the conclusion to be weak, although he was able to praise Anne Elliot as one of Austen's greatest heroines. Farrer noted further that Austen reached her peak in characters who were able to convey feeling through subdued expression because while the novel "moves very quietly, without sobs or screams, in drawing-rooms and country lanes, it is yet among the most emotional novels in our literature" (148–49).

In 1924, Virginia Woolf concluded that *Persuasion* depicted Austen's realization that the world was vast and that she had been sheltered in her life of manners. Woolf hypothesized that had Austen lived longer, her characters would have relied more on observation than dialogue. A similar stance is taken by Mary Lascelles in her seminal work, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939); she found *Persuasion* to be outstanding in its treatment of "proper place" (87). Again praise for Austen's seeming strength in this novel stems from a feeling of the author's maturity. In contrast, Andrew Wright, in *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure* (1953), noted that the characters of *Persuasion* go out of their way to overpersuade, and he almost totally dismissed Lascelles's work (Handley 66).

However, it is the maturity that Lascelles noted that Marvin Mudrick in 1952 felt to reflect Austen's more personal struggle when he commented on it in his *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*. He posits that the conflict is not heightened through irony of quasi-aristocratic characters' speeches, as in Austen's earlier novels; instead it results from struggles with the traditional values and customs of Austen's class as weighed against the rising middle class. This made Austen more conscious of her position as a woman and more aware of the potential for feminine vitality at the turn of the eighteenth century. Mudrick's work set the foundation for much later criticism along a similar vein. In the 1960s and through the 1970s critics tended generally to be less appreciative of the novel.

Stuart Tave, in his 1973 work, *Some Words on Jane Austen*, found Anne to be the center of everything, but unaware of the ambiguousness of her position, although Austen herself had noted specifically that Anne's words carried no weight; in essence she was talked at, not to. "Anne never seeks those moments of ambiguity and never avoids them, but bears them all as she must until they can be brought to clarity" (Tave 276). Tave saw Anne as an observer rather than the observed. This adds to his conclusion that the revised ending becomes even more important because Captain Wentworth finally "hears" Anne. Perhaps



this image adds some credence to Joan Rees's *Jane Austen: Woman and Writer* (1976), where the critic speculated that even through the haze of Austen's relationships and quickly approaching spinsterhood, the author remained an optimist. This was probably true, although Marilyn Butler, in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), stressed that Austen's construction of the novel is somewhat awkward in its combination of "old" (as in *Emma*, the "heroine who is wrong") and "new" style (166). Clearly not every critic supported others' claims of Austen's maturity creating a better novel.

As the 1970s ended, different approaches were taken to the text. Bernard Paris offered a psychological interpretation in 1978, finding that Anne's actions stemmed from her desire for self-approval. In 1979 Patrick Piggott observed in *Innocent Diversion: A Study of the Music in the Life and Writings of Jane Austen* that the key scene of *Persuasion* occurs at the public concert where Anne and Captain Wentworth meet. Piggott was especially keen on the musical details that Austen presented, and he concluded that the author was probably much more musically inclined than previously believed.

Obviously the 1970s was a decade of transition from character studies to more diverse ideas. The 1980s brought further interpretations based on Austen's maturity and characters, but it also included feminist, Marxist and other social or cultural critical studies, often focusing on morality and class. Margaret Kirkham, in *Jane Austen: Feminist and Fiction* (1983), found that Austen sympathized with the feminism of the Enlightenment, a view many see as a direct contradiction to the studies of Marilyn Butler. Kirkham's insightful examination concluded that Anne is the ideal feminist once she realizes that men have the advantage over women because of their educational opportunities and that male characters tend to have more depth because most writers are males.

Robert Hopkins noted in "Moral Luck and Judgement in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*" (1987) that as Austen's health deteriorated, she seems to have reconsidered her previous plot resolutions. Perhaps, Hopkins posited, Austen realized that in life, moral judgments must be addressed by all because everyone must live with the consequences. Anne Astall expanded on this position in "Anne Elliot's Education: The Learning of Romance in *Persuasion*" (1987), where she found that Anne did not have to rely on formal education, for she learned the lessons of life. This results in the idea that one can learn what is needed by observing and keeping a focused mind.

In other ways, much of the later criticism centered on Austen's maturity as an author. Near her death, her tone became less mocking. Trevor Davison's "Jane Austen and the 'Process' of *Persuasion*" (1984) found that the novel differs from Austen's previous works because of the questions it raises by being less complete than her other novels. Grahame Smith in 1984 offered that Austen, in *Persuasion*, finally demonstrated that she was capable of writing an original novel. Smith concluded that *Persuasion* is the most realistic of Austen's works.

Lynda S. Boren, in "The Performing Self: Psychodrama in Austen, James, and Woolf" (1986), professed that Anne Elliot is a reflection of Austen's defi-

ance and serves to underscore that aspect of the author's personality. Vivien Jones countered in *How to Study a Jane Austen Novel* (1987) that Austen's style in *Persuasion* is a radical departure from her earlier novels, noting how many dialectical notions such as male-female roles and change and constancy are treated.

Marked contrasts are further noted in "The Second Spring of Youth in *Persuasion*" (1987) by Janice Sokoloff, especially in terms of aging. Sokoloff found that both Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Croft are presented in the novel as the potential results of Anne's actions. It is this growth that Reddy Vasudeva in *Jane Austen: The Dialectics of Self-Actualization in Her Novels* (1987) found as a process that results in self-awareness; the characters come to understand the potentially crass or imprudent implications of their deeds before they act. However, Anne's tendency to evaluate her situation works as a barrier, according to "What We Have Here Is a Failure to Communicate: A Rogerian Analysis of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*" (1988) by James W. Booth, Jr. In the next year, Robin Raymer's "Jane Austen, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot" (1989) noted that the end result of such introspection is a more touching, human work. Here, Anne kindly takes responsibility for her actions rather than dumping her problems on others for them to solve.

Andrea Lebowitz also commented on Austen's maturity as a writer in *Persuasion* in "Illness as Metaphor in the Nineteenth-Century Novel," (1990) by showing that Anne grows personally as her health is restored. This plays off what Lebowitz saw as the male perspective that permeates the work. The related idea—that women are capable of being both reliable and rational—is explored by Marylea Meyerson in "Jane Austen's Garrulous Speakers: Social Criticism in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*" (1990). Jan Fergus's *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (1991) shows that *Persuasion* contains a deeper introspection about relationships than do Austen's earlier novels. This may have been due to her Christian perspective: "For Austen religion was an essential part of her daily life" (36), and this profound sort of thought wavered, no doubt, spilling over into her writing. It is a similar depth and maturity that Keith C. Odom examined in *Jane Austen: Rebel of Time and Place* (1991), wherein he found *Persuasion* to be a mature, complex work that comes close to emulating a Shakespearean tragicomedy. Austen's growth is found by P. C. Chakrabarti, in *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Novels* (1992), to depend on much gentler and more subtle irony, although *Persuasion* is also Austen's most emotional novel. Chakrabarti commented that although the plot is weak, the novel gains its depth from the mature wisdom it exudes.

Quite to the contrary, Julia Giordano, in "The Word as Battleground in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*" (1993), found that both Anne Elliot and, thus, Jane Austen discover their apexes through their silence. She offered that Anne often begs the question to avoid appearing too cognizant of her world, much the same way that Jane Austen was forced by her culture to cloak her ideas and opinions. It is this notion, coupled with the more modern examination of a changing society,

that is the focus of John Lauber's portion of the *Persuasion* section found in *Jane Austen* (1993). He recorded that the novel innately answers questions regarding class and status, noting that what one accomplishes in life is clearly superior to who one is, in terms of status. In "Lost in a Book: Jane Austen's *Persuasion*," Adela Pinch (1993) adds that Austen has a special knack for noting that women are not autonomous; rather, they have been conditioned to their limits. Clearly the realm of scholarship that comments on Austen's maturity is eclectic and staggering.

During this period, many critics, like their predecessors, opted to study the growth of characters found in *Persuasion*, particularly Anne Elliot, the heroine. Woo-Sang Moon, in "On *Persuasion*" (1984), found Anne Elliot to be different from Austen's earlier characters because she is older and wiser. Moon views Anne's development as far superior to that of Mrs. Smith and Lady Russell. In this regard it is clear that the characters fall into three groups: the well-to-do and their false impressions of their import, the Musgroves and the naval officers who have earned their way into the upper class. Linda C. Hunt's examination of Anne in "A Woman's Portion: Jane Austen and the Female Character" (1986) discovered that Anne provides a balance to the novel between the perceived and the real. Further, unlike Austen's previous heroines, Anne remains constant in character throughout the novel.

In *Jane Austen* (1986), Tony Tanner noted parallels between Anne's character at the novel's outset and England, where the way of life is in decline, which causes the hierarchy to struggle to keep their position against those who are being elevated in status through their work ethic. This idea, pictured by the sailors who earn their rank in the unpredictable sea, shows the turmoil of their class. Michael Williams disputed this notion in *Jane Austen: Six Novels and Their Methods* (1986), finding *Persuasion* to be a novel wherein Ann slowly evolves into a heroine who is the dominant figure by the work's conclusion. Williams did not believe the book's central idea is either class strife or the new-found class of social climbers among the naval officers. E. B. Moon, in his "'A Model of Female Excellence': Anne Elliot, *Persuasion*, and the Vindication of a Richardsonian Ideal of the Female Character" (1987), finds vindication in the novel because of the influences that come straight from Richardson's works. To Moon, the work is hardly original, given its clear reliance on the problems, although sufficiently skewed, of the heroines of Richardson's novels. Thus, Austen may have been scrutinizing her own impression of what a heroine should be.

Claudia Johnson noted in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988) that these tensions remain unresolved and are actually unsettled. She finds that because the characters are insulated by rural life, they are somewhat damaged psychologically. Austen, by allowing the readers to see the other characters from Anne's perspective, tries to foster interpretation on the audience according to "Aspects of Narration in *Persuasion*" (1989–1990) by Michael Orange. It is this perspective posited by Austen that shapes readers' knowledge of the characters

and their interests. However, Roselle Taylor, in "Point of View and Estrangement in *Persuasion*" (1989), notes that Anne is somewhat confused throughout the novel because she is unable to grasp totally the complexities of her situation, especially in regard to the plight of women. Taylor continued that the ideals of the novel become clearer because readers are more in tune with Anne's sense of solitude and loss.

This critical focus on the social classes has led critics away from what Anca Vlasopolos noted in "At Sea or in Deep Water: Women's Spaces in *Persuasion*, *The Awakening*, and *The Voyage Out*" (1990). Vlasopolos instead saw the sea as a metaphor for the unknown opportunities left for women. Through efforts such as this one and James L. Kasterly's "*Persuasion: Jane Austen's Philosophical Rhetoric*" (1991), the intermeshing of individuals in a community comes to the light. Kasterly posited that it is the role of the many characters within the work to influence and determine the personal feelings of the individuals. On an even more concise note, Oliver MacDonagh, in *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (1991), found that the interaction of family members molds and shapes the individuals. Given this, it is somewhat ironic that, according to MacDonagh, the main families of the novel are given traits that do not compare favorably to Austen's own, which MacDonagh described as less than ideal.

Joanne Wilkes, in *Jane Austen's Persuasion* (1991), follows with in-depth analyses of Austen's treatment of social themes and personal growth as they effect the development of the female characters. Wilkes believed that Austen was aware of the limitations of her gender and concluded that in spite of all of the obstacles, women will be able to make something of themselves. This theme is somewhat twisted in Michael M. Boardman's "Comic Fiction and Ideological Instability: Goldsmith and Austen" (1992), wherein *Persuasion's* comic elements are undercut by the reality that happiness is more a product of chance than merit. Roger Gard, in *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity* (1992), agrees that the tone of *Persuasion* is lighter and less perfect than her earlier novels. He continues that Anne Elliot is the exception, for he found her to be among Austen's most perfect characters: "In her modest form we recognize, if anywhere in this novel the 'mentor' figures of whom literary scholars like to write" (198).

Other components of character study are presented in the works of Amy Levin and Diana Postlewaite. To Levin (1992), the sisters of *Persuasion* contribute to the novel's darker side; they suffer because they choose to remain close to their father. Postlewaite, in "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child: Austen's Anne Elliot and Freud's Anna O" (1992), compares Austen's heroine to Freud's, centering on the theme of the missing mother. This leads Anne to search for her maternal lineage throughout *Persuasion*, finally achieving the climatic ability of maternal instincts.

Yet there is much more to the characters of the novel, as exemplified by John Wiltshire in *Jane Austen and the Body: "The Picture of Health"* (1992). Wilt-

shire comments on all of the negative elements of the novel, especially the seeming vulnerability of the characters and “the psychopathology of everyday life” (187), to conclude that these elements come together to expose that one’s inner self and outer self can be disturbingly different. Even so, the idea of Anne Elliot’s growth into a woman capable of working to shape her life to meet her needs is examined in Ae Kyung Han’s “A Feminist Approach to *Persuasion*: On Anne’s Growth” (1993). Han concluded that this inner journey enables Anne to be the paradigm of women’s excellence concerning composure and decision making. Yet Harold Bloom, in “Canonical Memory in Early Wordsworth and Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*” (1994), finds Anne to be isolated by her abilities, which results in a novel that is dark and somber, indeed, almost sad. It is a sad theme that Anita Sokolski pursues in “The Melancholy *Persuasion*” (1994), where she finds the novel ends with Anne’s being sad because she no longer has any reason to be sad.

Anne knows her feelings and does not need to change, according to Barbara K. Seeber and Kathleen James-Cavan in their 1994 article, “‘Unvarying, Warm Admiration Everywhere’: The Truths about Wentworth.” It is, however, crucial that Wentworth evolve to the point of feeling that his relationship with Louisa was a mistake or that he even revise his memory to believe that it never happened. “Changes made to the past and how the past is re-written for the present” (Seeber and James-Cavan 43) reflect the instability of history and text, a common critical theme in the early 1990s. Similarly the instability of history caused by grief and the impossibility of restoration is the focus of Jill Heydt-Stevenson’s “‘Unbecoming Conjunctions’: Mourning the Loss of Landscape and Love in *Persuasion*” (1995). Here it is seen that Austen incorporated picturesque aesthetics to show that all is mutable in the physical world just as in human relationships. The instability of romance is also the subject of Laura Tracy’s “Relational Competence: Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*” (1995). According to Tracy, Austen felt that the work of romantic poets was unnatural and confusing to women because romance had little to do with a young woman’s relativity and what she had seen of her mother’s existence: “Moreover, when romance dies after three or four years, women usually are left with the children and the washing. As Austen well knew, love stories end at the point of ‘the happy ending’—everyone agrees that marriage and romance have nothing to do with each other” (Tracy 154).

Isabel Grundy’s “*Persuasion*: Or, The Triumph of Cheerfulness” (1996) finds in Anne a heroine who understands women’s suffering to be caused not by biology but by a society that confines women inside the home. That Austen was interested in painting and romanticism because they fictionalize reality is Peter Saber’s argument in “‘Staring in Astonishment’: Portraits and Prints in *Persuasion*” (1996). The notion of professional domesticity and the literary merging of sea and home in *Persuasion* is Monica F. Cohen’s subject in “Persuading the Navy Home: Austen and Married Women’s Professional Property” (1996). Co-

hen notes the interest of Britain and the rest of anti-Bonaparte Europe in naval innovations during the Napoleonic wars. That exotic items from far-off lands became the rage in English decorating as a result of British military expansion is well known; however, Cohen interestingly notes the rather unromantic influence of the quiet and confined navy existence on decor as a sudden male attention to cleanliness brought about by cramped, tidy spaces on ships being the experience of so many young men.

Again underscoring the limitations of romantic love is “‘Song of the Dying Swan’? The Nineteenth-Century Response to *Persuasion*” (1996) by Joanne Wilkes. In a summation of modern feminist interpretations, Wilkes writes that recent critics “have investigated the social and literary conventions of Austen’s time that affected both women in general and women writers in particular, and have shown how Austen’s awareness of these conventions influenced her narrative strategies as well as the representation of her heroines” (52). Discussing one of Austen’s main themes, Paul Poplawski in *A Jane Austen Encyclopedia* (1998) notes that “the paradox of marriage for middle-class women in Austen’s time and in her novels was that it represented everything that disempowered them and could have made them dependent on men but at the same time offered them their only escape from profound material insecurity and an even more constrained and burdensome dependence on the family” (290).

Recently the Internet has added to the vast criticism of Jane Austen and her works. Web pages containing maps, illustrations, hypertexts and references abound on the web. One of the foremost in this regard is “The Republic of Pemberly,” which contains discussion groups, information pages and other valuable tools for browsers interested in all of Jane Austen’s works. Concerning *Persuasion*, “Pemberly” contains a section called “The Cancelled Chapters of *Persuasion*,” noting the history of the chapters and their place in the British Museum. Also included on this page are copies of the E. C. Brock illustrations from the early twentieth century, as well as one illustration by Hugh Thomson. Concerning the characters of *Persuasion*, “Pemberly” presents three genealogical charts: the Elliots, Musgroves and Hayters; the Wentworths and Crofts; and the Benwick and the Harvilles. These helpful charts are followed by a file that presents genealogical information using the standard genealogical computer data format (GEDCOM). Also, the page charts the use of the words *persuade* and *persuasion* in the novel, differentiating them by part of speech: verbs, adjectives and nouns. This portion includes the words’ usage in the “cancelled chapters.” Also included here are the text of *Persuasion* and a copy of an advertisement for Gowland’s Lotion, the balm for eliminating freckles, from 1809. Finally, a cursory look at the movie *Persuasion* is presented.

James Dawe is the author of the “Jane Austen Page,” where visitors can glean information about the Jane Austen Society. Included in this work are a listserv discussion group, as well as links to other Jane Austen pages and the texts archived at the University of Maryland. Finally, Dawe includes a section on the

1996 film version of *Persuasion*, which includes six reviews. He then relates what he feels are the best books about Jane Austen as well as the means to become a part of a Jane Austen mailing list.

Other Jane Austen web pages include Mitsuoharu Matsuoka's "Jane Austen Page," which has zipped versions of many of Austen's novels, as well as a chronology of Austen's life. Matsuoka presents a list of Austenian home pages as well as a mailing list that includes a listserv offering a free subscription. Following a list of his on-line texts, which includes a zipped text of *Persuasion*, Matsuoka provides additional listings for other academic resources, including Austen's letters and a selected bibliography. The page concludes with links to other sites of interest, including additional Victorian web sites and sites devoted to English authors.

Finally, shorter pages have minimal interest that may appeal to Austenian scholars. The "Jane 'Persuasion' Austen" page presents a short biography of the author and includes some interesting facts concerning Austen and her works. All in all, the movement to hypertext and hypercriticism will be valuable additions to the scholarship concerning Jane Austen.

There is also much lively ongoing chatter about characters who are as alive to modern readers as they were to those who read *Persuasion* immediately after Austen's death. Clearly Austen's timeless text is a masterpiece, despite the flaws noted by some critics.

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## The Juvenilia: Energy Versus Sympathy

*Juliet McMaster*

“What Became of Jane Austen?” is the title of Kingsley Amis’s 1957 essay on *Mansfield Park*. He was staggered that Austen, with her mastery of irony, should have settled even temporarily for what he sees as the dreary moralism of Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram. But the difference between *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, startling though it is (even for readers who have learned to admire Fanny), is as nothing to the difference between Austen’s juvenilia and the novels of her maturity.

One tradition of critical response, originating in the Austen family, has remained faintly embarrassed by the juvenilia, even to the point of considering they should not be published (J. E. Austen-Leigh 46; J. Austen-Leigh 178). Most readers of Austen discover them late in the day, and are either surprised and delighted or mildly shocked, but the “real Austen” for them will remain the six novels. “What became of Jane Austen?” for them, was that she grew up and became a great novelist, in that order. But for a few eccentrics, or choice souls (depending on one’s point of view), the answer to the “What became of?” question is less positive: she grew up and was tamed. They measure the loss as well as the gains. The Wordsworth of “Tintern Abbey” looks back on the “aching joys” and “dizzy raptures” of his youth, and tries to convince himself, “other gifts / Have followed; for such loss, I would believe, / Abundant recompense.” He does not quite succeed, because he continues to be haunted by that sense that “there hath passed away a glory from the earth.”

And so with my reading of Jane Austen—who was born in the same year as Wordsworth. The six novels are indeed “abundant recompense” for the exuberance and dizzy raptures of the juvenilia. And it would be mere perversity to “mourn or murmur” at the passing of Jane’s juvenility. Nevertheless, the opposite extreme is perversity too. It is worth lingering, after all, over “the

hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower.” Lingering, and exploring—for if the differences are amazing between the juvenilia and the six novels, so are the similarities. I shall be pondering both the discontinuities and the continuities: the juvenilia as their own separate place of dizzy raptures and the juvenilia as offering intimations of the immortality that is to come.

The Jane Austen who has hit the jackpot of critical success is the novelist of restraint. “First and foremost,” wrote G. H. Lewis, in 1852, pulling out all the rhetorical stops, “let Jane Austen be named, the greatest novelist that has ever written, using the term to signify the most perfect mastery over means to her end” (Southam, *Critical Heritage* 140). The qualification about “means to her end” strikes the keynote of much of the praise that was to come, the claims that she was (surprisingly) great but exact, whereas other great writers, such as Shakespeare, have always been allowed to be great and chaotic. It used to be held one of Austen’s great strengths that she knew her limitations: that she never presented a scene between men in which no women were present (because, after all, she was a woman), and that she never followed her couples into the bedroom (because, after all, she was a spinster). It is rather like praising an athlete for how fast she can run in a hobble skirt. Austen *is* brilliant for all she can do despite her limitations. But it is wonderfully liberating to take a look at what she could do before she knuckled under and took to that hobble skirt. Her juvenilia are not elegant and certainly not restrained. But they do show that athlete’s extraordinary energy and suppleness.

“Keats’s amazed delight on first looking into Chapman’s *Homer* was nothing compared to mine on first looking into Dr. Chapman’s edition of the *Minor Works*,” records the novelist Reginald Hill of his younger self (79). To a teenage boy who had been thoroughly put off Austen by a compulsory reading of *Mansfield Park*, the juvenilia were a godsend, an awakening to the *proper* way into Jane Austen’s work.

What we find in the juvenilia is not an aesthetic of exactness and restraint, but an aesthetic of exuberance, of excess. Here we have no painstaking search for the single *mot juste*, but a gargantuan delight in plethora. Rich Mr. Clifford, we hear, keeps not just a coach and four but “a great many Carriages of which I do not recollect half. I can only remember that he had a Coach, a Chariot, a Chaise, a Landeau, a Landeaulet, a Phaeton, a Gig, a Whisky, an Italian Chair, a Buggy, a Curricule & a wheelbarrow” (“Memoirs of Mr Clifford” 43). The “beautiful Cassandra,” on a single visit to a pastry-cook’s, “devoured six ices, refused to pay for them, knocked down the Pastry Cook & walked away”—a lot of action and consumption for a single sentence (“The Beautiful Cassandra” 45). Charlotte Lutterell of “Lesley Castle,” who is also keen on food, goes to her lodgings in Bristol well supplied: “We brought a cold Pigeon pye, a cold turkey, a cold tongue, and half a dozen Jellies with us, which we were lucky enough with the help of our Landlady, her husband, and their three children, to get rid of, in less than two days after our arrival” (“Lesley Castle” 119). Why use one word when a dozen will do as well? Why restrict yourself to a single

long-lost relative when, as in “Love and Friendship,” with a flourish of the pen you can be so much more generous? “Another Grandchild!” exclaims Lord St. Clair, with theatrically uplifted hands. “What an unexpected Happiness is this! to discover in the space of 3 minutes, as many of my Descendants!” (“Love and Friendship” 91). And presently a fourth reveals himself. Charlotte Brontë famously denounced Austen for her paucity of passion and lamented the absence of the “bonny beck” and “bright physiognomy” in her novels. And indeed the Austen of the novels is notably sparing in details of personal appearance as of landscape. Not so the Austen of the juvenilia. Elfrida and her companions deliver the following address in chorus to their new neighbor, Rebecca Fitzroy, when on their first visit, they are impressed by her conversation:

Lovely and too charming Fair one, notwithstanding your forbidding Squint, your greazy tresses & your swelling Back, which are more frightfull than imagination can paint or pen describe, I cannot refrain from expressing my raptures, at the engaging Qualities of your Mind, which so amply atone for the Horror, with which your first appearance must ever inspire the unwary visitor. (“Frederic and Elfrida” 6)

A resounding way to sound the first note of the “First Impressions” theme!

Such boisterous overstatement is not just over the top, but down the other side too. And while hyperbole is the familiar tool of the satirist, this aesthetic of excess has more than a satiric intent. It is Rabelaisian, carnivalesque, born of a youthful jouissance that is one of the clouds of glory that the mature author has had to leave behind. Far from working with a fine brush on a little piece of ivory two inches wide, this young artist wields a broad and laden brush, sloshing her effects over an area as broad as Tom Sawyer’s fence, producing much effect after little labor.

Consider one aspect of the notable discontinuities between the juvenile work and the mature work: motion. Stuart Tave memorably characterizes the mature Austen as a dancer who can move “with significant grace in good time in a restricted space” (1). He shows how the characters who take liberties with time and space, (like John Thorpe, who boasts that his horse cannot go slower than ten miles an hour in harness, or Mary Crawford, who also stretches distance and duration) are morally tainted. Approved characters observe a strict decorum in these matters. Similarly, the principle that “3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on” in a novel (*Letters* 401) implies a commitment to the unity of place that is very different from the wildly unstructured peregrinations that are characteristic of the juvenilia. The young Austen, like Catherine Morland before she was “in training to be a heroine,” seems to have delighted in the dizzying motion of “rolling down the green slope at the back of the house” (*Northanger Abbey* 15, 14).

Free and vigorous motion, in fact, is one of the recurring characteristics of these rollicking narratives. The heroine of “The Beautifull Cassandra” takes a hackney coach to Hampstead, “where she was no sooner arrived than she or-

dered the Coachman to turn round & drive her back again" ("The Beautifull Cassandra" 45). Such motion is not purposeful and efficient, but gratuitous, undertaken for its own sake, and so simply pleasurable. She is like the grand old duke of York, who

had ten thousand men;  
He marched them up to the top of the hill,  
And he marched them down again.

The irrational and repetitive motion in both cases has its nonsensical appeal for the child. In "A Tour through Wales" the narrator explains,

My mother rode upon our little pony & Fanny & I walked by her side or rather ran, for my Mother is so fond of riding fast that She galloped all the way. . . . Fanny has taken a great many Drawings of the Country, which are very beautiful tho' perhaps not such exact resemblances as might be wished, from their being taken as she ran along.

When the girls wear out their shoes,

Mama was so kind as to lend us a pair of blue Sattin Slippers, of which we each took one and hopped home from Hereford delightfully. ("A Tour through Wales" 176)

(Fanny's drawings, though not "exact resemblances," might stand as emblems for the juvenilia: the vigorous young artist has more lively priorities than realism.) The heroines of "Love and Friendship" rattle about all over the country, and the memorable last scene takes place in a stagecoach that shuttles to and fro between Edinburgh and Stirling. These indeed are "dizzy raptures," to appropriate Wordsworth's phrase for his youth: rhythmic and repetitive motion vigorously indulged in for its own sake. It is the sort of high, like the rides in a fairground, for which the adult loses stomach.

There are gender implications to this wild, unrestricted motion. The value for stability and stasis that characterizes the six novels makes them very much a woman's world. Woman has traditionally been the "fixed foot" (Donne's phrase), while the man is that part of the compasses that wanders forth and circles round. A recurring trope in Austen's novels shows the heroine posted at a window, engaged in identifying the mounted male who rides toward her from a distance, as Marianne watches and waits for Willoughby, Elinor for Edward, Elizabeth for Darcy, Charlotte Heywood for Sidney Parker (*Sense and Sensibility*, 86, 358; *Pride and Prejudice* [PP], 333; *Mansfield Park* [MP], 425). Not so in the juvenilia. Waiting and watching are not congenial activities for the hyperactive personnel there, female or male. They know no boundaries.

The young Jane Austen was still relatively free of a gendered identity, and she presents characters who are similarly unsocialized. In fact, one of her most gleeful recurring jokes is gender reversal.

In “Henry and Eliza,” which she probably wrote at age twelve or thirteen, she presents a heroine who is a foundling, like Tom Jones, and chronicles the sowing of her wild oats with a Fieldingesque indulgence. Eliza is an adventuress who purloins banknotes, snaps up other girls’ fiancés, absconds to France and survives motherhood and widowhood. Thrown into prison with her two little boys, she escapes down a rope ladder as resourcefully as any Jack Sheppard. And she is never made to repent of her cheerfully self-indulgent behavior. Among the assumptions built in to the juvenilia is that girls can be as naughty as boys—in fact, are *meant* to be as naughty as boys—and that a good adventure is more fun than a morally pointed tale any day. In the dénouement of this tale, after she has been reunited with her cheerfully forgiving parents, Eliza raises an army, demolishes her enemy’s stronghold and “gained the Blessings of thousands, & the Applause of her own Heart” (39). No long-suffering forgiveness of enemies for *this* heroine! And rather than being haunted by the sentimental heroine’s sense of unworthiness, Eliza, “happy in the conscious knowledge of her own Excellence,” takes the time to compose songs in her own praise (34). As Karen Hartnick points out, “Eliza lives out the traditional male adventure—she leaves her family, travels, faces danger, demonstrates cunning and bravery, and defeats her enemies in armed battle” (xiii). The dangerous adversary of the piece is also a woman, the implacable “Dutchess,” who maintains a private army and keeps a personal Newgate “for the reception of her own private Prisoners” (“Henry and Eliza” 36). There is not much left for the men to do except be snapped up and fought over by the martial ladies.

The Jack of “Jack and Alice” is disposed of in a single paragraph, while the ladies commandeer the stage. And here there is further cheerful reversal of gender roles, this time in the courtship situation. The women of Austen’s generation had inherited the courtship codes laid down by Richardson and the conduct books, according to which the woman’s role in courtship is meant to be not just passive but almost unconscious: she is not to be aware of her own sexuality until the male awakens it by his proposal. In her novels, Austen continues to challenge this ruling but in her juvenilia, especially “Jack and Alice,” she has more fun completely reversing it. Charles Adams, the man all the women lust after, is the feminized male—“amiable, accomplished & bewitching”—while it is the heroine who is “addicted to the Bottle & the Dice” (13). Like Richardson’s Pamela, though with much less finesse, he finds himself bound in honesty to admit to his own unimpeachable virtue: “I imagine my Manners & Address to be of the most polished kind; there is a certain elegance a peculiar sweetness in them that I never saw equalled & cannot describe” (25). In his behavior, no less than in his beauty and virtue, he smacks of the heroine. Pursued by love-hungry ladies, he retires to his country estate. This playing hard to get, of course, is very stimulating for the enterprising young women who come a-courting. Lucy, the most persistent of them, will not take no for an answer. Taking over the conventional phraseology of male discourse, she writes to him that she will “shortly do myself the honour of waiting on him” (22). Like Mr.



Collins she attributes his “angry & peremptory refusal” of her proposal to “the effect of his modesty” (21). When he will not answer her letters, like Mr. Elton in the carriage she “choos[es] to take, Silence for Consent” (22). She does not give up until she is caught, appropriately enough, in a man-trap—“one of the steel traps so common in gentlemen’s grounds.” Almost in chorus, like a quartet of courtly lovers, the women moan iambically, “Oh! cruel Charles to wound the hearts & legs of all the fair” (22).

The female suitors who surround the lovely Charles Adams are quite frank about being attracted by his physical charms rather than by the virtues that *he* considers are his best claim to being loved. In the novels it is usually the male who is expected to succumb irrationally to beauty, as Mr. Bennet did. But here Lucy admits, “I could not resist his attractions.” And Alice sighs, “Ah! who can” (21).

The same bold reversal of conventional gender attitudes appears in “A Collection of Letters,” where a young girl has no scruple in arguing, “It is no disgrace to love a handsome Man. If he were plain indeed I might have had reason to be ashamed of a passion which must have been mean since the Object would have been unworthy” (166). The long and agonized debates among women in *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* on the extent to which “person” in a man may legitimately influence a woman’s response are cheerfully set at naught in *this* epistolary collection. These females are frankly in pursuit of good male bodies and, by implication, good sex. The long tendency of sentimental fiction to etherealize the heroine can hardly survive against this gust of earthy comedy.

“The Beautifull Cassandra,” probably written when Jane Austen was twelve years old (McMaster, *Jane Austen*), is again interesting for the heroine’s bold appropriation of the male adventure and for its switch of gender roles in the parents’ generation. Cassandra’s mother, the “celebrated Millener in Bond Street,” is apparently the breadwinner of the family, but when Cassandra returns from her day of conspicuous consumption and unashamed self-indulgence, it is to her “paternal roof” (44, 46). The devoted mother is the effectual head of the family, but the male, absorbed with his “noble birth,” takes the credit. It is an early version, I like to think, of Anne Elliot’s family in *Persuasion*.

In her love life Cassandra is boldly experimental. The narrative offers the highly eligible Viscount, who is “no less celebrated for his Accomplishments & Virtues, than for his Elegance & Beauty” (another feminized male). But Cassandra falls in love with “an elegant Bonnet” instead, a female accessory created by her mother, and cheerfully elopes with it. The bonnet, however elegant and desirable, is no permanent commitment, but only one prominent item that contributes to the protagonist’s picaresque journey of self-fulfillment. It is mated, used and discarded, rather like the women in James Bond’s path.

Young Austen notably experiments in narrative technique. One reason she enjoyed the epistolary mode, besides the vogue it enjoyed in eighteenth-century fiction, was the opportunity it presented for different voices, different characters

articulating themselves and, hence, multiplied levels of irony. But she was also testing the possibilities of omniscient narration and the differing relations with the reader that could be attained by modulations in tone. “The History of England” bears examination here. Her model and satiric butt was Goldsmith’s *History of England* of 1771, a version of Hume’s 1754 *History*, abridged and addressed to women and children. (Austen was still mocking “the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England” in the famous chapter 5 of *Northanger Abbey* [Fergus i]). The patronizing patriarchal tone was enough to invite parody, and the stance she adopts is belligerently authoritarian. Her famous subtitle, “By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian,” is more a challenge than a humble admission. One hears the unspoken addition, “And proud of it.” And in her narration she revels in a tyranny over the reader. “I cannot say much for this Monarch’s Sense,” she says breezily of Henry VI,

—Nor would I if I could, for he was a Lancastrian. I suppose you know all about the Wars between him & The Duke of York who was of the right side; If you do not, you had better read some other History, for I shall not be very diffuse in this. (“The History of England” 139–40)

She has revised the tone of solemn authority to a capricious and impatient Shandyism. (“How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter?” writes Tristram. “. . . I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back . . . and read the whole chapter again” [*Tristram Shandy*, I, 20].) Both narrators practice a kind of playful tyranny on their readers, sending up solemn authority. Such antiauthoritarian irreverence has usually been considered the province of male authors like Sterne and Fielding.

Indeed, laughter and the comic mode have all too often been alienated to the masculine, while sentiment has been allowed to be the province of the ladies. Anna Letitia Barbauld, in her historic fifty-volume *The British Novelists* of 1810, notes that women specialize in the sentimental novel of distress; it is male authors who write the satire and humour. Thackeray, also writing of the Regency, similarly alienates laughter to the men. After the hilarious episode of Becky Sharp’s agonies with the curry when she is trying to catch Jos Sedley, father and son “thought the joke capital,” but “the ladies only smiled a little. They thought poor Rebecca suffered too much” (*Vanity Fair*, Chapter 3). This is a division of cultural labor that young Austen refuses to accept. “Why is it that women when they write are apt to give a melancholy tinge to their compositions?” Barbauld wondered. “Is it that they suffer more, and have fewer resources against melancholy? . . . Is it that humor is a scarcer product of the mind than sentiment, and more congenial to the stronger powers of man?” (Barbauld 44). “No way!” one can imagine young Austen responding; and older Austen, too, come to that (Grundy 15), though it is the young writer who most vigorously claims humor for her own. “The liveliest effusions of wit and humour” are among the characteristics of the novel (as most notably practiced by

women) that Austen lists in *Northanger Abbey* (38). Not for her the “novel of distress” ghetto. Distress and delicate sensibility are among the earliest targets of her humor. In *Volume the First* appears “A beautiful description of the different effects of sensibility on different minds,” in which everyone is grouped around the bedside of the interestingly ailing Melissa:

Sir William is constantly at her bedside. The only repose he takes is on the Sopha in the Drawing room, where for five minutes every fortnight he remains in an imperfect Slumber, starting up every Moment & exclaiming “Oh! Melissa, Ah! Melissa,” then sinking down again raises his left arm and scratches his head. (72)

Distress is made matter for laughter.

In this, besides reversing the expectations of a near contemporary like Mrs. Barbauld, Austen differs from a number of other youthful writers. The adolescent writer, particularly the girl, is typically intensely serious. She usually writes romance rather than burlesque and humor. Fourteen-year-old George Eliot in “Edward Neville” writes serious imitation of the historical romances of Scott and G.P.R. James, with a rebellious swashbuckling hero who employs high rhetoric (“We . . . would have defended him to the last drop of our blood” [Eliot 7]). Louisa May Alcott at fifteen wrote a serious heroic melodrama, *Norna, or the Witch’s Curse*, which she herself sent up mercilessly in *Little Women* years later, when as an adult she was ready to laugh at her own youthful earnestness. Charlotte Brontë’s Angrian sagas, though they contain humor, are mainly serious romance. Where childhood writings are funny, the humor is usually unintentional, as in Daisy Ashford’s classic *The Young Visitors*. By her own avowal, Ashford gave up writing when she found her brothers laughed at her work (xxii).

From the first, however, Austen courted laughter. Instead of imitating the serious history and distressed fictions she read, she made burlesques of them. It is no surprise that, as Reginald Hill attests, the juvenilia appeal to boys. One of two girls in a family largely of boys, young Jane was evidently something of a tomboy, with an ability to cater to boys’ tastes (Tomalin 29)—or, indeed, to the tastes of people of either sex who do not like to be restrained. She writes rowdy fiction, with plenty of violence, movement, irreverence and bad behavior. She eschews the goody-goody and the sniveling. And the young women in her fiction can be as forgivably bad as the young men, the young men as namby-pamby as the boy’s version of a girl. She seems to have been like Jo March of *Little Women*: quite at home with girls and girls’ doings, yet liking also boys’ pursuits and boys’ language and the freedom of movement and thought that their cultures assigned to the privileged sex. When Jo March’s father returns at the end of the first part of *Little Women*, though, he notes with satisfaction, “I don’t see the ‘son Jo’ whom I left a year ago . . . I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug, as she used to do” (Alcott 223). Generations of Alcott’s readers have felt a sense of loss as the free spirit they admire inevitably knuckles under to the

demands of becoming a young lady. Readers who have admired the boisterous overstatement in Austen's juvenilia, as well as the cheerful experiments and reversals that make gender so unstable a category in her early works, may also feel some regret as she moves into responsible young-ladyhood. In the mature novels, it is the unapproved teenager Lydia Bennet who enjoys the cross-dressing joke: "We dressed up Chamberlayne in women's clothes, on purpose to pass for a lady,—only think what fun! . . . We were obliged to borrow one of [my aunt's] gowns; and you cannot imagine how well he looked! . . . Lord, how I laughed!" (*PP* 221). But Elizabeth and Jane, now fully socialized and proper young ladies, are faintly disapproving. Have the "glad animal movements" all gone by?

But—and Wordsworth again comes in handy—"O joy! that in her embers / Is something that doth live!" Though in doing justice to the juvenilia one inevitably regrets, to some extent, the taming of the free spirit, the dwindling into an adult, to examine the adult work is to recognize that there is still plenty left of the brilliant, unfettered child writer. As the juvenilia are already pregnant (to use a highly inappropriate metaphor) with the promise of the novels to come, so the novels preserve joyful traces of the gusto and irreverence of the juvenilia. Two strands coexist in the juvenilia and the novels, and though the emphasis changes, the continuity is as notable as the discontinuity. I shall call the two strands the ethic of energy and the ethic of sympathy. Jane Austen the satirist espouses the ethic of energy; Jane Austen the novelist develops the ethic of sympathy.

Take "Love and Friendship," which is in many ways the most complete and accomplished of the juvenilia. Energy is surely the essential value here. Laura and Sophia, twin heroines who supply a wonderful symmetry as they faint "Alternately on a Sofa" (86) and execute each adventure as a *pas de deux*, hold our interest for their zest and vigor and unshakeable conviction that their sentimental worldview is the correct one. Morality is memorably turned on its head as Sophia, caught "majestically removing the 5th Bank-note" from her host's supply of cash, unblushingly calls her detector the "culprit," and accuses him of "insolently" breaking in on her retirement ("Love and Friendship" 96).

If one works hard, one *can* extract a moral pattern from "Love and Friendship," by carefully reversing Laura's and Sophia's principles. The stodgily "sensible" characters they describe, like Sir Edward and Lady Dorothea, can be made the moral norm, while Laura and Sophia, with their overdeveloped sensibility, become the negative examples. But to make such an argument, one has to become pretty stodgy oneself. What makes "Love and Friendship" enjoyable is the huge energy and conviction of the heroines. We know they are crazy—indeed, Laura is proud of her facility in "running mad"—but we take their side anyway, because they are lively and resourceful rather than because they are right. It is no wonder that Gilbert and Gubar chose "Love and Friendship" for their anthology of women's literature. Here is a pair of heroines, created by a young woman writer, who confidently snatch agency for themselves and are never ground in the mill of morality.

Mary Stanhope of “The Three Sisters” is similarly a character we can admire for the unswerving conviction of her quest for an establishment: she never once descends into the bathos of sympathy or moral approval. She tells her rich fiancé (who, she declares, is “*so* plain that I cannot bear to look at him” [58]),

“Remember I am to have a new Carriage hung as high as the Duttons’, & blue spotted with silver; and I shall expect a new saddle horse, a suit of fine lace, and an infinite number of the most valuable Jewels. . . . This is not all; You must entirely new furnish your House after my Taste, You must hire two more Footmen to attend me, two Women to wait on me, must always let me do just as I please & make a very good husband.”

Here she stopped, I believe rather out of breath. (65).

It is not for her scruples that we admire this rapacious character, but for her magnificent lack of them. The satire would be biting if it were not so gleefully overdone. As it is, *satire*, with its suggestion of moral agenda, seems almost too heavy a term for the playful gratuitousness of the overstatement.

The juvenilia present many such figures, especially women who are boldly transgressive—outrageous self-seekers who nevertheless delight us by their energy and conviction. These are heroines who act as heroes, claim male privileges and run their worlds with never a moral scruple, and though it is clear we are not meant to approve of them, it is also clear that serious censure would be out of place. I find it interesting that very few punishments are meted out to these bold self-seekers: they either thrive, like Eliza and the beautiful Cassandra, or persist in their unawakened self-seeking, like Laura, or their stories are uncompleted, like those of Mary Stanhope of “The Three Sisters” and Charlotte Lutterell of “Lesley Castle.” Indeed, perhaps that is one reason that many of the juvenilia are left unfinished. In the dedication to “Lesley Castle,” the young author almost makes a principle of forgoing closure: “That it is unfinished, I grieve; yet fear that from me, it will always remain so” (109). Young Jane does not want to turn her fictions into moral tales by visiting closure and poetic justice on her energetic transgressors. The pattern of the moral tale is at any rate resoundingly rejected. In dedicating some “Miscellaneous Morsels” to her niece Anna, “convinced that if you seriously attend to them, You will derive from them very important Instructions, with regard to your Conduct in Life” (*MW* 71), the young author clearly has her tongue thrust firmly in her cheek, since Anna at the time has only just been born.

Frequently coexisting with the ethic of energy is the ethic of sympathy. The self-seeking protagonists are often juxtaposed with some character who shows some awakened sense of responsibility. Mary Stanhope’s sisters, who are in league to make sure that Mary will be trapped into a miserable marriage, have moments of moral wakefulness. “Yet after all my Heart cannot acquit me,” writes Georgiana Stanhope, “& Sophy is even more scrupulous” (“The Three Sisters” 63). In “A Collection of Letters” the letters alternate between the ethic of energy and the ethic of sympathy, highlighting the correspondent’s outrageous

desires (whether for flattery, property or merely gossip information) in Letters the Second and Fifth, and sympathizing with her vulnerability in Letter the Third; while in Letter the Fourth, written by an inquisitive girl about cross-questioning a sensitive and withdrawing one, we have a contrast between the girl satirized and the girl sympathized with, rather like the relation of Emma and Jane Fairfax (where the contrast has become less extreme). “A Collection of Letters” has received little critical commentary, partly no doubt because its lack of continuity leaves us short of Austen’s best hold on our attention: developed character. But in many quite specific ways, it forms a milestone of distance covered, a signpost of things to come. It includes the names Willoughby, Dashwood, Crawford. It incorporates in Lady Greville a very recognizable forerunner of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Most interesting, it is a more painstaking examination of manners and what may and may not be done in country gentry society than any previous fiction. It begins with a satirical account of coming out—a much-heralded entry into “the world” by two teenage sisters—and ends with the unscrupulous exploitation of an all-too-easily-fooled heiress by a manipulating older woman bent on snaring her and her fortune for her impoverished cousin. The subtle Lady Scudamore must manage both sides of the courtship, since the principals are very meagerly endowed with sense or powers of articulation. The excesses of sensibility, a familiar theme, appear again, but here they are mobilized by a cunning manipulator to bamboozle a gullible girl:

When I am dead said he, Let me be carried & lain at her feet, & perhaps she may not disdain to drop a pitying tear on my poor remains. . . . Ah! Cousin imagine what my transports will be when I feel the dear precious drops trickle on my face! Who would not die to taste such extasy! (“A Collection of Letters” 167–68)

The girl finds this account highly erotic, indeed irresistible. But we are left in some quandary as to whether to admire the unscrupulous manager or to sympathize with her dupe.

To juxtapose *Catharine, or the Bower*, written at sixteen, with *Lady Susan* (probably written soon afterwards [Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* 46]) is to see the contrast in vivid form. *Lady Susan* in many ways marks the culmination of the ethic of energy, *Catharine* the triumph of the ethic of sympathy.

*Lady Susan* features a totally self-seeking female protagonist whose considerable power lies in her freedom from moral scruple. She commiserates with her bosom friend, for instance, on having a husband who is “just old enough to be formal, ungovernable & to have the Gout—too old to be agreeable, & too young to die” (298). Unlike the ice-cream-guzzling beautiful Cassandra, the ostentatiously sensitive Laura or the privilege-hungry Mary Stanhope, Lady Susan, though not moral herself, does understand morality. She is, like Henry Crawford, a villain of Austen’s maturity, in having “moral taste” (*MP* 235). That enables her to manipulate the moral folk, rather like Lovelace, whom she

also resembles in her “happy command of Language” (251). We are not meant to like Lady Susan, for the moral pattern that is hardly even latent in “Love and Friendship” is here quite patent, but we are allowed to admire her for her resourcefulness. And even when she has lost the game, and her elaborate deceits are in ruins, she escapes punishment: “I never was at more ease, or better satisfied with myself and everything about me, than at the present moment,” she congratulates herself serenely (307). This boldly managing female protagonist, in fact, largely runs the show, except when her female adversary, Mrs. Vernon, the goody-goody, outsmarts her. As in the early fiction like “Henry and Eliza” and “The Beautifull Cassandra,” the males are hardly present. Reginald, the *soi-disant* hero, is less an autonomous character than a bag of goods contested over by the women, like the obligatorily obedient feminine heroine.

At the end of the epistolary *Lady Susan*, the narrator, “to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue,” takes the wind-up of the tale into her own hands. It is a memorable sign-off as I read it: a farewell alike to the epistolary mode that had dominated the eighteenth-century novel and Austen’s own fictions, and to the energy-driven personnel who had dominated them. “I leave [the foolish Sir James] to all the Pity that anybody can give him” (311, 313), speaks a newly empowered omniscient narrator, deploying an authoritative first-person pronoun that is both reminiscent of the “prejudiced and partial” narrator of “The History of England” and prophetic of the urbanely ironic narrative voice at the end of *Northanger Abbey*: “I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience” (252).

*Sense and Sensibility*, converted from the epistolary *Elinor and Marianne*, makes a large step in a new direction, but it resembles the earlier fictions in that the male characters, Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, are still very much dominated by the women. Austen was no doubt improving her art and increasing her salability by granting fuller autonomy to her heroes as her career went on. But her heroines necessarily dwindle at the same time. *Catharine, or the Bower*, probably written a short time before *Lady Susan*, is much more like the mature novels both in theme and narrative tone. Kitty, the protagonist, is subject to discipline and morally scrupulous. She does not carry all before her like the energetic self-seekers, and we are called on to sympathize with her doubts and moral gropings rather than to applaud her energy and headlong conviction. And as the female protagonist is relatively disempowered, so the principal male (at least he is the principal male so far as the unfinished narrative goes) gains in authority and self-confidence. “Why, my dear Cousin,” the self-satisfied Edward Stanley addresses Kitty, as he takes her to a ball to which he is not invited, “this will be a most agreeable surprize to everybody to see you enter the room with such a smart Young Fellow as I am” (218). Convinced by his sister that Edward Stanley has fallen in love with her, the susceptible Kitty is destined to suffer many of those “female difficulties” that Frances Burney

made the staple of her fiction. When Kitty discovers that his kissing of her hand was only a mockery of love to shock her puritanical aunt,

She could not help feeling both surprised & offended. . . . It is true that she had not yet seen enough of him to be actually in love with him, yet she felt greatly disappointed that so handsome, so elegant, so lively a young Man should be so perfectly free from any such sentiment as to make it his principal Sport. (234)

We are in the realm now of human and realistic character, of nuanced and subtle psychology, of an artistic management, by a trustworthy narrator, of a reader called on to sympathize and identify partially with the protagonist. But by the same token, we have left behind those energetic self-seeking heroines (henceforth demoted to the status of minor characters like Lucy Steele) and moved closer to the feminine novel of distress. It is not all gain.

Margaret Anne Doody has written memorably about Austen's renunciation of the bold and free-spirited mode of the juvenilia: "Jane Austen had to change, in short, from a 1790s writer to a 'Regency' writer" (72). She was tamed, she capitulated, she dwindled into the moral mode and she even settled for writing of a congenitally victimized and moralizing heroine like Fanny Price. And it is fascinating to think of the juvenilia as a different kind of writing altogether, and as pointing to a putative Jane Austen quite unlike the one who wrote the six novels.

But there are continuities as well as discontinuities, and many ways to consider the juvenilia as preparation for the novels rather than pointing elsewhere altogether. Elizabeth Bennet, with her vital physical energy, her taste for "follies and nonsense" and her refusal to be browbeaten by magisterial authority, is surely a developed creation of the author of the juvenilia: she too "dearly love[s] a laugh" (*PP* 57). Even Anne Elliot, who suffers sore distress, knows very well how to be amused (Grundy 17). Although the novels show no such bold female suitors as Lucy in "Jack and Alice," still these heroines do take their necessary initiatives in courtship (McMaster, *Jane Austen* 186). And if the heroines of the novels have to cede some power and initiative to the males, they still remain among the most vivid and self-determining heroines of fiction.

Among the many characteristics that do carry over from the juvenilia to the novels is the delight in language and what it can accomplish. Austen already has a command of certain figures such as syllepsis, an incongruous yoking of the literal and figurative applications of an idiom: Charles Adams is cruel "to wound the hearts & legs of all the fair" (Burrows 172); the adulterous Louisa Lesley "left [her Husband], her child & reputation a few weeks ago in company with Danvers & Dishonour" (*MW*, 22 100). The use of the wickedly well-placed adverb is famous in the account of Charlotte Lucas's campaign to catch Collins: "[she] *instantly* set out to meet him *accidentally* in the lane" (*PP* 121); but it is already familiar in "Love and Friendship," where Laura and Sophia "*instantly*



unfolded to each other the most inward Secrets of our Hearts,” and “fainted *Alternately* on a Sofa” (*MW* 84, 86; my italics).

Young Austen is at her best in dialogue, where she demonstrates a remarkable control of register and a facility in individual speech practices. Here is an exchange between the romantic Edward and his down-to-earth sensible sister, when she suggests that without other means he and his wife must turn to his father for support.

“Victuals and Drink! (replied my Husband in a most nobly contemptuous Manner) and dost thou then imagine there is no other support for an exalted Mind (such as is my Laura’s) than the mean and indelicate employment of Eating and Drinking?”

“None that I know of, so efficacious.” (“Love and Friendship” 83)

Augusta’s dry and sensible response neatly deflates his pretentious flight in the grand style. One finds an echo of such an exchange between brother and sister when Caroline Bingley, wanting to impress Darcy, seeks to intellectualize a ball:

“It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing made the order of the day.”

“Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say but it would not be near so much like a ball.” (*PP* 56)

The characters in the juvenilia are already individuated, endowed with their own fully realized worldview and their own speech patterns. Laura and Sophia speak a kind of generic sensibilitese (to coin a word) that signals their highly conventionalized romantic worldview; Charlotte Lutterell of “Lesley Castle” is given her own idiolect, complete with metaphors appropriate to her obsession with food: “her face as White as a Whipt syllabub” (113). Moreover, the characters take note of each other’s style in expression: her friend writes back to Charlotte: “His heart . . . (to use your favourite comparison) was as delicate and sweet and tender as a Whipt-syllabub” (117). We are not far from Emma’s parody of Miss Bates’s speech habits: “‘So very kind and obliging! . . .’ And then fly off, through half a sentence, to her mother’s old petticoat. ‘Not that it was such a very old petticoat either’ ” (*Emma* 225). The characters assist the author, alerting us to each other’s idiosyncrasies.

The consciousness of medium—shown in the novels in the way the characters comment on each others’ speech and habits, their tendency to novelize each other and sometimes themselves and to draw on literature as a model for life—is much to the fore in the juvenilia too. This is art that humorously draws attention to its own fictionality. Indeed, since the juvenilia comprehend several genres—drama and verse, fictions finished and unfinished, in epistolary form and otherwise—the consciousness of medium is even more to the fore. “Amelia Webster, an interesting & well written Tale” reads like *Sir Charles Grandison* in telegram, and accomplishes three courtships from inception to marriage in a

mere two pages in the Chapman edition. Even in so telescoped a fiction, the epistolary medium is to the fore. Here is the whole of one of the letters:

DEAR MAUD

I write now to inform you that I did not stop at your house in my way to Bath last Monday.—I have many things to inform you of besides; but my Paper reminds me of concluding; & beleive me yrs ever &c.

AMELIA WEBSTER (48)

The same metafictional consciousness of medium prompts the elaborate and humorous “Dedications” to the different pieces, which so elaborately mimic the literary etiquette of the author’s relation to the patron. “I commend to your Charitable Criticism this Clever Collection of Curious Comments . . . by your Comical Cousin, The Author” (149), reads one. Another claims that previous works, “The Beautifull Cassandra” and “The History of England,” “have obtained a place in every library in the Kingdom, and run through threescore editions” (192). This young writer has a highly developed awareness of her status as author and a developing ambition, however veiled in humor, for professional recognition.

The dedications bring us back to the family audience. There is one work for each of her elder brothers (except George), two for her younger, one for each of her parents, one for her newborn niece, two for one cousin, Jane Cooper, one for another, Eliza de Feuillide, and three for her sister. She is conscientiously covering the ground, making sure no one feels neglected; everyone has a memorial copy. Although she grouped and copied the juvenilia together into her *Volumes the First, Second, and Third* (aspiring thus to the status of the standard three-decker novel), presumably each work was originally its own entity and presented as a gift to the person it was dedicated to—perhaps in its own small volume not unlike those of the Brontë children. Only her fair copy survives; but it is tempting to think of those original compositions set out individually, in handwriting that would have shown her age at the time. They would no doubt have conveyed even more vividly the sense of a gleeful young professional at work.

Still developing in this young author is the shaping hand, the control and restraint that make for observing the unities of time and place, and adjusting emphasis; and also the patience in developing character and sustaining the narrative to an achieved conclusion. Patience is a virtue, no doubt, and artistic control of this order is rare and precious. But neither would avail without that creative fecundity in the first place—the vigorous imagination, delight in language and its possibilities and the zest and energy that provide the essential material for the hand to shape. Those are what the young Jane Austen already had in joyous abundance.

“Till the heroine grows up, the fun must be imperfect,” the adult Jane Austen wrote to the niece who aspired to follow in her aunt’s literary footsteps (*Letters*

401). But the work of the young Jane Austen convinces us that so far as *this* heroine is concerned, by then some of the best fun will be over.

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## Child's Play: A Short Publication and Critical History of Jane Austen's Juvenilia

*Eric Daffron*

And yet, nothing is more obvious than that this little girl of fifteen, sitting in her private corner of the common parlour, was writing not to draw a laugh from brothers and sisters, and not for home consumption. She was writing for everybody, for nobody, for our age, for her own; in other words, even at that early age Jane Austen was writing.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*

Virginia Woolf offers a striking image of the youthful Jane Austen. Nestled in “her private corner of the common parlour,” Austen took up her pen—not for “home consumption,” Woolf quickly points out. Austen’s writing even at that delicate age transcended the walls of the nineteenth-century middle-class home and emanated with timeless, universal qualities. In short, Woolf turns Austen into a creative genius. We could accept Woolf’s Austen as “the” Austen if it were not for the simple but sobering fact that Woolf speaks from a certain historical juncture: a time when meditations on the creative genius of canonical female authors had begun to accompany and even to replace outworn images of “the angel in the house.” Yet Woolf’s comments do more than simply mark one pivotal moment in Austen’s critical reception. Her comments offer, in inverted form, a thumbnail summary of Austen’s critical reception over the past century and a half. Rather than Austen’s writing for everybody and every age, everybody and every age has turned Austen into an author who speaks to their culture’s pressing concerns.

A quick survey of the juvenilia’s publication and critical history justifies inverting Woolf’s remarks. Late Victorian and Edwardian critics, the first to assess the juvenilia, made reference only to scattered fragments. Based on that evidence

alone, they derided her early work as mere child's play, unworthy of a great canonical author. Critics from the first half of the twentieth century, who read the juvenilia in complete published form, turned from derision to defense, arguing for the inclusion of the juvenilia in the Austen canon. Even her child's play, they contended, showed signs of a creative genius. Austen's critics since the complete publication of the juvenilia have no longer derided or defended her early work. They have sought instead to analyze the juvenilia and place those analyses in rich historical contexts, demonstrating how Austen's texts played with her era's conventions and assumptions. These critics have also begun the necessary task of assessing how past literary critics have made use of Austen's juvenilia and why.

This chapter begins by tracing three successive stages of the juvenilia's publication and critical history, putting those historical stages in their wider cultural contexts. It ends by reflecting on the institutional constraints and demands that shape our current critical moment. This reflection is crucial, for it reminds us that our critical moment is not a time of one-upmanship but another occasion to reckon with this child's play.

The history of the juvenilia's publication and critical reception begins with the late Victorian and Edwardian period, roughly 1870 to 1910, when various institutions turned the middle-class family into a veritable cultural icon. This icon's chief characteristic was privacy: its presumed separation from the nitty-gritty of political and economic life. Once conceived as private, the family could enforce and sustain a variety of social expectations and regulations, such as a woman's disenfranchisement and a child's sexlessness, without appearing to do so. In other words, the division between private and public served the ideological purpose of creating a supposedly presocial space, only to penetrate that space more fully with social norms (Habermas 27–56; Armstrong 3–27). This quintessentially Victorian and Edwardian cultural logic informed the juvenilia's first, albeit partial, publication. James Edward Austen-Leigh revealed the juvenilia's existence to the reading public in the 1871 edition of his *Memoir*, which included "The Mystery" as the sole example of Austen's early work. By previously keeping the juvenilia a secret and finally releasing a single example, Austen's descendants attempted to turn her early work into a family secret and thus into a private affair (Bush 41; Southam 1–2). Yet precisely because the *Memoir* constituted the juvenilia as private in a public forum, it played with the ideological relationship between private and public. The *Memoir* demonstrated, in short, that the private is always public.

Victorian and Edwardian family values informed not only the juvenilia's initial, incomplete publication but also its first critical assessment. This period's cult of the child cast childhood as an innocent stage before adulthood—as, in other words, an edenic period before one's entry into the "real" world. Thus, early critics derided the juvenilia as child's play because of the author's age and, according to Litz, as scandal because of their subject matter (1–2). Witness James Edward Austen-Leigh, who called the juvenilia "slight and flimsy," "non-

sensical" and "puerile" (44, 48). His kinsmen, William and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, echoed his sentiments, describing various juvenilia as "immature" and "pure extravaganza." They even did not regret Austen's failure to finish "Catherine" (56). For these early critics, true authorship meant maturity and seriousness—something that this child's play had apparently not yet achieved.

The Victorian and Edwardian ideal of domesticity valued the private and dismissed the childlike and thereby kept most of Austen's juvenilia from seeing the light of day. Britain's national agenda between 1918 and 1955, in contrast, pushed her early work into the limelight. During this period, especially between the world wars, the middle-class woman assumed a new role. Still ensconced in her home, she became a central figure in national projects that valued and sanctified the domestic over the imperial. This new national environment gave women's fiction, particularly their tales of home life, greater attention. It is in this context that we can best understand the founding of the Jane Austen Society by Elizabeth Jenkins (Lynch 159–64). This context also helps explain the complete publication of the juvenilia of Austen, whose status as a national author received renewed support during this period. *Volume the Second* appeared in 1922 as "*Love and Friendship*" and *Other Early Works*, edited by G. K. Chesterton. Eleven years later Clarendon Press released Robert William Chapman's edition of *Volume the First*. Not only did Chapman later edit the 1951 publication of *Volume the Third*, but he also oversaw the combined publication of all three volumes in the 1954 Oxford edition of Austen's *Minor Works*. Although Chapman was clearly instrumental in bringing Austen's juvenilia to print, even he wondered "whether such effusions as these ought to be published" (*Volume the First* xix).

Chapman's doubts about publishing the juvenilia were echoed by critical reservations about their worthiness. Indeed, some of this period's critics continued to deride the "trifles" (Southham xii) "travesties" (Chesterton xii), and "girlish sketches" (Baker 65) of the "Elementary Jane" (Birrell 37). Yet new national pressures to glorify things domestic prompted other critics to introduce the juvenilia into the Austen canon. These critics often invoked images of a creative genius to make their case. Thus, for critics such as Elizabeth Jenkins and Q. D. Leavis, the juvenilia stood as early testimony to this genius's later, more mature accomplishments. In fact, Leavis, among others, went to great lengths to demonstrate how Austen pieced together scraps of her early "satiric humor," turning them into "works of art" (68). These justifications for reading the juvenilia typically took precedence over concerted efforts to analyze them. There were a few exceptions, however. Both Marvin Mudruck and Mary Lascelles, for example, illustrated how the juvenilia contrast the illusory world of literary convention with the supposedly realistic word of the bourgeoisie. Only in a critical environment after the inclusion of this child's play into the canon would such analyses become the rule rather than the exception.

The juvenilia's complete publication in the 1950s has been followed by mass-market editions in both paper and cloth. The wider circulation of the juvenilia



has in turn created a wider audience and a more diverse critical reception. Among these critical responses can be found two earlier critical preoccupations. Like her late Victorian and Edwardian readers, some of Austen's recent ones still deride her early work. B. C. Southam, for instance, has called the juvenilia "relatively unimportant" next to the "big six"; they are, with few exceptions, "amusing" "trifles" (2). And like her early twentieth-century critics, some of Austen's later ones have continued to defend her juvenilia as a necessary beginning for a creative genius. This critical view has become all the more popular since the 1950s, when new criticism, along with its search for origins, growth and development, became hegemonic in American universities (Brown 12, 25). Critics with this approach have read the juvenilia "through the lens of the mature novels," admiring her "progress" (Litz 4) and noting "the young author's considerable growth" (Bush 41). The juvenilia, according to this view, are "interesting" only for us to see Austen's "first struggles to find a literary voice of her own" (Halperin 30). Both critical perspectives not only recapitulate past preoccupations. They also make defining, characterizing and managing the Austen canon their top priorities.

Most recent critics, however, have adopted the critical tasks of analyzing and contextualizing the juvenilia. The French poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida and others has taught critics how to analyze the semiotic instabilities of literary texts. The cultural studies of Michel Foucault and Marxists have encouraged critics to contextualize those textual instabilities and read them as symptoms of social contradictions, ones that can be found in other texts circulating during a given period. These critical assumptions and techniques have influenced recent criticism of the juvenilia. Some critics have tackled these texts' semiotic incongruities. For example, Ellen Martin has found metonymy a fitting figure for the juvenilia's resistance to interpretation, while Patricia Meyer Spacks has shown how the juvenilia's nonlinear plots defy readers' expectations. Juliet McMaster has taken these and other rhetorical features of the *Juvenilia* into the classroom, using these texts to teach composition and literary history. Critics like Martin, Spacks and McMaster have taught their audiences how this child played with the semiotic values of her day.

Other critics writing in the wake of French poststructuralism and cultural studies have sought to place the juvenilia in historical contexts. They have done so despite Chesterton's early twentieth-century claim that Austen did not "so much as look out of the window to notice the French Revolution" (xvi). Not only did Austen see the French Revolution outside her window, according to Chesterton's challengers, she also noticed the various institutions and conventions that defined English women and their roles at the end of the century. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar made this claim in their ground-breaking volume *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Jane Austen's fiction "demonstrates her discomfort with her cultural inheritance," they explain, "specifically her dissatisfaction with the tight place assigned women in patriarchy" (112). Critics following Gilbert and Gubar's lead have tended to fall into two groups. One group has examined women's roles and relationships in the juvenilia. Claudia Johnson,

for instance, argues that the juvenilia expose and at times undermine the conventionality of female manners, while Deborah H. Knuth contends that the juvenilia often elevate friendship over marriage. The second group has illustrated Austen's engagement with her period's discursive conventions—literary or otherwise. Christopher Kent, for example, shows how Austen's *History of England* departs from Whiggish, masculinist eighteenth-century histories. Edward Copeland demonstrates how *The Lady's Magazine* provided the young Austen with plots of courtship and in particular a cultural link between sentimentality and consumerism. And Julia Epstein has explained how a tradition of letter writing gave Austen a form with which to explore the “female voice” and its potentially subversive tactics. These critics have taught readers that the juvenilia are no mere child's play. These youthful works, like other pieces of literature, tried and tested the representational repertoire of the late eighteenth century.

This brief history of the juvenilia's publication and reception illustrates the varied critical attitudes and uses to which Austen's early texts have been subject: derisive dismissal, romantic inclusion and finally semiotic and cultural contextualization. If the juvenilia have been put to such historically varied uses, then it is not quite the case, as Woolf puts it in the chapter epigraph, that Austen wrote “for everybody, for nobody, for our age, for her own” (193). Instead, critics have turned Austen into an author suitable for their own cultural needs at a given historical moment. Once we accept the inversion of Woolf's claim, we can understand the juvenilia and literature more generally, in the words of Tony Bennett, as “a historically specific, institutionally organized field of textual uses and effects” (10). Bennett's critical approach, named earlier as cultural studies, has already produced rich analyzes of the juvenilia in their historical context. Cultural critics have also begun to analyze the role of the Austen canon in later historical context. Deidre Lynch, for instance, has illustrated the use of the Austen canon between two world wars for national projects and in debates about high and low culture. Analyses such as Lynch's offer us new and exciting ways to understand how literature functions in cultural history.

Cultural studies, because they allow us to historicize and trace the emergence and decline of various critical approaches, appear to trump them all. Yet cultural studies are a product of a given historical moment. Indeed, when, a few decades ago, Roland Barthes opened up a work's barriers to textual plays and announced the “death of the author,” he marked the “epistemological shift” that has made the textual and contextual maneuvers of cultural studies possible. If cultural studies bear the stamp of our historical period, then it cannot have the last word. We can only wait with expectation for future critical attempts to use and come to terms with this child's play.

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Tender Toes, Bow-wows,  
Meow-meows and the Devil:  
Jane Austen and the  
Nature of Evil

*Paula Buck*

Jane Austen and evil? At first glance the two abstractions seem just about as compatible as an ordinary house cat and natural water. Upon second thought, though, one recalls that the literary Puss had boots and that water is an ambiguous symbol. Holding an ambiguous position herself, Austen has evoked dissonant responses from general readers and critics alike. Two themes in earlier Austen criticism, for example, occur with annoying regularity: that Austen had no serious subject matter and that she had no conscious understanding of her own satire. Buoyed by modernist, new historicist and feminist perspectives, later critics have taken clear issue with these positions. Claudia Johnson, writing in 1988, provides a perfect example of the rift. In her introduction to *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Johnson rebuts critic Richard Simpson, who in 1870 insisted “repeatedly that Austen, ‘always the lady,’ has the good sense to avoid getting out of her depth: she ‘never deeply studied the organization of society’ . . . had ‘no idea’ that clergymen and baronets speak and act in different ways” (xvi). Johnson also notes her objection to the series of “contradictory guises” readers have imposed upon this author (xiii).

Was Austen just a simple woman, content to dab pastel watercolors of country drawing rooms, or was she a perceptive writer, fully able to use her realism to convey alert, satiric commentary on the larger patterns that Hampshire exemplified? Without undue adulation of a novel that may or may not, after all, evidence universalities in Austen’s writing, this analysis respects the possibility that it may. In the creation of the controversial novel *Lady Susan*, it is likely that Jane Austen did know she was wading into deep streams and knew where she kept her boots.

A brief survey of ideas about whether Austen had anything important to say shows that she certainly did and that we can still learn from her seemingly time-

bound depictions of daily life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in rural England. Sir Walter Scott, Austen's immensely successful contemporary, offered a much-quoted assessment: identifying his own work as "the big Bow-wow strain," he admired her "exquisite touch" in the portrayal of "ordinary life" (qtd. in Watt, Introduction 3). Scott inadvertently calls up the feminine, feline image of a contented kitty here; even so, most perceive his remark as positive. Other critics, though, offer more direct compliments—and see the implications of the extraordinary in Austen's "ordinary" depictions.

David Spring's "Interpreters of Jane Austen's Social World" (1983) offers ample evidence to refute claims by even contemporary critics, such as Lionel Trilling, that Austen had "no comprehensive view of society" and therefore wrote just an imaginative English "idyll" (54). In a detailed analysis, Spring proves that Austen deliberately and specifically portrayed the world of "the local rural elite," fully mastering the "social language" of each of its three "classes" (55). He also addresses claims by the new historicist Oliver MacDonagh that Austen's experience amounted only to encounters with "extended family" (54). Identifying Austen's nuclear family as members of the "pseudo-gentry," that is, a group "with a sharp eye for the social escalators," "positional goods" and "positional means of competition," Spring argues that the author was well aware of the "range and idiosyncrasies and absurdities" exhibited by this transitional stratum of society in Regency England (61). He concludes that not only does Jane Austen provide an accurate chronicle of the rise of the pseudo-gentry, but also that her work anticipates the power that group would wield through the beginning of the twentieth century and even now, at the beginning of the new millennium (63, 69).

Other extended studies of the social structure Austen portrays substantiate Spring's contentions. Moreover, they recognize Austen's fully conscious, ironic intent. Roger Sales examines several key ideas in his book, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (1994), arguing that restricted understanding of Austen's work has been more by design than simple misreading. Claiming that most of the skeptical criticism generated by the "Austen industry" has been tailored for British and American historical scholars, he recalls the more complimentary work of Sarah Tytler. Writing in 1880, Tytler had trouble reconciling official accounts of Austen set forth in Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoirs* (1870) with her own reading of the novels. Although Austen's nephew cast his aunt as a demure, sedate dabbler, Tytler found "a different kind of writer: proud, intolerant, impatient, and cynical" (Sales 4). Sales enumerates ideas that substantiate Tytler's point: Austen ridiculed Regency conventions of "keeping countenance," that is, the repressive English stiff upper lip; the system of "voluntary spies" employed by the government to suppress criticism at the local level; and "high society scandals," for example (33, 38). In her work, Austen created "metaphorical dissections" of her culture; she "raided the newspapers, as well as her own experience in order to produce an open-ended, or continuous Regency drama" (Sales 38, 45). As for her nephew, Sales believes that he tried to

hide his aunt's "Regency coarseness" by using a variety of means to rehabilitate her image for the 1870s audience he was addressing, "transforming her into a Victorian proper lady" (7,5).

Evidence of Austen's accurate social commentary is abundant, despite efforts to characterize the writer as "a cameoist oblivious to her times" (Johnson xiii). Those who argue that her work is "full of nothing much"—centered on and limited to "such ephemeral matters as beef dumplings, partners at balls, sick babies, and raspberry bushes"—seem to miss a level of satire quite clear to other reliable critics (Drabble 10, 11). Virginia Woolf, in fact, called Austen "one of the most consistent satirists in the whole of literature" (19). Ian Watt includes Woolfe's article in his critical anthology (1963). His introduction to this collection attempts to balance decades of evaluations of Austen. He notes the negative remarks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, Mark Twain and Henry James, among others (3,7,8). Yet he emphasizes the responses of E. M. Forster, like Woolf a modernist, who claims her work has "universal import" (9). In his own article "On Sense and Sensibility," Watt resolves the dilemma: "Many of Jane Austen's admirers, it is true, read her novels as a means of escape into a cosy [sic] sort of Old English nirvana, but they find this escape only because . . . the devout 'Janeites,' like all regular churchgoers . . . , scarcely notice what is being said" (41).

Readers frequently miss the point of good satire, especially if they are part of the target. Sidestepping to avoid bruises to their tender toes, it seems, many still insist that Austen is merely a "homely songbird, unconscious of her art" (Johnson xiii). Claiming that Austen missed her own point, however, is a different matter. Although she may have maintained the requisite straight face, "she was all the time laughing in her sleeve—so as not to provoke any suspicion of her satire, or any resentment of what might easily be called her presumption" (Tytler 201). One of her early verses, barely as long as its satiric subtitle, serves as a fine example of her mocking restrictive social conventions:

A Middle-aged Flirt

On the Marriage of a Middle-aged Flirt with a Mr.  
Wake, Whom, It was Supposed, She Would Scarcely  
Have Accepted in her Youth

Maria, good-humored, and handsome, and tall,  
For a Husband was at her last stake;  
And having in Vain danced at many a ball,  
*Is now happy to jump at a wake.* (Chapman 454)

In case this comic derision seems slight, consider also her attack "On the Universities" (Oxford and Cambridge), from which "so few" students "*bring any [knowledge] away*" (Chapman 447). Her italics in both works indicate her satire, clear to any alert reader. Her subject matter does not stop even at the great seats



of learning, but extends to the august culture of Great Britain itself. “The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st” is a playful, irreverent and clearly conscious attack on national pompousness. Here is, for example, her assessment of James I: “Though this King had some faults, among which and as the most principal, was allowing his mother’s death, yet considered on the whole, I cannot help liking him” (Chapman 147). She duly warns her readers that she is “a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant Historian”; she also alerts them that “there will be very few Dates in this History” (Chapman 139). Willing to make herself part of the joke, Austen demonstrates hearty good cheer—and obvious awareness of her methods and motives. From what may seem the least impressive detail of social life through the most influential educational and political institutions of her day, Austen moves with confidence and humor and “shocks us into seeing the disparity between proper norms of conduct and the actualities of human behavior” (Watt, “On Sense” 43).

Questions about the “real” nature of Austen and her works are likely to fuel more criticism and discussion—some on this side, some on that, all intent on proving that one way or the other is the correct approach. Probably interesting to some degree, this oppositional thinking is also tiresome. What about the possibility that the debate misses a much more lively point? What about the idea that the entire either-or paradigm has outlived its usefulness—not only in terms of Austen criticism, but in terms of human philosophy itself?

Nel Noddings’s remarkable study *Women and Evil* (1989) establishes legitimate, new perspectives for today’s readers: the dichotomies that have characterized Austen criticism dissolve in the light of these insights. The work most likely to benefit from rereading is *Lady Susan*, a work Margaret Drabble considers marred by the “slightly melodramatic nature of the plot, and the excessive wickedness of its heroine” (11). In *Susan*, Austen creates a character who challenges preconceptions about what makes a woman wicked, what makes her a heroine: in fact, all of the characters in this early novel cross boundaries that have held many critics at bay.

As Noddings reevaluates the dualistic thinking that has dominated systems of Western thought since Plato originated the either-or model, she tackles what may be the deepest-seated division of all: goodness versus evil, that is, the attempt to extend the distance between the two so-called poles that has “inflicted great harm on men and women alike” (57). Noddings calls for a truce—a realization that we all live daily with evil—it is part of us—and must learn to “find new language” to help us admit that people—men and women, young and old, lazy and industrious—have essentially “the same aspirations and the same faults” (245, 244). Analysis shows that Jane Austen sensed this possibility as she “shocked” careful readers into seeing “disparity” in ourselves and the systems that so often control us (Watt, “On Sense” 43).

At the heart of the answer lies Austen’s portrayal of “a clever, beautiful, and ruthless widow” who, some say, personifies cruelty in action (Drabble 12).

“This,” claims Drabble, “is strong stuff,” “more extreme than we expect from Jane Austen” (12). Is it?

Lady Susan is a thirty-something woman, who has been a widow for four months when we meet her. In a series of letters, we learn that she has sold the castle in Srattfordshire, where she had lived with her husband, Lord Frederick Vernon, and that she has placed her daughter, Frederica, in a boarding school. She has sought shelter with the Manwarings in nearby Langford. Under their roof, she carries on an affair with her host and obstructs the budding romance between his daughter, Marie, and one Sir James Martin, whom Susan has selected as a likely husband for her own child. Forced out by Mrs. Manwaring, Susan retreats to the home of her brother-in-law, Charles. Catherine Vernon, his wife, is full of resentment. Not only does she see agreeing to the visit as a sign of weakness in her husband, but also she knows that Susan had tried to prevent her marriage to Charles. Catherine is also full of gossip about Susan’s reputedly loose behavior and is aghast at what she considers the worst sin of all: Susan is not a loving mother to her daughter. While she is there, Susan tries to establish a romance with Catherine’s brother, Reginald De Courcy; she entraps Sir James into a kind of mix-and-match romance with her daughter—and herself; she carries on her affair with Manwaring; and she lies repeatedly about all of the above in an attempt to wheedle approval from her reluctant hostess. Eventually she abandons the country cousins for the thrill of living in London, leaving her daughter free to pursue Reginald for herself.

What kind of person is this? Is Drabble right? Is Austen way over her head in this fictional portrayal of one woman’s “vice” (Drabble 2)? Do the original terms of debate about Austen’s skill apply to this work?

First, Austen does have real subject matter in this novel. Certainly her own experience, limited though critics claim, offered models for her shocking heroine. In a description of a local “lady” at a ball, Austen wrote in 1801 letter to her sister, Cassandra, “I am proud to say that I have a very good eye at an adultress” (qtd. in Drabble 12). Jane Aiken Hodge offers a model even closer to home: Austen’s cousin Eliza Hancock, who married into the title comtesse de Feuillide. Describing herself as “the greatest rake imaginable,” the comtesse stimulated much amusement among her English relatives and often caused her mother “to breathe a quiet, maternal sigh of relief” when she returned to the Continent after visits home (Hodge 25). After the death of her husband the count, Eliza enjoyed “the delights of merry widowhood” for about two years, then agreed to the persistent proposals offered by Austen’s brother Henry (Hodge 52). Evidence shows that the pastoral Hampshire hillside was home to more than idyllic marriage.

Austen also knew about less-than-perfect mothers. Hampshire again provided adequate information, this time in the unkind person of a neighbor identified only as Mrs. Craven. Austen was friendly with Mrs. Craven’s granddaughters, who often repeated tales of how their grandmother had abused their mother

(Drabble 12). *Lady Susan* does bear out the idea that Austen concentrated on the world around her; yet, as Sales, Spring, Watt and others agree, that world did not operate in a vacuum: it reflected the shifting values of the Regency—and, perhaps even more important, of the end of the eighteenth century. Austen recorded the stresses of “a turning point in the morals of the nation” (Drabble 12).

Second, she was well aware of what she was doing. Although she was able to see the so-called vices of the people of Hampshire—their “aggressiveness, daring, an eye for money and the main chance”—she was also able to enjoy them, to live with them, to participate in the daily patterns that reflected the fractures of the larger world (Spring 67). Austen observed relentless matchmaking, unprincipled scrambling for money and position, the enjoyment of badly written epistolary novels and plenty of “Bow-wow” prose. Using her perfectly “natural” day-to-day approach, Austen preserved and reordered her world in her art, demonstrating a wise and “impeccable sense of human values” (Woolf 21).

So, then, is Susan Vernon a wicked woman—or is it possible that Austen had a larger idea in mind? Consider her own words, as she invites the reader to conclude whether Susan is finally happy: “I do not see how it could ever be ascertained—for who would ever take her assurance of it on either side of the question?” (103). In this deliberately ambiguous line, Austen reinforces the paradoxical portrait she has created. She interrupts her readers’ ability to rely on assumed systems of right or wrong, leaving us to decide for ourselves what to make of a person who knows how her society operates and learns how to use it for her own ends.

If we recoil at the idea of an adulterous, self-centered man, do we recoil even more at the thought of an adulterous, self-centered woman? If we do, we need to listen to Noddings as she explains the relationship between gender and evil. For centuries, humans have succumbed to the “naive temptation” to “attribute good qualities to our allies and monstrous ones to our opponents” (239). Complicating this tendency is women’s “long history as the second sex,” historically relegated to the less attractive column in Plato’s dichotomous thinking (Noddings 229). Writers such as Vern and Bonnie Bullough, Merlin Stone, Josephine Donovan and many others validate the far-reaching effects of Greek dualism. The Bulloughs’ fascinating study, *Sin, Sickness, and Sanity* (1977), clearly explains the Orphic origins of dividing the “world into two opposing forces, the spiritual vs. the material” (10). Further development of these ideas relegated long lists of ideas, people and things to each realm: the heavens, the mind, activity and members of the male gender, were assigned to the first category, for example, while the earth, the body, passivity and members of the female gender were assigned to the second. Aggravating this artificial split has been the assignment of absolute values to each: the first group was good; the second was evil (Bullough and Bullough 10–13). The further apart the two forces could be kept, it was thought, the better—at least for members of the superior caste.

Noddings urges us to resist such either-or thinking and to admit that we deny

our own paradoxical natures. She contends that in our attempts to distance ourselves from our own evil sides, we pretend we are working for “obedience,” “knowledge” and “the safety of our own lives”—and “we evaluate these as good” (229). Austen’s careful characterization of not only Susan, but of all the other women and men in the novel, shows exactly this same point. According to the lights available to them, they all believe they are good, they are right; meanwhile, they all gossip, cheat and manipulate one another in full denial of the harm they perpetuate.

A close analysis of Susan herself is the best place to begin because she most fully challenges the problematic ideal of womanhood in Austen’s England. Feminist writers have definitively described the schizophrenic madonna-whore syndrome—the attempt to place both the holy and the profane in woman, which leaves man the vast, more workable ground in between. What most annoys the other characters and, apparently, many readers is one overriding transgression: because she is active and rational, Susan treads on male territory. Compared with this violation of cultural taboo, her shortcomings in the traditionally female arena are less significant, but troublesome nonetheless. Susan acts the whore, never even coming close to the madonna. She expects condemnation for that action—and for her unconventional mothering—yet in her blatant determination to work her will, she cheats her society out of a fully satisfying binge of self-righteousness.

Although her behavior offends her contemporaries and a host of critics, it makes sense in historical context. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain the difficult position of all widows in England in the 1790s. Despite the ideological gains of the French and American revolutions, women were “increasingly confined to the domestic sphere”—partly as result of the movement away from rural manors to the industrialized cities, partly as a continuation of dualistic thought: men would work in the world, and women would stay at home (52). Without her own home, a woman could only go begging. Although women had “nothing to do in constituting laws,” much less “in consenting to them,” they remained “strictly tied to men’s establishments,” according to *The Law’s Resolution of Women’s Rights* (Gilbert and Gubar 53). Although widows were entitled to “a portion” of their husband’s estates, once those funds were depleted, they had little or no chance for financial independence: if they were unfortunate enough to work in the rapidly proliferating factories, they would earn only a fraction of the pay that men received; if they were fortunate enough even to dream of a profession, they would find themselves excluded by the dominant males (Gilbert and Gubar 54–55). Austen, single by choice, was certainly limited by cultural restrictions. Jan Fergus believes that Austen knew that “only women who self-consciously presented themselves to the reading public as deserving cases for charity were authorized [*sic*] to write for money” (qtd. in Sales 5).

Susan, the daughter of an unnamed baronet, would have been loathe to work in a factory. Although she claims her “eloquence” as her single vanity, she is not quite enlightened enough to seek professional employment either (64). Con-

sider her attitude toward education: "It is throwing time away," she says, for a woman to learn language, because such knowledge "will not add one lover to her list" (51). In short, Susan is a middling intellect, a product of her own thinking, true, yet surely the product of her culture as well. Her best chance to find some sense of safety is twofold: to rely on the kindness, or at least the sense of responsibility, of friends and relatives, and to find a new husband as quickly as possible. Marvin Mudrick's 1952 analysis of this character validates the insecurity of her position (127). Aware of the pressures brought to bear on women in her position, this scholar recognizes that "the requirements" for her were simple: "to be born, or marry, into rank; to observe propriety; to make public one's feelings only according to formal, preestablished patterns" (136).

In the energetic struggle of the pseudo-gentry to secure social status, even certain violations of propriety, Susan's "purposeful and direct" approach to problem solving would not have been objectionable—except for the pesky issue of gender (Mudrick 127). For nearly two thousand years of Western culture, a common attitude has been that "the male is active and causal in the world; the female's essence is a lack or inability" (Noddings 62). Susan's material lack stimulated her personal activity, a realm culturally assigned to the male; as she would not or could not remain passive, Susan encountered serious disapprobation. Although she could perhaps be forgiven for a small degree of movement toward self-preservation, she soon complicates the problem.

What becomes unforgivable is that she violates even more stereotypes. In effect, she becomes one of the detestable "men in petticoats," decried by conventional thinkers of both genders (Noddings 63). Noddings explains that for generations, philosophers have made a serious error: "They make female experience a product of feminine nature rather than feminine nature a product of human experience" (70). From Plato through Carl Jung and beyond, the identity of each gender has been based on division: what is male cannot be what is female. Each gender, then, encompassing billions of potentially different individuals, has been bound to rigid and mutually exclusive definition. Although her experience necessitates certain responses, Susan assumes a role that seems unnatural to those who divide characteristics by gender according to these a priori "laws" (Bullough and Bullough 11–14).

Since the Christian Bishop Tertullian coined the phrase in the second century A.D., men have thought of woman as "the devil's gateway," thereby trying to distance themselves from their own sexuality (Noddings 35; Bullough and Bullough 15–17). Living up to the lusty reputation already ascribed to her gender, Susan does carry on her affair with Manwaring. Austen never says who initiates the involvement, but the other characters make the assumption that Susan is the one. Centuries of associating the female gender with the body contributes to this leap. Austen does, interestingly enough, offer evidence that Susan's love for Manwaring is something far deeper than lust. In a letter to her friend Alicia Johnson, Susan praises her beloved's "power of saying those delightful things which put one in good humor with oneself and the world" (56). In later notes,

she expresses her respect for his liveliness and passion, eventually admitting that she would, if he were free, marry him gladly (98).

The interesting point here is that unlike the young Reginald and Sir James Martin, Manwaring can offer her no financial security: he is “without a shilling” (88). Although the would-be couple have nothing at all to gain in the competitive zone of Regency wealth, they remain mutually enamored. When Manwaring follows Susan to London for a tryst, the judgments and machinations of others interfere. The two never marry, but Austen allows the idea that they are happy in one another’s love to stay alive. It is not Austen who contributes to an attitude of condemnation on this point.

More grievous to her critics than her sexual activity is Susan’s deliberate, unemotional rational activity, again considered the prerogative of the male. Even as late as the mid-twentieth century, formal philosophers, such as Jung, have held that “to think like a man is to be unfeminine, to think like a woman is to think not at all” (Noddings 67). Susan is thinking all the time, as her letters to Alicia reveal. Her most pressing ideas are how to find husbands—one for herself, of course, and one for her daughter. Again Mudrick is sympathetic, recognizing the straits that unmarried women were forced to navigate (130). Susan has assessed her situation from a practical standpoint. Sir James Martin, a fatuous young gentleman, and Reginald De Courcy, who awaits his inheritance upon the eventual death of his father (who seems in fine health), are the readily available males. Sure that she and/or her daughter can have James, Susan embarks on a project to overcome Reginald’s initial resistance to her and take his hand. The endeavor, she believes, will “amuse” her (52). Susan concentrates real effort on winning him over “entirely by sentiment and serious conversation . . . without the most commonplace flirtation” (55). Her game with Reginald is strictly rational and undoubtedly heartless. Her only aim is to defeat his “insolent spirit” and secure his acknowledgment of her own “superiority” (52).

Susan applies this same single-mindedness to the problem of securing a mate for Frederica. Having assessed the young girl’s credits and debits, she concludes that a bit of musical education and some serious matchmaking will save the day. Although her method includes none of the hugs-and-kisses approach most associate with good parenting, Susan does achieve her goal. When she concludes that she would be “very little benefitted by the match” with Reginald, she leaves him behind for her daughter to claim and marries Sir James, whose inheritance is already his own (55). From this perspective, her ideas are on target: Frederica has expressed revulsion at the thought of marrying James, a deep desire to stay at Churchill with Catherine and the fullness of her love for Reginald. Love for Susan is beside the point: Manwaring is entangled and poor, James is ready and willing to save her from widowhood and she has arranged for her daughter a happy ending of sorts.

It is most interesting to note how many critics overlook the skill with which Susan accomplishes her ends, noting her “cruelty to her daughter” instead (Drabble 12). Austen, however, undercuts such a facile reading. She creates a fine,

realistic satire on the nature of motherhood, particularly of what would come to be known as the “angel in the house” syndrome. Writers like Nancy Chodorow, Mary Daly, Phyllis Chesler, Nancy Friday and others have discussed the characteristics of this kind of selfless behavior expected of mothers. The idea was that they should simply sacrifice themselves—body, mind and spirit—to the task of caring for their offspring. The ongoing debate even today about whether mothers should work shows that the issue is still a live one. Conventional thinking has held that “maternal instinct” is a kind of drive, the province of women—not men—because instinct is subrational (Noddings 68). Conversely, maybe perversely, any female behavior running counter to this deep, emotional subconscious becomes doubly dangerous and evil (Noddings 67–70).

Marianne Hirsch’s *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989) offers a variety of perspectives that exemplify the continuing debate among contemporary writers and feminist scholars. In retellings of ancient patterns, Hirsch contends, today’s novelists, such as Toni Morrison, are examining the suffering imposed on both the mothers who comply with the societal demands for self-effacement and those who try to—or because of circumstance have to—resist them. The problem is that “procreativity” in most “Euro-American patriarchal context[s]” is not only considered more important than “creativity,” but that the two activities are “incompatible”: in other words, motherhood must be quiet, passive, selfless (8). Austen obviously understands a female character who challenges this very point: Susan will not come second—to her daughter or to anyone else—at least insofar as she is able to “create” alternatives. Mudrick explains part of the reason: in Regency England if “the mother happen[ed] to be a widow and still young, her own interest [was] paramount” (130).

Susan does not abandon her daughter completely. She does, however, treat her as a problem to be solved rather than a little girl to be adored. Austen provides a few explanations of this behavior. Susan herself has had no educational advantages, and she frequently expresses frustration and jealousy about toward the more wealthy branch of the Vernon family (51, 54, 55, 72). Furthermore, Frederica apparently had the full favor of her father and was “spoilt” by him, Susan would say (81). This pattern is typical in much Freudian and post-Freudian theory and criticism. Susan and Frederica were in competition for the affection of the husband-father figure they shared. Austen implies no criticism; instead, she provides information that confounds a simple conclusion.

Austen’s portrayal of Frederica herself adds another layer of possibility. Although her Aunt Catherine sees her as the victim of mistreatment, this young woman is easily as active on her own behalf as is her mother. She refuses to comply with the idea of marrying Sir James, she runs away from school, she manipulates Catherine into helping her get what she wants—and she wheedles her way into the heart of Reginald, whom Susan fancies for herself (70, 63, 74–76). Hardly the waiflike darling Catherine pretends her to be, Frederica is, after all, her mother’s daughter: “she has *my* hand and arm, and a tolerable voice,”

Susan notes—and when it suits her to notice, Susan yields the point that “Frederica has an excellent understanding” (51, 81).

What kind of mother has Austen painted, then? Noddings would call her an example of Jung’s “great mother” archetype, one figure that includes both “the Terrible Mother and the Good Mother” (74). Susan is neither purely terrible nor purely good: Austen sets her up as paradoxical, fully human, able to perform both unkind and kind deeds. Variations on this character abound in classical mythology, folklore and later literature. Pandora, for example, is “an ambiguous evil—beautiful, crafty, potentially useful, and seductive” (Noddings 57). Baba Yaga, the crone in Russian fairy tales, inspires fear and trembling in the young Wassilissa, yet brings her to the wisdom necessary for her survival (Noddings 49). Moll Flanders, Becky Thatcher, Jane Eyre, the Unsinkable Molly Brown and Eva Peace are all manifestations of this model. Powerful women are capable of action in all realms—not just the nurturing, self-denying, passive realm as so long supposed, but also in the acquisitive, self-affirming, active realm. What they do is sometimes seen as good, but more often as evil, simply because of longstanding preconceptions that still judge autonomous action by women as threatening.

Why, then, has Austen painted a “good” mother to whom Susan can be compared? Lady Catherine is only as good as her reader wants her to be. Austen provides plenty of evidence that even this model of domesticity is ironic. Her brother, admittedly working under Susan’s tutelage, sees that Catherine is vulnerable “to the malevolence of slander” (61). Surely Catherine is able to slander others, particularly Susan (46, 49, and *passim*). When she meets Susan, though, Catherine cattily admits that even for a “lady no longer young,” Susan is “lovely” (49). Catherine even goes so far as to say that she has never seen a face “less indicative of any evil disposition” (66). Not quite a devil, then, Susan is simply too much for Catherine: the younger, less sophisticated hostess fears her guest’s power to control the household—which heretofore had been Catherine’s undisputed domain. She sets about undermining Susan’s relationship with Frederica, doing all she can to usurp the maternal role for herself although she has children of her own (68, 77, 99). Catherine busies herself in countering Susan’s every move—all the while engaging in subterfuge and complicity with her own mother, a luxury Susan does not have. The two set up a sort of war zone, battling for the control of Reginald’s loyalties. Eventually it is Catherine’s mother who voices the telling words. Once Susan has left, more as the result of her own will and of Frederica’s maneuverings than of Catherine’s efforts, the granddame says of her beloved son, “We will try to rob him of his heart once more” (99). Austen creates doubt that the ladies De Courcy are such homely angels as a first reading may make it seem.

Another ambiguous female character is Alicia, Susan’s only ally. Austen places her in London, the city both beloved and morally suspect for the rural pseudo-gentry of Churchill. In her words, another level of the gap between



Susan and Catherine becomes clear to a careful reader. Alicia recognizes Susan's liveliness and her aversion to the dull country life that has become her temporary venue (45, 49). Alicia does what she can to make her friend happy because she knows that it is "shameful" for such a vital woman to be "exiled" from the stimulating social world Susan loves and knows how to handle (87). Alicia counsels her friend to leave Frederica where she will be happiest and to take up her own pursuits. Although Austen surely gives Alicia some unpleasant characteristics, lying to her husband perhaps foremost among them, she also shows her as a worthy confidante. While the country cousins conspire against the cosmopolitan Susan, Alicia conspires with her; Austen creates balance in this character.

Lest this analysis seems to be veering toward a defense of women only, a look at Austen's portrayal of men shows the same compassionate, ironic treatment of their positions in a gender-based system of evaluation. Mr. Johnson, Alicia's husband, occupies the clearest position of man of the world. He is gruff, powerful, often absent and definitely averse to the friendship between his wife and the main character. In fact, he obstructs Susan's access to Manwaring and to Alicia, eventually forbidding his wife to see her friend at all. Despite all that show of bravado, Austen allows him to be cuckolded, thereby undercutting his power. The point is that the author does not pass judgment on the individuals, but creates a comment on the culture in which they are all forced to function. Just as she laughs at the great centers of Oxford and Cambridge, at kings and queens themselves, Austen scoffs at the pompousness of the "Man to whom the great word 'Respectable' is always given" (45). Putting these words, capitalized and quoted, into Susan's letter to Alicia is more proof of Austen's conscious social commentary.

Manwaring, the one person whom Susan loves, is as much a victim of the system as is Susan. A "tender and liberal spirit," he is penniless, apparently dependent on the fortunes of his jealous wife (Mudrick 63). Unable to overcome the obstacles set before him—the alliance of Maria and Mr. Johnson in the name of decent matrimonial principles—he suffers the loss of Susan's hand, if not her affection. Like her, he will have to bear his grief alone, save for what Austen leads us to believe will be an ongoing series of stolen moments. Happiness is nothing in the light of money and marriage: economics and convention triumph. In Austen's portrayal, Manwaring can actually appear more feminine than masculine in ordinary terms. He is defeated, impecunious and silent.

Another silent man is Charles Vernon, Susan's brother-in-law. His reticence, though, is more typically male. Once he has agreed to allow Susan to visit, he effectively disappears from the narrative (46). He simply provides the framework that will pit his wife against an intruder, then withdraws. He has no idea, Austen suggests, that his happy home has become a battleground. On the other hand, he refuses to yield to the rampant gossip about Susan, treating her simply in relational terms: the law has set them together; so shall it be. Busy in the

outer world, as good Enlightenment men ought to be, Charles leaves the little stuff of daily living to the women.

Sir James occupies an interesting position. He is rich, he is in search of a wife—any wife, Austen suggests—and he is altogether “silly” (54). He is one of Susan’s dupes, yet Austen makes much compassion for him unlikely. Expected to conform to “laziness” or “frivolity,” the “universally accepted mode for a young gentleman” of the Regency, Sir James is a caricature (Watt, “On *Sense and Sensibility*” 43). Noddings explains that alliances between needy, though righteous, women and innocent younger men is a staple of folklore and Jungian archetypal analysis (48–50). One of the themes in literature using this pattern is that such partnerships represent victory over standard, rational, active male prowess by those who for one reason or another operate on a different wavelength. Through no power of his own, Austen indicates, Sir James (note the ironic title) is lucky enough to be real gentry. Susan is well aware of this point and uses it effectively. She will be Lady Martin, free of the annoying connection with the Vernons, and he will be her passive tool. In her rationality, Susan deviates from the innocent-female-cum-dull-male model, a point of which Austen may well have been aware. Again, we see a witty variation on a theme.

Reginald De Courcy, the ostensible hero, is probably the most fascinating, ambiguous man of them all. Like Sir James, Reginald will inherit his father’s wealth—one day, but not soon enough to suit Susan. This one fact is the only definitely “manly” characteristic Austen allows him; otherwise, she paints him as a gossipy, gullible and highly emotional person—more stereotypically female than male. When we meet him, he is primed to tease and tangle with “the most accomplished coquette in England,” Susan herself (47). Full of seedy accounts of her behavior, provided not only by his domineering sister but also one Mr. Smith, a friend of the Manwaring, Reginald expects to enjoy resisting this woman’s “bewitching powers” (47). Soon enough, he falls prey to what he calls her “spell,” only to find that he has offended dear old dad. Both male De Courcys become almost sickeningly gooey as they work out the system: Reginald must behave or lose both money and affection (96, 57–59, 60–62). Austen suggests that what passes for “Respect” between them is much more a matter of pride. Once cleared of his relationship for Susan, Reginald comes back to his senses, or so he believes, and “despise[s]” himself for his own “weakness” (96).

Yielding to Susan’s powers and his father’s power is one thing, but Reginald’s inconstancy goes well beyond both of those dubiously formidable forces: he is helpless to evaluate the pleas of Frederica as well. Faced with two accounts of the mother, whom he thinks he loves, and the daughter, whom he thinks he hates, Reginald switches allegiances, disgusting Susan once and for all (98). Austen makes Reginald a sort of “dumpling,” a helpless younger brother figure in folklore (Noddings 48). What is most interesting, though, is that she again creates a variation on the theme. When Reginald tries to make decisions on his own, he meets the same fate as folklore females: “Conquer your own realms,

lay your own plans, and evil has taken possession of you,” the pundits threaten (Noddings 49). Obediently trotting back into his kennel, Reginald will have his spirit and his heart tamed by both the women and the men in his own family. Unable to act on his own behalf, he becomes the foil for Susan, who knows that her free spirit is what she absolutely must protect (Austen 90).

Taken as a pair, Susan and Reginald represent two approaches to “coping” with nothing less than “the powers of evil” (Noddings 49). The problem they face is rooted in the culture they experience, and it is so pervasive, even today on both sides of the Atlantic, that many miss its cruel injustice. The characters in this novel concentrate on maintaining “the veneer of gentility over the materialist base,” but they suffer in so doing (Mudrick 137). The harnessed forces of uneven distribution of wealth and discrimination based on gender create widespread “helplessness,” “pain” and “separation”—conditions that limit individual choice and thwart personal joy (Noddings 229). “Moral evil,” Noddings believes, “consists in inducing, sustaining, or failing to relieve these conditions” (231). Although it is true that Lady Susan “cleverly exploits the socially approved methods” available to her, reading her as a successful human being is difficult (Mudrick 136). She is guilty of evil as Noddings defines it, and she pays the price of disapproval and the deprivation of true love.

The point, though, is that Susan is not alone. Austen crafts her text so that each character makes choices that prevent any final judgment: acting in what they see as their own best interest, they all transgress the rights of others, all contribute to their own diminution, all go on as best they can, creating a way to live in a world that is far more hostile than they know—or will admit. D. W. Harding’s essay “Regulated Hatred” argues that the social satire in Austen’s novels was intended “to be read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked” (167). Harding believes that Austen is “a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine” (167). Melioration is one goal of satire, yet Harding’s point of view seems too harsh, too judgmental to apply to Austen’s more gentle, intelligent touch. Discussing the romance between her brother Henry and their cousin Eliza, the wild comtesse, Austen wrote these words of advice to her mother: “Never mind; let them puzzle on together” (qtd. in Harding 168). Able to live with the objects of her satire and to love them and be loved in return, Austen proves in her life and her work the essence of her foresight.

Like Noddings, writing some two hundred years later, Austen illuminates mind and spirit, demonstrating for readers then and now a far more tolerant, productive wisdom: any discussion of evil is “intimately bound up in disputes over good” (Noddings 229). Understanding the futility of either-or thinking, Austen resisted the temptation of labeling people one way or another, seeing them as imperfect beings and accepting that fact with good grace, some regret, clear encouragement. She waded willingly into waters that humble us all: those who cannot perceive her depth must “slightly misread what she wrote” (Harding 167).

One last pair of gender-based comments should clarify the concept. In what seems intended as praise, Edmund Wilson, writing in 1950, offered this assessment: “Miss Austen is almost unique among the novelists of her sex in being deeply and steadily concerned not with the vicarious satisfaction of emotion (though the Cinderella theme, of course, does figure in several of her novels) nor with the skillful exploitation of gossip, but, as the great masculine novelists are, with the novel as a work of art” (38). April Alliston, on the other hand, emphasizes Austen’s femininity. In “The Value of a Literary Legacy” (1990), she argues that the epistolary form is a uniquely female one, designed as “an inheritance passed down from one generation to the next, as a substitute for the material, patrimonial inheritance denied the heroine, who as a woman is defined by the laws of patrimonial transmission as an improper receiver” (110). These evaluations are interesting as artifacts, as examples of ideas bound by and limited to concepts of gender that Austen herself sees right through. Like Lady Susan, Austen used her “happy command of language,” sometimes making “black appear white,” male appear female, right seem wrong (50). She dissolved unnecessary and artificial boundaries in the clear streams of her satire.

Like Susan—active, rational, skeptical of easy answers—Austen herself broke taboos. She loved to bathe in the sea, for example, and although another “bow-wow” poet, Thomas Carlyle, would call her words “mere dishwashings,” she had much grander ideas about what to do with water—that versatile symbol of life, death, change and eternity (qtd. in Watt, Introduction 3). She simply kicked off boots that would bind her and leaped—catlike and defiant—into what some would see as an unapproachable, possibly devilish zone. Tender toes, bow-wows, meow-meows and the devil are Austen’s subject. What we make of it is largely up to us. By the way, the original Puss in Boots was portrayed as a male, water most often female—funny, come to think of it.

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*Lady Susan:*  
A Bibliographical Essay  
*Deborah Knuth*

This lively, brief epistolary novel that features an unexpectedly wicked and experienced widow as its antiheroine was probably drafted after the juvenilia, around 1795, when the author was twenty years old, but not published until 1871, and named, probably by Austen's family, after her death. Austen herself made a fair copy on paper watermarked 1805, a date usually accepted as a period when she perhaps revised the work. (See Chapman, *Jane Austen*.) Though the dating of the text remains controversial, A. Walton Litz (*Jane Austen*, "Chronology"), Ruth ApRoberts and Deirdre Le Faye, among others, accept this chronology, and many recent critics may be said to have reached a consensus. (See Marshall.) David Nokes is so certain of the date that he deems that *Lady Susan* the first work created at Austen's writing desk, a present from her father on her nineteenth birthday (151).

The novel takes the form of two sets of correspondence: one between the widow Lady Susan Vernon and her best friend, Mrs. Johnson, and the other between Lady Susan's sister-in-law, Mrs. Vernon, and her mother, Lady De Courcy. Lady Susan's letters to her intimate friend in London retail, apparently without varnish, such schemes as her scandalous past affair with another friend's husband; her exploitative plans to sponge off her sister and brother-in-law indefinitely at their country house, while seducing her sister-in-law's honorable brother, Reginald; and to farm her (despised) sixteen-year-old daughter out to an expensive school, while skipping out on the tuition; and, when that plan fails, instead to marry her off to a foolish, though moneyed, baronet. Mrs. Johnson, while conspiratorially cheering on her friend, complains about her gouty husband's insistence on social propriety, which prevents her from inviting Lady Susan to visit her in London. For their part, the Vernon family, though aware of Lady Susan's scandalous reputation, remain almost helpless, as Mrs. Vernon's

letters to her mother chronicle Reginald's prompt and apparently inexorable fall under the temptress's spell.

Despite Lady Susan's thirtyish charms and worldly knowledge, things do not go quite as she plans. Her daughter, Frederica (unfortunately named for her late father, whom she apparently resembles), turns out to possess, as well as youth and innocence, an artless way with pen and paper. When Frederica eventually writes, like a Richardson character, a letter to fellow house guest Reginald, begging him to dissuade her mother from forcing her to marry the designated baronet Sir James Martin ("a very weak young man" [276]), the daughter begins to give her mother some unwelcome competition. Despite the apparent temporary success of Lady Susan's machinations to reattach Reginald ("I am again myself—gay and triumphant," she assures Mrs. Johnson [291]), her ploys encounter a new obstacle. Lady Susan's ex-lover's jilted wife encounters Reginald at Mrs. Johnson's house and reveals all. "This Eclaircissement is rather provoking" (303), laments the heroine in a commendably confident understatement, as she sets about to regain Reginald's affection once more. But at last, Lady Susan finds that she must settle for marriage to Sir James Martin herself, with her final humiliation being Reginald's betrothal to Frederica. The forty-one letters and narrated conclusion may thus contain more unabashed expressions of heartless sentiments and shocking actions than all the rest of Austen's novels and correspondence put together.

Opinion has always been divided about the significance of the work, with some critics rating it merely slightly more important than the juvenilia. In an early review (1871), R. H. Hutton appears to dismiss *Lady Susan* as "interesting only as the failures of men and women of genius are interesting," though he goes on to make some perceptive comments about the "feline, velvet-pawed, cruel, false, licentious" heroine, while deprecating Austen's choice of the epistolary form. A significant milestone in the reception of the novel comes with the centenary of Jane Austen's death: Reginald Farrer's commemorative essay in the *Quarterly Review* gives *Lady Susan* its first serious attention as "important to the study of its author's career and temperament. . . . The cold unpleasantness of *Lady Susan* is but the youthful exaggeration of that irreconcilable judgment which is the very backbone of Jane Austen's power, . . . harshly evident in this first book" (258). (For more early bibliography, see Gilson and Grey.)

The novel came to prominence among critics of Austen's work in the 1940s with Q. D. Leavis's series of articles on Austen's development as a novelist, but interests biographical, formal and feminist have superseded Leavis's rather schematic reading of *Lady Susan* as a prototype for *Mansfield Park*, a theory disproved by Brian Southam in an appendix to *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts*. Chapman's (1948) assessment is a good anticipatory summary of what would be the opinions of his followers during the next fifty years: that the novel is "as brilliant as its central figure," though "the [other] characters are not very well individualized. But the hard polish of the style creates a vivid illusion" (52). Leroy W. Smith has a useful summary of critical treatments of the novel.

The biographers' temptation to associate the title character with Austen's cousin, the widow Eliza de Feuillide who later became her sister-in-law (irresistible to, among others, Jane Aiken Hodge and Park Honan, and most recently Claire Tomalin and David Nokes), or to seek, as do Elizabeth Jenkins, George Holbert Tucker and others, another "real-life" model for the vicious, scheming Lady Susan is more a testament to the perverse appeal of the title character than to the persuasiveness of any biographical argument. Brian Southam is amused by Austen's descendants' "rather naive outlook on the nature of experience and inspiration," which leads to their assumption in their early biographical remarks that their ancestor could have created such a "remarkable analysis of a vicious woman's nature," only if the portrait were drawn from life (51, citing M. A. Austen-Leigh, 1920). Perhaps the author's youth when the novel was presumably written bolsters this persistent assumption that only a real-life model could explain the worldly, evil heroine. William Jarvis dispenses with the Eliza de Feuillide speculation in an economical note. But John Halperin (in what Paul Pickrel refers to as "a book, called—a little misleadingly perhaps—*The Life of Jane Austen*" [444]) refuses to believe that the character of Lady Susan could have been the *invention* of such a young writer and finds a perhaps unexpected source for the scheming widow: it must be a sort of self-portrait. "One must conclude" that some of the "insight and understanding needed to draw such a character and make us believe in her . . . was instinctive rather than merely contextual—intrinsic rather than purely extrinsic" (48).

Marvin Mudrick's landmark study calls *Lady Susan* "Jane Austen's first completed masterpiece . . . a quintessence of Jane Austen's most characteristic qualities and interests" (138). He sees the novel as a devastating comment on so-called genteel society, with its "primary irony" focused not on the title character but rather on her ineffectually well-motivated sister-in-law, Mrs. Vernon:

Mrs. Vernon never recognizes the reasons for her impotence, never understands . . . that Lady Susan succeeds because their world is negative and anti-personal, because the veneer of gentility over the materialist base reflects manners but not motives, sentiment . . . but not feeling, propriety but not character, because, in such a society, inevitably, the individual exists to use and be used, not to know and be known. (136)

Whether the novelist would recognize this reading is open to question, as with all other of Mudrick's most devastating ascriptions of irony to Austen, but the reading certainly has the merit of assuming that the author is in complete control of her creation rather than merely copying from life.

Of the biographical approaches, the soundest appear to be those that discuss the novel in terms of what we can know about Austen's not uncritical reading of her predecessors' novels. Marilyn Butler ("Simplicity"), following Abby Louise Tallmadge and David Jackel, associates the character Lady Susan with a fictional model, Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806), in an argument that would, however, also drastically alter the generally accepted chronology of the first



draft. A. Walton Litz (“*The Loiterer*”) writes persuasively about how Austen’s brothers’ satirical periodical, *The Loiterer*, gives evidence for the style and tone of the family’s literary environment that produced the brothers’ often epistolary imitations of Johnson’s *Rambler* and their sister’s early work. Litz points to *Loiterer* No. 27 as bearing a close resemblance to *Lady Susan*. Jan Fergus convincingly reviews the echoes of Richardson’s *Clarissa* in the novel and speculates that Austen returned to the material to make a fair copy in 1805 because “she may simply have regained interest in this portrait of a powerful woman whose manoeuvres are largely successful” (119).

Jay Arnold Levine deplores the almost “universal assumption that *Lady Susan* represents an original reflection upon real persons and experiences” and argues that, instead, the novel’s formal ancestry is best understood in terms of the eighteenth-century “character”: here, that of the merry widow. He traces the figure from the plays of Wycherly, Congreve and Etherege to Eliza Haywood’s *Epistles for the Ladies* (1749–1750), Johnson’s *Rambler* 55, the novels of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, and Austen’s own juvenilia, concluding that Northrop Frye’s schema for comedy can be usefully employed in understanding the figure of Lady Susan herself as a combination of the overbearing parent and the procuress, both types that threaten happy outcomes for young couples. “Inasmuch as a complete gallery of unscrupulous widows was exhibited to the young Jane Austen in her readings, critics need not have felt compelled to posit a live model for Lady Susan,” he concludes (28). Another eighteenth-century form, the conduct book, offers a model for Barbara Horwitz, who suggests that “readers [of *Lady Susan*] may sense that they are reading an *anti-conduct* book” (183). Other critics too find it tempting to associate the novel, owing to Austen’s relatively late use of the epistolary mode, with eighteenth-century literary forms and pre-occupations. Poovey calls the novel, point-blank, a satire (174). Litz (1965) points out that Lady Susan’s “hypocrisy” rather than what in a later Austen heroine we might term “duplicity” or “insincerity” proves that Austen “borrowed” “the proper manners [and morals, we might add] to clothe her creation from the literature of earlier decades” (41). Litz adds that “the manners and motives [of *Lady Susan*] belong more to the world of Richardson or the early Fanny Burney than to the 1790s” (Preface vi). Marilyn Butler (1975) estimates the heroine’s provenance most precisely: “With her charm and irresistible air of up-to-date fashion, Lady Susan is the female counterpart of the male seducers of the later anti-jacobin period” (122).

Formal approaches to the novel offer various other suggestions about Austen’s models. Terry Castle suggests Fielding’s *Shamela*, the epistolary parody of Richardson, for its portrait of an unscrupulous female rake. The French critic Simon Davies is convinced that *Lady Susan* proves Austen’s familiarity with Choderlos de Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. (Claire Tomalin, following Frank W. Bradbrook, suggests, in fact, that it was Eliza de Feuillide who introduced Austen anecdotally to this novel, though “it is hard to believe that [the Countess] would have shown it to her unmarried cousin” [83].) The novel’s form also

invites critics to discuss it in the context of the lost epistolary draft of *Sense and Sensibility*, “Elinor and Marianne,” a point made by F. B. Pinion and others.

The epistolary mode of the novel itself is the focus for much discussion and conflict of judgment about the work’s success. Litz (*Jane Austen*) concludes that the book is “a dead end, an interesting but unsuccessful experiment in a dying form based upon outmoded manners” (45). Drabble agrees that the letter form is “not suited to [Austen’s] talents,” and John Lauber is one of many who sees the comic, post-script ending (“This Correspondence . . . could not, to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue, be continued longer” [311]) as evidence of that the novelist “clearly had become impatient with the convention of the novel-in-letters form” (16). (Indeed, Francis Cornish assumes that the novel is actually unfinished.) But Lloyd W. Brown analyzes in detail Austen’s mastery of the form: “Both Lady Susan and Mrs. Vernon are engaged in the letter writer’s perennial business of self-justification. And, as usual, Jane Austen subverts this instinctive process in order to have each correspondent betray herself unwittingly. . . . What Jane Austen has done is to translate the psychological potential of her inherited epistolary forms to the dominant theme of *Lady Susan*—the ambiguities of Self” (149, 152–53). Julia Epstein’s book on Frances Burney gives a spirited account of the “high degree of duplicity [that is] inherent in the narrative form of the letter,” which makes the form ideal for the deceitful Lady Susan (50). Hugh McKellar enthuses about Austen’s awareness of the epistolary “form’s strengths. . . . Since almost every letter is addressed to a relative or close friend of long standing, economy of expression can be achieved on two fronts. No one has to waste time and energy on constructing, or on penetrating, facades; . . . [Readers] are deemed intelligent and alert enough to pick up and fit together scattered details mentioned in passing by various writers” (208). Susan Pepper Robbins contrasts Austen’s use of the mode in *Lady Susan* with that in the juvenilia and sees *Lady Susan* as a turning point toward the definitive authority of the narrative voice. Lloyd Brown too associates *Lady Susan*’s epistolary mode directly with the author’s move to third-person narration: “The mature novels are appreciably influenced by the structural functions and psychological insights of letter writing” (155). Wayne C. Booth uses *Lady Susan* to demonstrate the value of the epistolary mode in creating dramatic irony (65).

The critical history of *Lady Susan* is for the most part a recent business, with even the bicentennial of Austen’s birth (1975) producing few essays that focus on or even mention the novel. The Jane Austen Society of North America devoted its Ninth Annual General Meeting to the juvenilia and *Lady Susan* in 1987, an event that resulted in a number of publications, many found in Grey. Critical discussions of the novel cannot avoid focus on the character whose name Austen’s family gave to the novel. While *Lady Susan* is a particular concern for feminist writers, she appeals also to the psychological critics Beatrice Anderson and Bernard Paris (“Jane Austen’s most remarkable portrait of a ruthlessly aggressive person” of either sex [177]); and to the educationalist D. D.

Devlin, who locates the supposed failure of the novel (“it is badly done”) in the fact that “the story [is] so massively dominated by the energy of Lady Susan” to the point that what he prefers to see as the novel’s subject, the use of love to effect education, is lost (41–42).

Feminist considerations of Jane Austen, from the bicentenary publications on, have always tended to give extra emphasis to *Lady Susan* because it offers such a powerful, if evil, title character. A recent biographer conjures up the young author’s enjoyment in the power of her creation:

[Lady Susan’s] power derives not merely from her physical beauty, . . . but equally from her seductive verbal skill. “If I am vain of anything,” she confides to a female friend, “it is of my eloquence. . . .” For Jane Austen, still polishing her own verbal skills, there was an unmistakable thrill in creating a character whose command of language could have such devastating effects. (Nokes 152)

Terry Castle too points out that “Austen is captivated” by her heroine—“almost in spite of herself. . . . Lady Susan is a villain, prone to near melodramatic cruelties. But she is also a survivor, a woman who refuses to be a passive victim. Austen half-identifies with her heroine’s incorrigible will to power, her gaiety, her erotic rebelliousness, her triumphant contempt for all the ‘romantic nonsense’ that keeps other women subservient” (xxvii–xxviii). The motif Castle uses here—“almost in spite of herself,”—is echoed in many readings. As with assumptions that the title character must be drawn from the life, the fact that the novel is a relatively youthful production seems to invite critics to ascribe a sort of unconsciousness to Austen’s accomplishment. What some see as a paradox, such a young and inexperienced author’s choice of a ruthless antiheroine, leads an admirer like P.J.M. Scott to claim that “*Lady Susan* is a fully accomplished and important piece of fiction,” but at the same time that “the author was writing here better than she knew” (23). Claire Tomalin follows out this idea to its apparent conclusion:

The energy and assurance shown [by Austen] in trying out such an idea and such a character are truly remarkable. [The novel] stands alone in Austen’s work as a study of an adult woman whose intelligence and force of character are greater than those of anyone she encounters, and who knows herself to be wasted on the dull world in which she is obliged to live.

The exercise is brilliant. So brilliant, that Austen may have frightened herself, and felt she had written herself into a dangerous corner, and been too clever, too bold, too black. (84)

Here the critic assumes that rather than being unconscious of her artistry in *Lady Susan*, Austen is actually frightened by it. Douglas Bush sums up, with a reference to the author’s status as a novice, “The unrelieved harshness of the satire is not the vein of the Jane Austen we know, and we feel that her developing skill is wasted on old-fashioned material” (54). Granting the author more self-

knowledge is Louis Kronenberger: “*Lady Susan* makes us feel that Jane Austen could have mastered a brilliantly brittle manner, a certain enameled surface. . . . But the vein of *Lady Susan* would have . . . hobbled the whole humorously comic side of [Austen’s] work” (140–41).

Most recent feminist critics have ascribed to the author full and fearless awareness and control of her subversive creation, control that extends to the form Austen chose for her novel. Patricia Meyer Spacks makes an explicit connection between a critical emphasis on the novel’s epistolary form and the feminist perspective it invites in many readers: “By playing with epistolary convention in *Lady Susan*, . . . Austen located herself in a female tradition, demonstrating subversive possibilities of a form that in previous uses by English women had reinforced literary and social restrictions on female enterprise” (89). Deborah Kaplan points to the appropriateness of the form for what she sees as a novel about female friendship:

Letters . . . are the particular province, indeed the genre of women. Of the forty-one that constitute the fiction, the majority—thirty—are written by one woman to another. . . . We encounter women primarily and not as isolated individuals but always within relationships. The interactions of Lady Susan and Catherine Vernon . . . are, in effect, the interactions of two networks of women, not of this pair alone. (160)

Poovey notes that “the novel is consistently dominated by women, despite [Lady] Susan’s preoccupation with men. . . . Only the women are capable of grasping the implications of [the heroine’s] exuberance or of doing anything about it” (177). Knuth too emphasizes the novel’s focus on female friendship as a source of subversive power. Leroy W. Smith analyzes the sources of Lady Susan’s power, while noting that she is, of course, “a hypocrite” and “a threat to the patriarchal order” (55). He considers that “perhaps Lady Susan’s behaviour is most disturbing because she imitates the male. Her treatment of her daughter is like that of a patriarchal father. Her reluctance to surrender her freedom by marrying parodies the male’s view of matrimony. . . . Finally, Lady Susan possesses an egotism identified with the male” (53). “So compelling and so complete is this heroine’s artful power that the only way Austen can effectively censure her is to impose punishment by narrative fiat,” Poovey concludes about what others see as an impatient and abrupt ending to the novel (178).

On occasion, however, the feminist preoccupations of the critic cut the opposite way, to prove that Jane Austen’s portraits of female power are always qualified or even perverse. Nina Auerbach points out that “if flabby fathers are to be deplored in the novels, strong mothers . . . like Lady Susan . . . are almost always pernicious in their authority: female power is effectively synonymous with power abused” (50). But Leroy Smith reads that “Austen neither idealises nor condemns [Lady Susan], neither extols nor demeans her, but develops the character in her strengths and weaknesses as the product of the society with which she contends” (56).

With Jane Austen's increasing popularity, we will see further discussion of *Lady Susan*, as well as film or television adaptations. And perhaps a twenty-first-century imitation of the novel in the form of e-mail should be expected as well. The fascination of the title character, the conundrum of the letter form and the author's apparent sheer delight in evil invite us irresistibly to revisit the novel.

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On the Virtues of Stout  
Half-Boots, *Speculation* and a  
Little Fresh Hair Powder: A  
Political, Yet Jovial, Reading of  
Jane Austen's *The Watsons*

*Laura Hamblin*

Jane Austen's unfinished novel, *The Watsons*, follows in the tradition of her other novels in being a comedy dealing with the attempt by various characters, exercising various degrees of ruthlessness, to find suitable mates for themselves in a world having strict codes, protocols and rituals behind such pursuits. Comedy, according to the critic Northrop Frye, traditionally consists of the desires of a young man for a young woman that come in contact with opposition, but through various twists and contours in the plot, the hero ultimately has his will. Of course, in a Jane Austen novel, the hero is replaced with a heroine, but the core of the plot is essentially the same in that the lover seeks out the beloved in the middle of social and political challenges.

In comedy, the movement is typically from one type of society toward another. The society moves from a rigid, ritual-bound structure—or arbitrary order controlled by tradition—toward a culture that is honest and free, and is controlled by honor. The movement is essentially from “illusion to reality” (Frye 169). In the resolution, the new society crystallizes with the union of the hero and heroine and is typically recognized, by the reader and by the wiser characters, to be the “proper and desirable state of affairs” (164). The new society is pragmatically free, representing a type of moral norm. Thus comedy is always political, and it functions on one level as a criticism of the society that would thwart the power of the lovers to unite. In doing so, comedy undermines the powers that be. Frye suggests that “humor is intimately connected with the theme of the absurd or irrational law that the action of comedy moves toward breaking” (169).

*The Watsons* can be considered a comedy of manners, a type of satire that deals with the complex and sophisticated code of manners adhered to in certain fashionable circles of the time. In such comedies, appearance is valued over



moral character, judgment or behavior. Austen's writing is satirical, as it has the entertaining purpose of generating laughter and the moral purpose of pointing out the follies and foibles of society in order to correct the follies and consequently improve society. One could say of satire what Sir Philip Sidney said of poetry: that it functions "with this end, to teach and delight" (138). Thus, satire is one of the most political forms of comedy. Critic Margaret Kirkham notes the following of Austen's satirical sense:

There is, in the Austen comedy, a great deal of wit, some sarcasm and a trace of malignity here and there. . . . But there is more sympathetic merriment than sarcasm, and the wit is tempered by humour. Jane Austen's comic vision includes a glimpse of something ideal and universal, together with a sharp, ironic awareness of how far short most of us are of it, especially when "dressed in a little brief authority." (83)

In *The Watsons*, comedy works in much the same way comedy often works: through highlighting the absurd juxtaposition and discrepancy between reality and appearance. In *The Watsons*, the rich, sophisticated upper class who theoretically should be better bred and thus more civilized are juxtaposed with the less wealthy, less meticulously bred and, therefore, lower class, who theoretically should be uncultivated and uncivilized. The discrepancy exists when we observe that the wealthier, and therefore more politically powerful, often act outside moral boundaries, and the less wealthy often act within the boundaries of a certain grace and morality that go beyond breeding or money. Austen's humor relies on a type of elitism as she deals with an elite class of people. But the elitism is "not in defense of wealth and class but in defense of the enduring possibility of a human life that both benefits others and perfects oneself" (Ruderman 9).

Austen is a master at observing the elite social classes, the parlay between them and the absurdity of their rituals. Virginia Woolf explains Austen's ability to reflect the social classes as being a factor of the traditional cultural and political milieu of women:

All the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion. Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room. People's feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. (67)

In observing the social classes, Austen expresses the humor she sees through sophisticated and witty dialogue; the humor has as much to do with a play of language as with a play of situation. We see the foolish and wise natures of a number of characters as they interact in various social settings where their true natures surface when in contact and dialogue with other characters. Critic Kathleen James-Cavan suggests that conversation is of extreme importance in *The Watsons*, so much so that it actually is central to the book as it, rather than

marriage, functions as the initiation ritual that allows the heroine full participation in adult society (437). “Conversation becomes a crucible within which the mettle of the heroine is tested. While conversation may forge intimate relations between characters, it is also a public [and thus political] act that establishes a character’s place in society” (James-Cavan 445).

*The Watsons* revolves around the heroine—Emma Watson, the youngest of the Watson children—“refined” (111), “good-natured” (112) and “sweet temper[ed]” (139)—who was raised from the age of five by her wealthy Aunt Turner (and so enjoyed the full benefit that a life in a higher social class and greater wealth might buy). However, Aunt Turner has recently married an Irishman (alas, not a full-blooded British aristocrat), Captain O’Brien, and, upon O’Brien’s request, has settled in Ireland, sending Emma back home to her less able family. Thus, the conflict immediately present exists between a well-bred young woman of nineteen years attempting to readjust herself to a life with little of the financial ease or social prospects that life with her aunt seemed to have promised. In addition, due to the social and political situation of nineteenth-century England, women during this period had “matrimony [as] their only hope of escape from current penury and future ruin or near-ruin” (MacDonagh 28). Thus, Emma’s and her sisters’ plight is to find an appropriate spouse to secure their position in society. And in nineteenth-century British upper-class circles, typically a more secure position is tantamount to a more wealthy position. Critic Oliver MacDonagh believes that in *The Watsons*, “money is almost everything” (28). Certainly Emma’s plight is framed within the context of money:

From being the first object of hope and solicitude of an uncle who had formed her mind with the care of a parent, and of tenderness to an aunt whose amiable temper had delighted to give her every indulgence, from being the life and spirit of a house, where all had been comfort and elegance, and the expected heiress of an easy independence, she was become of importance to no one, a burden on those, whose affection she could not expect, an addition in a house, already overstocked, surrounded by inferior minds with little chance of domestic comfort, and as little hope of future support.—it was well for her that she was naturally cheerful;—for the change was such as might have plunged weak spirits in despondence. (151)

The Watsons, living at Stanton, consist of a large family, which in addition to Emma include the following: Mr. Watson, widowed, sickly and equally poor in financial health; Elizabeth Watson, the eldest sister, age twenty-eight, single and “unlucky” (113) in love, who is now functioning as the primary caregiver to Mr. Watson; Robert Watson, attorney “in a good way of business” (139), married to Jane (who has six thousand pounds a year, making her a good financial match), the only daughter of the attorney to whom Robert had been a clerk; Penelope Watson, who, according to Elizabeth, would do anything to marry, is without honor or scruples, was previously disappointed in her romantic feelings for Tom Musgrave and is now pursuing old Dr. Harding; Margaret

Watson, who is gentle and mild in public but “snappish” and “perverse” with her sister, would “rather have quarreling going on, than nothing at all” (134), and is “possessed” by Tom Musgrave, assuming, wrongly, that he cares for her as she cares for him; and Sam Watson, a practicing surgeon, which in Austen’s day did not hold the prestige or the financial rewards of contemporary surgeons, who is fond of Mary Edwards (whose social class and wealth are higher than his, making his chance of success with her rather slim). This rather lengthy description of the family is important for a critical reading of the novel, as each family member exemplifies various aspects of duplicity, civility and grace (or the lack thereof), thus enhancing or undermining the political powers that be.

The novel begins with a carriage ride by Emma and Elizabeth, as Elizabeth escorts Emma to the Edwards’s home for the first of the monthly winter balls for which they are famous. Austen frequently uses ballroom scenes as arenas “where characters reveal both their degree of accomplishment in surface manners and their inner courtesy or vulgarity” (Reid-Walsh 115). The two sisters are conversing about the upcoming ball. As is typical of Austen’s style of writing, we see much of the characters revealed through their dialogue. Here word, more so than action, exposes the characters’ true self. During the carriage ride, Elizabeth instructs Emma on the finer nuances of the individuals Emma will be meeting at the dance and the proper protocol of behavior. Elizabeth warns Emma of the charming yet somewhat dubious Tom Musgrave as they discuss the difficulties the various sisters have had in finding matches. Elizabeth instructs, “We must Marry” (109). But Emma, with clear head and heart, cannot accept the desperate actions of Penelope in chasing Tom Musgrave:

I am sorry for her anxieties, but I do not like her plans or her opinions. I shall be afraid of her.—She must have too masculine and bold a temper.—to be so bent on marriage—to pursue a man merely for the sake of the situation—is a sort of thing that shocks me; I cannot understand it. Poverty is a great evil, but to a woman of education and feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest.—I would rather be a teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a man I did not like.

Thus we see that Emma is grounded in common sense and propriety. Her values are not those of her society, which would place the value of a person on his or her income—often at the expense of valuing the foolish over the wise and the good. Emma here challenges the political system by refusing to participate if the participation would require a breach of her integrity.

Integrity is just what is lacking in the four most ostentatious characters (of varying degrees of wealth): Lord Osborne, Tom Musgrave and Richard and Jane Watson. Each of these individuals unknowingly exemplifies various manifestations of the follies of the rich and famous. Lord Osborne is the highest-class citizen of Surrey. He and his mother, Lady Osborne, and his sister, Miss Osborne, enter the Edwards’s ball late—but their lateness is expected. It is in fact part of the upper-class ritual. The lateness of their arrival is anticipated with

much interest and fuss. Mr. Edwards announces to his family that the Osbornes will be at the ball: "Horses for two carriages are ordered from the White Hart, to be at the Osborne Castle by nine" (115). Mrs. Edwards is glad of the news but feels ambivalent toward the Osbornes, "because their coming gives a credit to our assemblies. The Osbornes, being known to have been at the first ball, will dispose a great many people to attend the second.—It is more than they deserve, for in fact they add nothing to the pleasure of the evening, they come so late, and go so early;—but great people have their charm" (115). Thus, the most elite are not required to maintain the normal standards of etiquette. It is as if the Osbornes stand outside the political and social rules that maintain order and propriety for the rest of the community. At the same time, the Osbornes embody the social rule, thus highlighting the comic paradox. When the Osbornes finally do arrive, the first two dances are over. Guests note among themselves, "The Osbornes are coming, the Osbornes are coming" (120), accompanied by much bustle and commotion. Prior to their entering the room, the master of the inn attentively and pretentiously precedes the Osbornes in order to open a door "which was never shut" (120). Austen atypically introduces the reader to Lord Osborne through direct description rather than through dialogue: "Lord Osborne was a very fine young man; but there was an air of coldness, or carelessness, even of awkwardness about him, which seemed to speak him out of his element in a ball room. He came in fact only because it was judged expedient for him to please the borough—he was not fond of women's company, and he never danced." (121). Additionally, during the tea break, Lord Osborne lacks the social grace and ease to mingle freely with the other guests but "was to be seen quite alone at the end of one [long table], as if retreating as far as he could from the ball, to enjoy his own thoughts and gape without restraints" (123). These actions illustrate his egotism and snobbishness, along with his crass habit of being somewhat of a voyeur. Politically Lord Osborne is so far above everyone else that he does not have to participate. It is beneath him to participate, and he does not have to bear the repercussions that a lack of participation would certainly create for anyone else.

Lord Osborne seems to have a genuine interest in Emma, but because he fails to learn from participation, he lacks the skills to approach her, so he sends Tom Musgrave out to spy for him: "Lord Osborne, who was lounging on a vacant table near [Emma], call[ed] Tom Musgrave towards him and [said], 'Why do you not dance with that beautiful Emma Watson? I want you to dance with her, and I will come and stand by you . . . and if you find that she does not want much talking to, you may introduce me by and by.'" (124). Although Tom Musgrave has good reports to make of Emma, Lord Osborne never rallies himself to the point where he asks her to dance. Lord Osborne leaves the dance early and, under the pretext of looking for his gloves which are "visibly compressed in his hand" (127), ventures back to the party of the Blakes and Howards as they are saying goodbye to Emma, so that he might be near Emma.

From the actions of Lord Osborne, we see that he is extremely self-centered,

coming late and leaving early; he is insecure in spite of his wealth; and he lacks the social graces fully expected of a man in his position as he cannot approach a woman he is interested in, nor can he interact with a woman without the assistance of his more socially skilled friend, Tom Musgrave. Thus, Lord Osborne's domination actually is responsible for his inability to commingle with the rest of the community when he has the desire to do so. He is a victim of his own elitism.

It is the way of the place to call on Mrs. Edwards on the morning after a ball, and there is much general curiosity on everyone's part to "look again at the girl who had been admired the night before by Lord Osborne" (128). The community feels an interest in Emma: "She is an unknown variable entering a closed community where her sisters are almost too well known. Therefore she is an object of interest in the sense of providing variety in a very narrow world" (Reid-Walsh 118). Most women, certainly those of Emma's standing, would be flattered by both Lord Osborne's and the community's interest. But Emma, "due to her cultivated upbringing and due to her spirited personality . . . is not bothered by the social pressures of her 'entrance' "? (118).

The third night after the ball, Lord Osborne makes a major faux pas, which only his class and rank could excuse. He and Tom Musgrave drop by Stanton, unannounced and uninvited, under the pretext of waiting on Mr. Watson (which has never before happened in all of the fourteen years that Mr. Watson has lived in his house). Lord Osborne himself looks embarrassed. The entire dialogue is awkward as Lord Osborne sits down near Emma and has essentially nothing to say except that he hopes Emma has not caught a cold at the ball. "After hard labour of mind, he produced the remark of its being a very fine day, and followed up with the question of, 'Have you been walking this morning?' " (136). When Emma replies that she had not because it seemed too dirty out, he preceded to go on and on over the virtue of stout half-boots: "You should wear half-boots. . . . Nothing sets off a neat ankle more than a half-boot; napkin galoshed with black looks very well" (136). When Lord Osborne suggests that women look best on horseback, Emma reminds him that not all women have the inclination or the means for riding horses. Here Lord Osborne demonstrates his insensitivity to the very real predicament of most people, particularly to the predicament of Emma: "If [women] knew very much about [horses], they would all have the inclination, and I fancy Miss Watson—when once they had the inclination, the means would soon follow" (136). Obviously Lord Osborne believes that everyone, if well informed, would enjoy what he does, horseback riding, and that if one enjoys a thing, one can easily find the means of indulging oneself in one's enjoyment. Again, in spite of his good breeding, or perhaps because of it, Lord Osborne proves himself insensitive, unrealistic and egocentric. Emma silences Lord Osborne by trying to remind him that "there are some circumstances which even *women* cannot control.—Female economy will do a great deal my Lord, but it cannot turn a small income into a large one" (136). The irony here is that although Emma had a very wealthy upbringing, she is

still realistic in her view of herself and of others. In many respects, she has as much reason to be an elitist as any of the other characters. However, Emma's wealthy upbringing has not prevented her, unlike Lord Osborne, from feeling sympathy for others. Thus, she proves to be morally superior to Lord Osborne in her intellect and her sympathy.

Lord Osborne adds little to the conversation after Emma's mild chiding. He and Tom Musgrave overstay the uninvited visit, "disregarding every symptom, however positive, of the nearness of [the dinner] meal" (137), and remove themselves only after Nanny suggests that Mr. Watson wants to know why he has not been able to eat. Again, Lord Osborne, in his inability to perceive the needs of others, makes himself look the fool as with his parting breath he continues to praise half-boots and asks Emma to stop by on his hunting trip on Wednesday.

In comparison with Lord Osborne, Tom Musgrave makes additionally distasteful political maneuvers, but his are not as easily excused as he has neither the social rank, the breeding nor the money to make his faults easily forgivable. Tom Musgrave's elitism comes not from wealth or breeding, but from his association with Lord Osborne; however, association alone does not provide the political justification for his actions. To begin with, Mr. Musgrave has a reputation for being a bit of a womanizer. He has made his way though all of the Watson girls and most of the others in the area. Part of his reputation includes the correct assumption that Mr. Musgrave has no intention of acting on his apparent interests. His flirting has seriously disappointed Penelope and led Margaret to believe that he has intentions for her. Musgrave's maneuvers demonstrate his lack of sympathy or concern for the people with whom he involves himself. Elizabeth warns Emma, "'He will never marry unless he can marry somebody very great; Miss Osborne, perhaps, or something in that style'" (111). Thus we see that Mr. Musgrave has adopted the superficial values of his society, and although he enjoys the company of women, he will commit himself only to one whose money and prestige will elevate him socially.

At the ball Mr. Musgrave makes himself out as a bit of a fop when he locks himself up in his own room, "listening in bitter impatience to the sound of music, for the last half hour" (120), as he wants to make his entrance with the Osbornes in order to be attached with their grandeur. Tom Musgrave is happy to play the part of Lord Osborne's errand boy, attempting to dance with Emma, and his reply to Lord Osborne's request to gather information on Emma further exemplifies not only his insensitivity, but his outright rudeness as he insults, without any provocation, the hostess of the ball: "'Find [Emma] in the tea-room. That stiff old Mrs. Edwards has never done tea'" (125).

Tom Musgrave is surprised to find that Emma has already promised herself for the next few dances. He wrongly assumed that since she danced the first two dances with ten-year-old Charles Blake, she could not be "overpowered with applications" (125). Only after Emma rejects him outright for Lord Osborne's former tutor, Mr. Howard, does Mr. Musgrave act a bit more formal and civil, making inquiries after her family. Again, Mr. Musgrave tends to mis-

understand people and their motives; judging others to be as self-serving as himself, he is unable to conceive of a person's acting kindly, out of something like compassion, toward a person of a lower standing.

Mr. Musgrave stays at the ball only as long as do the Osbornes. We can infer from his action that he is only interested in courting the Osbornes and that he thinks too highly of himself to waste his time on anyone other than the Osbornes. He remarks to Lord Osborne that after the Osbornes leave, "I shall retreat in as much secrecy as possible to the most remote corner of the house, where I shall order a barrel of oysters, and be famously snug" (126). As he is seen no more, we are led to "suppose his plan to have succeeded, and imagine him mortifying with his barrel of oysters, in dreary solitude—or gladly assisting the landlady in her bar to make fresh negus" (127).

The next morning, Mr. Musgrave stops by the Edwards's house, unannounced and, in spite of Mrs. Edwards's stiff looks and chilling air, presents with ease a note to Emma from Elizabeth asking her to come home if at all possible. Mr. Musgrave adds a postscript to Elizabeth's note and insists on taking Emma to her house himself. Emma is distressed because "she did not wish to be on terms of intimacy with the proposer" (130). Emma resists Mr. Musgrave's proposal, suggesting that she can easily walk the distance. Mr. Musgrave awkwardly and in a pushy manner insists that the Edwards cannot take Emma home because their coachman and the horses will be exhausted from the efforts of the previous night, even after Mrs. Edwards offers Emma the option of staying another night or taking their carriage. The absurdity is that if Mr. Musgrave were the gentleman he parades as being, he would never push anyone to do something he or she felt uncomfortable doing or might be perceived as being the least bit inappropriate. He is attempting to dominate and manipulate Emma. Of course, Mr. Musgrave is not a gentleman; he is a self-serving social climber. When he realizes that Emma will not go to her house alone with him, he puts her in another awkward situation by asking, outright, in front of Mrs. Edwards and her daughter, "What do you think of *Lord Osborne*, Miss Watson?" (131). Emma shows her moral superiority in her reply which is honest, direct and not in the least bit obsequious: "That he would be handsome even, thought he were *not* a lord—and perhaps—better bred; more desirous of pleasing, and showing himself pleased in a right place" (131). Of course, Emma's answer, considering the questioner, will likely make its way back to Lord Osborne; Emma would certainly be aware that she could offend Lord Osborne, as her answer is not flattering. However, Emma is obviously not interested in playing the social or political games that so many people of her circle play (especially Mr. Musgrave, the champion at such games). And in a real sense, it is her honesty and her ability not to be manipulated by the social games that makes her so desirable. Emma reads Mr. Musgrave correctly when she reports to Elizabeth:

"I do not like [Mr. Musgrave], Elizabeth. I allow his person and air to be good—and that his manners to a certain point—his address rather—is pleasing.—But I see nothing

else to admire in him.—On the contrary, he seems very vain, very conceited, absurdly anxious for distinction, and absolutely contemptible in some of the measures he takes for becoming so.—There is a ridiculousness about him that entertains me—but his company gives me no other agreeable emotion.” (133)

Emma is not the only one who sees the silliness of Mr. Musgrave. When Lord Osborne and Mr. Musgrave visit (unannounced and uninvited) the Watsons’ home, thus preventing Mr. Watson from getting his dinner in a timely fashion, Mr. Watson blames Mr. Musgrave: “What occasion could there be for Lord Osborne’s coming? . . . It is some foolery of that idle fellow Tom Musgrave”(138).

A week or ten days later, when Robert and Jane visit the Watsons, Tom Musgrave again makes an uninvited and unannounced visit, as “he loved to take people by surprise, with sudden visits at extraordinary seasons” (145). He had been in London, was on his way home and had “come half a mile out of his road merely to call for ten minutes at Stanton” (145). While Mr. Musgrave loves to give surprises, it seems his visit this time gives him more surprise than he gives, as he finds “a circle of smart people whom he could not immediately recognize arranged with all the honors of visiting round the fire, and Miss Watson sitting at the best Pembroke table, with the best tea things before her” (145). Here we see Mr. Musgrave’s inability to judge deeply or correctly. He believes that since the Watsons are experiencing financial difficulties, they would forgo “smartness,” “honor” and “best things.” When questioned about the hours that he is keeping in his late travels, Mr. Musgrave responds: “I could not be earlier, I was detained chattering at the Bedford, by a friend.—All hours are alike to me” (146). In this bit of dialogue, Mr. Musgrave reveals that he has no sense of the propriety of keeping a prudent time schedule. He is trying to flout his extravagant lifestyle, as he has no responsibilities of work. But with this particular circle—at least with the wise one in the circle—his shiftlessness fails miserably to impress.

The members of the circle decide to play cards, and as Jane has already informed her husband’s family that “*Speculation* is the only round game at Croydon now” (144), Elizabeth announces to Mr. Musgrave that the game is Speculation. Mr. Musgrave, in his typical vain manner, embarrasses Robert and Jane in their taste for the game and refutes the choice of it:

“I have had some pleasant hours at speculation in my time—but have not been in the way of it now for a long while.—Vingt-un is the game at Osborne Castle; I have played nothing but vingt-un of late. . . . Lord Osborne enjoys it famously—he makes the best dealer without exception that I ever beheld—such quickness and spirit! he lets nobody dream over their cards—it is worth anything in the world!” (148)

The absurdity here lies in fact of Mr. Musgrave’s praising Lord Osborne’s card playing as if it were a skill highly to be admired or desired. If he is trying to



impress Emma, he only makes a bigger fool of himself and Lord Osborne by making a big deal of such a trivial thing as cards; only the trivial people respond with interest and enthusiasm. Mr. Musgrave's choice of game wins over Margaret's vote, and "Mrs. Robert offered not another word in support of the game [of Speculation]. She was quite vanquished, and the fashions of Osborne Castle carried it over the fashions of Croydon" (148).

Emma is grateful for Mr. Musgrave's presence, in spite of his obsequiousness toward Lord Osborne and his rudeness toward others' feelings:

He proved a very useful addition to their table; without him, it would have been a party of such very near relations as could have felt little interest, and perhaps maintained little complaisance, but his presence gave variety and secured good manners. . . . He played with spirit, and had a great deal to say and though with no wit himself, could sometimes make use of wit in an absent friend; and had a lively way of retelling a commonplace, or saying a mere nothing. . . . He repeated the smart sayings of one lady, detailed the oversights of another, and indulged them even with a copy of Lord Osborne's style of overdrawing himself on both cards. (149)

At the expressed desire of Margaret (who is convinced that Mr. Musgrave's visit is solely due to her presence and his interest in her), Elizabeth invites Mr. Musgrave to dinner the following day. Mr. Musgrave's reply reinforces the impression of his frivolous lifestyle, his lack of consideration toward others and his lack of propriety, for even his decline is offensive: "If I can possibly get here in time—but I shoot with Lady Osborne, and therefore must not engage—You will not think of me unless you see me" (Austen 149).

Equally obsequious, self-serving and thoughtless are Robert and Jane Watson. Their situation is a bit different from Lord Osborne's or Mr. Musgrave's. They are not lords nor even intimate friends of lords. Robert is as poor as the Watsons, but he happened to marry above himself. As he married the only daughter (with a fortune of six thousand pounds) of the attorney he clerked for, his place in society is solely a factor of his wife's position and money. One might think that Robert would be a bit more sympathetic toward those of his original station, but he is as full of himself and his wife as if he never experienced anything other than an income of six thousand pounds. Jane seems to be equally full of herself. "Mrs. Robert was not less pleased with herself for having had that six thousand pounds, and for being now in possession of a very smart house in Croydon, where she gave genteel parties, and wore fine clothes" (139). In spite of her wealth and social position, Mrs. Robert herself is not remarkable; "her manners were pert and conceited" (139). She sees others solely in terms of herself in order to compare them to herself so that she may recognize her own superiority. "Mrs. Robert eyed [Emma] with much familiar curiosity and triumphant compassion;—the loss of the aunt's fortune was uppermost in her mind, at the moment of meeting;—and she could not but feel how much better it was to be the daughter of a gentleman of property in Croydon, than the niece

of an old woman who threw herself away on an Irish captain" (139). The couple are perfectly matched. Mrs. Robert is emphatic in letting Emma know what a fine, cultured lady she is. As she invites Emma to visit them at Croydon, she notes their elitist circles: "I assure you we have very good society at Croydon.—I do not much attend the balls, they are rather too mixed,—but our parties are very selected and good" (140).

Like Mrs. Robert, Robert is also seemingly considerate, but his concern is limited to how Emma's situation might affect him. His inquiries and interactions are based on financial and political rationale rather than on filial concerns: "Robert was carelessly kind, as became a prosperous man and a brother; more intent on settling with the post-boy, inveighing against the exorbitant advance in posting, and pondering over a doubtful halfcrown, than on welcoming a sister, who was no longer likely to have any property for him to get the direction of" (139–40). When he finally is alone with Emma, he can only insult her and all other women as he rebukes their aunt: "'So, Emma,' said he, 'you are quite the stranger at home. It must seem odd enough to you to be here.—A pretty piece of work your Aunt Turner has made of it!—By heavens! A woman should never be trusted with money. I always said she ought to have settled something on you, as soon as her husband died'" (142). Emma, with her shrewd intellect, points out the flaw in Robert's argument: if their aunt had settled some money on Emma, then Emma, also a woman, would be in charge of money. Robert then has to qualify his suggestion by saying Emma's money could have been secured for her future use (likely by someone as well fitted to manage money as himself). Robert goes on to demonstrate his mean-spiritedness when he insults Emma and wishes evil on their aunt (who, after all, was good enough to have supported Emma for fourteen years): "What a blow it must have been upon you!—To find yourself, instead of heiress of eight or nine thousand pounds, sent back a weight upon your family, without a sixpence.—I hope the woman will smart for it" (142). Emma's response is full of grace and dignity; she will not allow Robert to insult either their aunt or their uncle as she reminds him of their "liberal and enlightened minds," their "attachment to" and "tender respect" for one another and her uncle's faultless conduct in trusting his wife with their money (142).

Robert, not winning the tête-à-tête with Emma in insulting his relations, then moves on to insult Emma herself and attempts to make her feel unwanted by her own family:

"But unluckily [Aunt Turner] had left the pleasure of providing for you to your father, and without the power.—That's the long and the short of the business. After keeping you at a distance from your family for such a length of time as must do away all natural affection among us and breeding you up (I suppose) in a superior style, you are returned upon their hands without a sixpence." (142)

The issue of Emma's lost inheritance is of utmost importance to Robert because he sees relationships only in terms of their financial possibilities. He himself

made his choice of a spouse based on the potential for material gain, and he assumes that all others do the same. He then offers to “assist” Emma in her pursuit of finding a spouse while simultaneously insulting her, so that his offer holds little sincerity or interest for Emma: “Pity, you can none of you [sisters] get married!—You must come to Croydon as well as the rest, and see what you can do there.—I believe if Margaret had had a thousand or fifteen hundred pounds, there was a young man who would have thought of her” (Austen 143). Emma is left choosing the lesser of two evils and attempts to leave Robert to join the others: “better to look at her sister-in-law’s finery than listen to Robert, who had equally irritated and grieved her” (143).

But Emma finds a similar shallowness and lack of sensitivity in Mrs. Robert. When Emma and Robert join the others, Mrs. Robert chides her husband:

“Mr Watson—” (to her husband) “you have not put any fresh powder in your hair.”

“No—I do not intend it.—I think there is powder enough in my hair for my wife and sisters.—”

“Indeed, you ought to make some alteration in your dress before dinner when you are out visiting, though you do not at home.” . . .

“Do be satisfied with being fine yourself, and leave your husband alone.” (143)

Robert thinks it is not necessary to dress up or try to be as fine as possible for people as subordinate as his poor relations. Emma is quick to “put an end to this altercation, and soften the evident vexation of her sister-in-law, Emma (though in no spirits to make such nonsense easy) began to admire [Mrs. Robert’s] gown” (143). Her doing so immediately pacifies Mrs. Robert as it gives her an opportunity to focus on herself. But the situation concerning the lack of fresh hair powder is not over. Only later, when Mr. Musgrave arrives and comments on his inappropriate dress for visiting, does Robert excuse his lack of formality with a bold-faced lie: “Robert Watson stealing a view of his own head in an opposite glass,—said with equal civility, ‘You cannot be more in *déshabille* than myself.—We got here so late, that I had not time even to put a little fresh powder in my hair’ ” (147).

Mrs. Robert makes another social blunder when she hears that turkey is being served and responds: “ ‘I do beg and entreat that no turkey may be seen today. I am really frightened out of my wits with the number of dishes we have already. Let us have no turkey, I beseech you’ ” (144). Of course, the turkey was made in anticipation of pleasing Mr. Watson. Emma informs Mrs. Robert, “ ‘If it is cut, I am in hopes my father may be tempted to eat a bit, for it is rather a favorite dish’ ” (144). Mrs. Robert here demonstrates her own conceit when she assumes that everything, even dinner, is about herself. She reveals her oblivion toward others’ needs, particularly those who are weak and in poor health. Mrs. Robert responds in a similar fashion when Elizabeth suggests that they play a game of cards—again, thinking only of herself, Mrs. Robert says that she does

not like to play cards except in a formal circle, but Elizabeth had suggested cards because she was trying to amuse her father.

In the final interlude of Robert and Jane, they press Emma to return with them to Croydon. Emma has difficulty in “getting a refusal accepted; as they thought too highly of their own kindness and situation, to suppose the offer could appear in a less advantageous light to anybody else” (151). Robert and Jane are too full of their own wealth and position to recognize that Emma, with her integrity and down-to-earth nature, could never be comfortable as their guest. And Emma’s decline of their offer is further indication that she will not participate in the political maneuvers of her culture if the price includes a compromise of her integrity.

Juxtaposed with the petty, insincere and insulting behavior of those whose culture would have them perceived as superior, we have Emma, whose behavior always reflects a stable mind, a genuine and open affection and a solid sense of integrity. She always defies the codes of behavior set by her society and gives us a model of a person of true grace. Emma’s ability to define herself makes her easy for feminists to sympathize with. Margaret Kirkham suggests that Emma, like other Austen heroines, is not a “self-conscious feminist” (84). However, she is “exemplary of the first claim of Enlightenment feminism: that women share the same moral nature as men, ought to share the same moral status, and exercise the same responsibility for their own conduct” (84). In a real sense Emma’s enlightened perception of women makes Emma superior to other characters, as with her new vision she defies the codes of her culture.

But not all critics look so favorably on the character of Emma. Juliet McMaster suggests that Emma ultimately fails as a character because she is *too* good. She acts in a moral fashion, but we do not see her develop as a moral agent: “She has learned too little, and therefore leaves no room for the operation of authorial irony” (214). Emma is, in fact, the only Austen heroine who is not duplicitous. Because Emma is so good, so intelligent, so spirited and so high principled, she has no room to grow and develop (McMaster 214). With McMaster’s appraisal, Emma functions not as an intriguing character with personal conflicts to resolve, but simply as a moral yardstick by which to measure the smallness of other members of her society. These are strong charges, which perhaps are unfair to make because the book is a fragment, and we will never know how Austen might have developed Emma had she finished the novel. If the text were a finished piece, intended for publication, and the Emma we see was the finished product, perhaps the charges would then have some validity.

Nevertheless, Emma *is* the most moral of all of the characters. In the beginning of the book, en route to the Edwards’s ball with Elizabeth who informs her of the various individuals she will be meeting that evening, Emma resists making judgments. She is respectful of Elizabeth’s loss in her unfortunate relationship with Pruvvis (a particular friend of Robert), and she refuses to believe the reports that Penelope actually undermined Elizabeth’s relationship: “You quite shock me by what you say of Penelope— . . . Could a sister do such a

thing?—Rivalry, treachery between sisters!” (109). Emma wants to believe the best of everyone. In spite of Emma’s strong opinions and her straightforward manner of speaking, she is full of humility and grace as she understands that it is possible that she could be misperceiving the situation: “My conduct must tell you how I have been brought up. I am no judge of it myself. I cannot compare my aunt’s method with any other person’s, because I know no other. . . . If my opinions are wrong, I must correct them—if they’re above my situation, I must endeavor to conceal them” (110).

Although Emma understands her and her sisters’ dire financial situation, she is realistic in her hopes, and she feels a solidarity with the family members from whom she has been separated. As Elizabeth hopes that their brother Sam might be as lucky in marriage as their brother Robert has been, Emma responds, “We must not all expect to be individually lucky. . . . The luck of one member of a family is luck to all” (113).

At the ball, Emma shows genuine concern and charity when ten-year-old Charles Blake is turned down for the dances that Miss Osborne promised him. When Emma sees Charles’s reaction—“the picture of disappointment, with crimsoned cheeks, quivering lips, and eyes bent on the floor” (122)—she saves the day in a heroic fashion. “Emma did not think, or reflect;—she felt and acted—. ‘I shall be very happy to dance with you sir, if you like it’ ” (122). Here we see that Emma has sympathy toward those who are subordinate to her; she would never think of humiliating a child and instinctively does all in her power to remedy the situation and restore the boy’s spirit and dignity. And she acts not out of pity, but takes as much pleasure in the situation as she gives (122). Emma’s actions reveal that she has integrated the “logic of the conduct books whereby manners were considered to be ‘morals in action.’ Accordingly, her superior conduct chastises those of the others who are acting out of self-interest” (Reid-Walsh 121). In addition, Emma here challenges the social convention of the man’s asking the woman to dance (Reid-Walsh 121), but her defiance of the social norm is for the greater good, enabling Charles Blake to retain his dignity in the middle of an otherwise awkward and hurtful situation.

During the ball, when Mr. Musgrave tries to flirt with Emma, saying he will now make up for his neglect of Stanton, Emma does not respond to his advances as he is used to having women respond: “Emma’s calm curtesy in reply must have struck him as very unlike the encouraging warmth he had been used to receive from her sisters, and gave him probably the novel sensation of doubting his own influence, and of wishing for more affection than she bestowed” (126).

Later, in reporting to Elizabeth the events of the ball, Emma compares the natures of Mr. Howard and Mr. Musgrave: “ [Mr. Howard’s] manners are of a kind to give me much more ease and confidence than Tom Musgrave’s ” (133). Awed over Emma’s ability to refuse Mr. Musgrave’s advances, Elizabeth remarks, “My dearest Emma!—you are like nobody else in the world” (133).

The next day when Lord Osborne and Mr. Musgrave visit Stanton, Emma is the only person with enough sense and decorum to recognize the impropriety

of the situation. She is distressed as she is able to see her home as Lord Osborne would likely see it: “She felt all the inconsistency of such an acquaintance with the very humble style in which they were obliged to live; and having in her aunt’s family been used to many of the elegancies of life, was fully sensible of all that must be open to the ridicule of richer people in her present home” (135). And although Emma is “flattered” by Lord Osborne’s visit, “his coming was a sort of notice which might please her vanity, but did not suit her pride, and she would rather have known that he wished the visit without presuming to make it, than have seen him at Stanton” (138).

After Mr. Musgrave’s visit, with the pettiness of Robert and Jane, and the irritation of Mr. Musgrave himself, Emma finds it difficult to endure the company of her sisters. Margaret is busily instructing and scolding everyone, particularly Elizabeth, about the preparations for a dinner for Mr. Musgrave—the very dinner to which he never comes. Emma seeks the company of her father, where the two can sit in quiet companionship: “Eager to be as little among them as possible, Emma was delighted with the alternate of sitting above, with her father, and warmly entreated to be his constant companion each evening” (150). Mr. Watson often cannot endure talking of any kind, so “in his chamber, Emma was at peace from the dreadful mortifications of an unequal society, and family discord—from the immediate endurance of hard-hearted prosperity, low-minded conceit, and wrong-headed folly, engrafted on an untoward disposition” (151). The text abruptly ends with Robert and Jane leaving for Croydon without Emma; even with Elizabeth’s urging, Emma cannot be convinced to go.

Jane Austen’s sister, Cassandra, mentions in her *Memoir, 1871* of how Austen intended to end the story: “Mr. Watson was to soon die; and Emma to become dependent for a home on her narrow-minded sister-in-law and brother. She was to decline an offer of marriage from Lord Osborne, and much of the interest of the tale was to arise from Lady Osborne’s love for Mr. Howard, and his counter affection for Emma, whom he was finally to marry” (qtd. in Austen 152)

Some biographical information may help us to understand why Austen left *The Watsons* as a fragment. *The Watsons* was written between 1803 and 1805, when Austen had already revised *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen was living at Bath during this period when her father passed away. She had also lost “the one man whom her sister Cassandra believed she might happily have married” (MacDonagh 20). There have been several speculations as to why Austen never finished *The Watsons*: she was enduring a period of loss and depression and had trouble focusing on her writing; she had difficulty with the topic, and the plot as Emma’s station seemed too close to her own condition (Austen was not married, and knew she was likely looking at a life of spinsterhood and financial strife); or she later reworked *The Watsons* into the novel *Emma* (James-Cavan 437). This third suggestion does not seem highly likely as the two Emmas have such drastically different personalities. A fourth suggestion as to why Austen never finished the novel is given by her nephew and first

biographer, Edward Austen-Leigh, who “thought she stopped because she became aware of the evil of having placed her heroine too low, in a position of poverty and obscurity” (Pickrel 445).

Whatever the reason, *The Watsons* is a piece of writing that only adds to Austen’s credentials as a writer. Through it, as much as in any of Austen’s other works, we see the political ramifications of her society debunked by her humor. Until we are able to create a more equal society, we can, by reading Austen, continue to laugh at “the dreadful mortifications of an unequal society” (Austen 151).

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## *The Watsons: Critical Interpretations*

*Maureen Hourigan*

Had Anna Austen Lefroy had her way, *The Watsons* would not have been offered to the public for the first time in 1871. Lefroy, the niece Jane Austen had encouraged in her desires to become a novelist, would have “tolerated” her half-brother’s inclusion of Austen’s juvenile sketches in his second edition of *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, but she deprecated any disclosure of those unpublished pieces she called “Betweenities” (Austen, Ed. Chapman, *Minor Works* v). Although published for the first time in the *Memoir*, *The Watsons*, as Jane Austen’s untitled fragment is traditionally known, was composed sometime after *Lady Susan*, probably between 1803 and 1805. It is the only new work Austen began between the time she finished first drafts of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* (around 1797) and the time she began to compose *Mansfield Park* in 1811. Paul Pickrel finds Austen’s inability to complete any of her writings during this long period “very curious” and conjectures that this situation “must reflect the generally unsettled and unhappy circumstances of her life” during that time (448). Indeed the period was a dark one. In the course of 1801–1804, she had been uprooted from her home in Hampshire, to which she had been deeply attached, and had lost the one man to whom Cassandra believed she might happily have been married (MacDonagh 20). On the verge of middle age and facing the likelihood of lifelong spinsterhood, Austen further suffered the loss of her best friend, Mrs. Anne Lefroy, on December 16, 1804, Austen’s twenty-ninth birthday. Her father died shortly after, on January 21, 1805, thereby depriving the family of his yearly income of six hundred pounds.

The manuscript is clearly a first draft. Its forty-seven leaves are heavily corrected and revised, and the untitled manuscript is neither dated nor divided into chapters, as is *Sanditon*, Austen’s final uncompleted novel. Early critics judged



*The Watsons* “second-rate” (Woolf 18), but found the manuscript itself, the only work surviving from the period of Austen’s life in Bath, an invaluable source of insight into Austen’s techniques of composition and revision (Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* 72–75, for example). Inspecting the “first angular chapters” of the fragment, Virginia Woolf (1925) concludes that Austen, unlike Emily Brontë, was not a “prolific genius,” but one of those writers who sketch “their facts out rather badly in the first version and then go back and back and back and cover them with flesh and atmosphere” (18–19). Mary Lascelles finds the corrections in the rough draft a demonstration of the method Austen used to achieve the idiosyncratic tone of her speakers (99). A. Walton Litz, while lamenting the “vexatious” state of the unfinished manuscript, concludes that alterations to the manuscript “square with the principles of selection and construction which Jane Austen recommended to her niece Anna [Austen Lefroy]” (*Jane Austen* 92). W. A. Craik, however, finds an analysis of the corrections less revealing. In *Jane Austen: The Six Novels* (1966), she argues that “one cannot observe a writer’s principles of selection and organization when the work is unfinished and one is not sure of her intentions” (5).

Even in its unfinished state, the 17,500-word fragment demonstrates Austen’s conventional courtship plot. The heroine, Emma Watson, nineteen and unmarried, is returned home to her family by an aunt who had brought her up. The Watson family is poor, its patriarch a sickly, widowed parson, with four unmarried daughters (Elizabeth, Penelope, Margaret and Emma). That matrimony was the daughters’ only hope of escape from future penury is made clear early in the novel. As Elizabeth, age twenty-eight, explains to Emma in perhaps the most frequently cited passage from *The Watsons*: “But you know we must marry. I could do very well single for my own part—A little Company, & a pleasant Ball now & then, would be enough for me, if one could be young forever; but my Father cannot provide for us, & it is very bad to grow old & be poor & laughed at” (*Minor Works* 317). But Emma objects: “Poverty is a great Evil; but to a woman of Education & feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest.—I would rather be Teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a Man I did not like.” The exchange concludes with Elizabeth’s instructing and cautioning the younger Emma:

I would rather do anything than be Teacher at a school. *I* have been at school, Emma, & know what a Life they lead; *you* never have. I should not like marrying a disagreeable Man any more than yourself,—but I do not think there *are* many very disagreeable Men;—I think I could like a good humoured Man with a comfortable Income. (*Minor Works* 318)

Other standard courtship plot conventions are apparent in *The Watsons*. Young Lord Osborne, a member of the local aristocracy is quite taken with Emma’s beauty, unselfishness and refined breeding when he meets her at the ball at Osborne Castle. He seems on the verge of proposing marriage to her,

but Emma discerns “an air of Coldness, of Carelessness, even of Awkwardness about him” (*Minor Works* 329) and is clearly attracted to the “agreeable” and “sensible” Mr. Howard, Lord Osborne’s former tutor and the clergyman of the parish (*Minor Works* 335). The fragment breaks off early in their developing relationship, but Austen’s plans for completing the story, revealed in the *Memoir*, depict the typical courtship plot resolution:

When the author’s sister, Cassandra, showed the manuscript of this work to some of her nieces, she also told them something of the intended story. . . . Mr. Watson was soon to die; and Emma to become dependent for a home on her narrow-minded sister-in-law and brother. She was to decline an offer of marriage from Lord Osborne, and much of the interest of the tale was to arise from Lady Osborne’s love for Mr. Howard, and his counter affection for Emma, whom he was finally to marry. (*Minor Works* 362–63)

David Hopkinson conjectures that the manuscript must have been a frequent topic of conversation between Jane Austen and her sister, Cassandra. Perhaps they referred to it as *The Younger Sister*, a title Cassandra supposedly passed on to her niece Catherine Hubback, who then used it for her continuation of the story, the first of several, written in 1850 (394). Hubback’s three-volume novel purports to continue the fragment according to Austen’s design, but by the third volume, the story has lost all connection with Austen’s original narrative (Keynes 218). Another continuation, *The Watsons: A Fragment by Jane Austen, Concluded by L. Oulton*, was published in 1923, followed in 1928 by *The Watsons by Jane Austen: Completed in Accordance with Her Intentions* by her great-grand-niece Edith Hubback Brown (in conjunction with Francis Brown). In this completion, Mr. and Mrs. Brown attempt to extract Austen’s segments in the later parts of *The Younger Sister* and finish *The Watsons* as Austen had indeed intended. Mrs. Brown believes that Austen would have completed the fragment herself had the story not been “too near her own life” (Keynes 218). In another completion by John Coates, the original fragment, altered, comprises the first seven of the book’s twenty-nine chapters. *The Watsons, [by] Jane Austen and Another* (actually Hopkinson, whose wife is a descendant of Mrs. Catherine Hubback) appeared in 1977. Hopkinson uses the fragment almost unaltered for the first five chapters and follows Hubback’s plot fairly closely, omitting minor incidents (Gilson 426). Most recently, Joan Aiken added *Emma Watson: The Watsons Completed* to her growing collection of Austen-inspired sequels and completions.

While modern critical studies and scholarship on Jane Austen have, in Litz’s words, produced a “flood of publications” from 1939 to 1983 (“Criticism” 110), *The Watsons* until recently received comparatively little critical attention. As Halperin notes in *The Life of Jane Austen* (1984), “With only a few exceptions [he includes Marvin Mudrick and Litz here] the critics have remained relatively silent about this revealing fragment” (140). The index for Roth and Weinsheimer’s *An Annotated Bibliography of Jane Austen Studies, 1952–1972* supports

Halperin's conclusion, for only 14 of the 794 entries listed in the index touch on *The Watsons* in any way. Moreover, the fragment is mentioned only once in Harold Bloom's *Modern Critical Views* (1986) and in Gilbert and Gubar's "Shut Up in Prose: Gender and Genre in Austen's Juvenilia."

Much of the comparatively limited discussion of *The Watsons* that does exist concerns three questions: when it was written, why it was left unfinished and how it is related to *Emma* (Pickrel 448). Determining the exact date of composition is of unusual interest to Austen scholars, for that date, they surmise, may lead to a fuller understanding of Austen's failure to bring a new work to completion in the years between Steventon and Chawton. R. W. Chapman concludes that the work was composed about 1803, for several of the leaves bear the watermark 1803, and he reasons that expensive paper was unlikely to remain unused for long (49). Hopkinson suggests that Austen began the fragment in 1804 at Lyme Regis, where the family had spent an autumn holiday (394). E. C. Brown (coauthor of *The Watsons by Jane Austen*), however, suggests 1807 as the date of composition for two reasons. For one, she views Stoneleigh Abbey, the Leigh ancestral estate that Austen visited in 1806, as the prototype for Osborne Castle. For another, she points out that the ball described at the beginning of the fragment was held on "Tuesday, October 13th" and that October 13 fell on a Tuesday in 1807 (1016–17). Brown's suggestion makes good sense to Paul Pickrel, for Austen apparently often consulted a current almanac and road maps when constructing her later stories, and the "desperate tone" of the fragment is in keeping with the unsettled and unhappy circumstances of her life in the years immediately preceding 1807. Pickrel concludes, "It seems entirely appropriate that as she moved on from the nadir of 1804–06 she should have found strength enough to start a new novel but not enough strength to complete it" (449).

Given the unusual attention paid to determining the exact date of composition of *The Watsons*, the major focus of early Austen criticism not surprisingly centers on why so promising a story was abandoned. Deborah Kaplan divides critics' answers to the question into three categories: biographical, aesthetic and a combination of both. Perhaps the most lighthearted biographical explanation is offered in the R. Brimley Johnson edition of *The Novels* (1906): "Why she laid it aside is unknown; probably it was interrupted by the pressure of social engagements, thus she lost interest in it when the thread was broken" (111). Mrs. Brown conjectures that "Emma Watson's situation, in living with a brother and his wife, was too like Jane's situation in Southampton" (Chapman 51). Mary Lascelles attributes Austen's abandonment of the fragment to the deaths of Anna Lefroy and her father (19). Margaret Drabble proposes that Austen abandoned the fragment because she could not endure a confrontation with "the melancholy associations" evoked by the manuscript once she became more settled at Chawton (Kaplan 177–78). Douglas Bush suggests that she was "dispirited" by the nonappearance of *Susan*, her first novel, which she had sold to Richard Crosby & Co. in 1803 for the nominal sum of ten pounds, expecting it to be published

soon after (71). For James Heldman, the time “of disruption, dislocation, disappointment, frustration, alienation, anxiety, loss, grief, and uncertainty about the future” that Austen experienced while composing the manuscript accounts for her loss of interest in writing (cited in Kaplan 177).

Although more critics offer biographical than aesthetic reasons for *The Watsons*' incompleteness, Austen-Leigh (1871), the first commentator on the subject, pointed to an aesthetic reason. With a nod toward Victorian snobbishness, he suggests that his aunt abandoned the fragment because she recognized “the evil of having placed her heroine too low, in such a position of poverty and obscurity, which, though not necessarily connected with vulgarity, has a sad tendency to degenerate into it; and therefore, like a singer who has begun on too low a note, she discontinued the strain” (296). But Mudrick disagrees, claiming that rather than degenerating into vulgarity, *The Watsons* “is solemn and severely moral,” so much so that Austen “has failed to direct our sympathies with anything more conjuring than an admonitory index finger.” He concludes that Austen, recognizing “the impossible black-and-white pattern that was working out,” thus abandoned the fragment. B. C. Southam, however, argues that Austen abandoned the novel not because Emma Watson's station was too low but because her character was too strong. Although he acknowledges that Austen may have fallen out of “sympathy with the almost unrelieved bleakness of the social picture” in the fragment, Southam maintains that she ceased to work on it because of the overriding difficulty of making a sufficient heroine of Emma, who, from the outset, is so “sensitive, intelligent, spirited, charitable, and high principled” that “the possibilities for her development are limited” (68). Joseph Wiesenfarth offers quite a different aesthetic explanation. In “*The Watsons* as Pretext” (1986), he suggests that Austen, not liking to repeat herself, found “there was little left in *The Watsons* new enough for her to say” (cited in Kaplan 178–79). Finally, John Lauber (1993) offers an aesthetic reason that is as much a product of late twentieth-century approaches to Austen as Austen-Leigh's judgment was a product of Victorian sensibility. Lauber, asserting that the worth of the fragment for modern readers lies in “its almost grimly realistic documentation of the inequalities of the marriage market and the consequences for women of failure in it,” argues that such a plot is “clearly incompatible with comedy” and probably accounts for Austen's abandonment of the narrative (110).

Finally, especially in more recent studies, critics have combined biographical and aesthetic reasons for the unfinished state of the fragment. While Litz argues that a combination of personal disaster and professional disappointment—“her father's death, a disorganized family life, the growing certainty that *Susan* would not appear”—accounts for Austen's abandonment of the fragment, he offers an aesthetic reason as well, suggesting that Austen's interest flagged because of her inability to blend a new method of presentation, combining authorial comment and dramatic implication, into an organized and unified whole (*Jane Austen* 84, 90). Juliet McMaster, in “God Gave Us Our Relations” (1986), discusses the

richness and refinement of Austen's sense of family in *The Watsons*. Taking into account the purported death of Mr. Watson in the intended development of the fragment, McMaster posits that not only was Austen generally reluctant to depict death in her novels, the death of her own father as she was plotting the end of Mr. Watson must have left her with a such a "strong though irrational" sense of guilt that she put aside working on the book for good (Kaplan 179).

In "*The Watsons* and the Other Jane Austen" (1988), Pickrel proposes an explanation that interweaves biographical and aesthetic reasons with a psychological reading of Jane Austen. Defining Emma Watson, Fanny Price (*Mansfield Park*), and Anne Elliott (*Persuasion*) as "exiles" who have a clear idea of their position in the world and their inability to change it (451), he connects their feelings of being unvalued with Austen's own lack of self-confidence brought about by her mother's preference for Cassandra. While Austen's father bolstered her self-confidence while he was alive, his death, along with the death of Mrs. Lefroy, whom Pickrel sees as a surrogate mother in an "adoption fantasy" that rejected children construct as a rescue (456–58), brought Austen's adoption fantasy to a failed conclusion. Realizing that Emma Watson's adoption fantasy is as likely to fail as a plot device as Austen's rejected child adoption fantasy failed in real life, Austen put aside *The Watsons*.

A third major focus of early criticism of the fragment is the relation of *The Watsons* to *Emma*. Chapman was one of the first scholars to suggest parallels. In rejecting J. E. Austen-Leigh's explanation for Austen's breaking off writing *The Watsons*, he notes that the fragment "may with some plausibility be regarded as a sketch for *Emma*" (51). Both Bush and Alastair Duckworth dismiss that supposition, Bush finding the theory "wholly unconvincing" (71) and Duckworth suggesting that Emma Watson bears some resemblance to Charlotte in *Sanditon* (224). Pickrel contends that while some surface similarities between *Emma* and *The Watsons* exist (sharing of a first name and last initial, a character snubbed by a prospective suitor at a ball, for instance), far more similarities exist between the fragment and *Mansfield Park*: a similar tone, a visit by a socially superior suitor to the socially inferior heroine's home and the heroine's decision to turn down a wealthy eligible suitor to marry a dull one (449–50).

But not all criticism of *The Watsons* is concerned solely with the date of composition, the reasons for Austen's abandonment of the fragment and the relationship of Emma Watson to Emma Woodhouse. Commentary on the fragment, however brief in key Austen critical studies, attends to all the significant developments in Austen criticism.

Mary Lascelles's full-length study, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939), and D. W. Harding's "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen" (1940) are generally regarded as starting points of modern critical approaches to Jane Austen's work. While Lascelles portrays Austen as generally at home in her world, Harding disagrees, declaring that Austen "was sensitive to the crudeness and complacencies [of the associates of her everyday life] and knew that her real existence depended on resisting many of the values they implied"

(170). Harding mentions *The Watsons* in passing (175), but his views have dominated the work of later critics, notably Mudrick, whose *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952) is arguably the most influential critical study of Austen to appear in the twentieth century. A primary example of a new critical approach that dominated literary criticism from the late 1930s to the 1970s, *Irony* examines all of Austen's work, including *The Watsons*, which Mudrick deems "self-righteous simpleness" (242). As the title suggests, Mudrick's critical lens is focused on irony as a shaping tone in Austen's work. He deems "husband hunting . . . an unironic morality" the subject of *The Watsons* and Austen so "pledged to her moral issue of vindicating genteel morality against the very society it is organized to uphold" that she has lost any sustained ironic tone (147, 153). So influential was Mudrick's reading of irony in Austen's work that Ian Watt was prompted to remark in 1963 that "the current view of Jane Austen is that she is first and foremost a critical observer of humanity who uses irony as a means of moral and social judgment" (2).

But Mudrick's narrow focus on irony came under attack, most notably by Litz in *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (1965). Stating that he is "in profound disagreement" with Mudrick's argument in general, Litz charges that Mudrick's negative assessment of *The Watsons* stems from the unwarranted assumption that Austen's "characteristic (and only valid) artistic vision was marked by an aloof and defiant irony" and a misunderstanding of her attempts at synthesis and accommodation as "lapses of artistic integrity" (85–86). To understand *The Watsons* fully, claims Litz, one must regard it as a "crucial stage" in Austen's artistic development and recognize that its departure from eighteenth-century themes required new methods of organizing and blending dramatic implications and authorial comment into an organized and unified whole that Austen had not yet mastered (89–90).

By the early 1970s, New Critical approaches came increasingly under attack for ignoring the economic, social and political contexts of Austen's novels. Like Litz, Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* relates Austen's work to the literary traditions of her time. Looking at Austen's fiction as thematically whole, Duckworth sets out to prove that Austen affirms the "prior, objective existence of moral and social principles in her novels" (10). Unlike many feminist critics, he deems Emma Watson's final marriage a "successful resolution" to the plot—one that would have accomplished the traditional heroine's movement from insecurity, to isolation, to reinstatement in a properly corrected society that rests on firm moral grounds (223–24). Historian Oliver MacDonagh's *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (1991) also connects the novels and social history. His stated purpose is to draw attention to historical insights that Austen's novels provide to the period from 1792 to 1817 and illuminate the novels themselves using historians' methodologies (ix). In the chapter entitled "The Female Economy: *The Watsons*, *Lady Susan*, and *Pride and Prejudice*," he illustrates the importance of money and the pragmatic motives governing the conduct of almost all characters other than Emma Watson

herself (30). With its depiction of a female economy where the odds favor not beauty and wit but those young women whose families are able and willing to pay for their “matrimonial settlement,” *The Watsons*, in MacDonagh’s view, portrays a “naughty” world where Emma, who apparently will choose the parson over the lord, is the sole bright light (32).

The early 1970s witnessed the advent of feminist criticism, an important force in Austen studies. The aims of early feminist criticism were to extend critical attention to female concerns, epistemologies and accomplishments and to recover largely ignored texts by and about women. Litz declares that “some of the best criticism of Jane Austen in the 1970s and 1980s has been written from a feminist perspective” (“Criticism” 117), and Stovel identifies feminism as “the most invigorating new approach” to Austen criticism (236). Conventional historical foci in recent feminist criticism entail the teasing out of cultural values underpinning the way women are depicted in texts in particular periods and places. Thus one finds Alison G. Sulloway deconstructing the ballroom scene in *The Watsons* to demonstrate the early emergence of Austen’s “ironic interest in dancing as a symbol of male domination” (150). Feminist approaches provided an abundance of articles on Austen and kindled interest in the relatively neglected *The Watsons*. By 1986, *YWES* proclaimed that Austen criticism was on the “crest of a feminist wave” (364), and the “fashionable” notion was that Austen “is much more a piece with her Romantic period than is often realized” attested to by “the instability and perceptual precariousness of her work” (365). Among the publications highlighted to support these contentions were several articles on *The Watsons* collected in *Persuasions*: Heldman’s “Where Is Jane Austen in *The Watsons*?” McMaster’s “God Gave Us Our Relations” and Joseph Wiesenfarth’s “*The Watsons* as Pretext.”

Kaplan’s *Jane Austen among Women* (1992), a biographical study with a self-conscious use of “cultural duality” as a feminist interpretive frame, is representative of some feminist critical perspectives. Kaplan argues against Heldman’s, McMaster’s and Wiesenfarth’s contentions, especially as they relate to the debate over *The Watsons*’ unfinished state. She carefully articulates her critical lens as a cross-disciplinary one common in feminist criticism, for she has borrowed the concepts of “cultural duality” and “women’s culture” from the work of historians (11). Looking at Austen’s depiction of strong, independent women in Part II of her book, she asserts that “the powerful female bonds in *Lady Susan* and *The Watsons* go well beyond the contemporary, conventionally narrow range of proper ‘feminine’ self expression,” so much so that they challenge the structure of the traditional comic courtship plot (12). Posing the rhetorical question, “Could the perspective of a women’s culture, rendered in *The Watsons*, be related to the question of *The Watsons*’ incompleteness?” (177), Kaplan posits that despite its traditional courtship plot framework, the social world Austen constructs is one in which “heterosexual ties are hard to establish and female friendship serves as an alternative to marriage” (170). Moreover, Kaplan argues,

Austen's depiction of Emma Watson as resentful of men's power (177) and *The Watsons*' sustained analysis of "the detrimental effects that women's social and economic dependence can have on feminine identities" (171) indicates that Austen is far from in tune with her Romantic world and, in truth, is offering female friendship as an alternative to the ideology of domesticity that underlies the conventional patriarchal courtship plot. Uncertain over portraying such subversive material and unwilling to erase those features drawn from a women's culture, Austen put the manuscript aside (180–81).

Not all Austen scholars esteem the contributions of feminist perspectives. In "The Feminist Depreciation of Jane Austen: A Polemical Reading" (1990), Julia Prewitt Brown declares that "Jane Austen's stature has declined with the rise of feminist literary criticism" (303). First among those critics Prewitt blames for this decline are Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, and with good reason, as their brief comments regarding *The Watsons* in Bloom's collection of critical articles attest. Gilbert and Gubar display the struggle that early feminists had in making sense of Austen's novels with their characteristic courtship plot resolutions. Citing the frequently quoted conversation about marriage early in *The Watsons*, Gilbert and Gubar deprecate Austen's fiction, declaring it "essentially limited" because Austen portrays marriage as "the only accessible definition of self-definition for girls in her society" (86). John Halperin, an Austen biographer who, as a male, finds his biographies under scrutiny in Kaplan's *Jane Austen among Women*, also challenges the value of some of the more recent feminist perspectives. In an acerbic review of Kaplan's study, he charges, "*Jane Austen among Women* is a good (or perhaps bad) example of what happens when ideology and the politics of the moment are allowed to take over and control the critical act. Something always goes wrong" (99). A radical reassessment and revision of early feminists' work, particularly that of Gilbert and Gubar, is already underway.

A few words about texts and possible directions for future critical approaches to *The Watsons* close this overview. The standard edition of *The Watsons* is the Chapman edition, first published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1927. This edition was reprinted from the manuscript, which was already in multiple ownership. (Interestingly, William Austen-Leigh had donated one quire to a Red Cross sale in 1918 [Chapman, *Critical* 11]). The 1927 edition describes the manuscript, sketches its history and includes the passage revealing Austen's intentions for the completion of the story. The notes give erasures and alterations in the manuscript, a suppressed passage and errors in the 1871 text. Especially important for scholars and useful for students as well is the third edition, published in volume VI, *Minor Works* (1954), where Chapman offers only what seems to have been Austen's final intention in the manuscript; it is from this edition that page references in this chapter are taken. This volume was reprinted with revisions by B. C. Southam (in 1969), whose new introductory notes, relating chiefly to the dates of composition, and additional notes make for inter-



esting reading, as does Margaret Drabble's Introduction to the Penguin *Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon Works* (1974) and Q. D. Leavis's Introduction to Philip Gough's publication of *The Watsons* (1958).

In 1994, Austen's novels were made available in electronic form. *The Oxford Electronic Text Library Edition of the Complete Works of Jane Austen* (as shipped in 1994) offers the six major novels published in the *Chapman Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen*. In addition, a searchable text of *The Watsons* in both ASCII and HTML versions is available on the Internet; however, that text has been extensively modernized in spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing from the original manuscript. The availability of Austen's works in electronic form offers a promising lens for future critical studies of *The Watsons*. As Eric Johnson notes in "Electronic Jane Austen and S. T. Coleridge" (1994), "It is almost impossible to imagine a kind of research . . . that could not be assisted by employing electronic versions of the texts" (93). In particular, with appropriate software, linguists could expand J. F. Burrows's statistical analysis of the distinctive speech patterns or "idiolects" of Austen's major characters described in *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method* (1987). Comparing the pattern of Emma Watson's use of comparative and superlative constructions, for example, with those of Emma Woodhouse and Charlotte Heywood in *Sanditon* might settle (for a time, at least) whether Emma Watson may have served as a sketch for one or the other (or neither).

The advent of a radical revision of early feminist work on Austen's novels, especially on the subject of Austen's views of marriage, coupled with critical attention focused on the completions of *The Watsons* (Terry; James-Cavan) suggests the scholarly interest in *The Watsons* will continue apace. As Kaplan, McMaster ("Emma Watson: Jane Austen's Uncompleted Heroine" [1994]) and Reid-Walsh (like the historian MacDonagh) train new critical lenses on the body of Austen's work, it seems likely that Emma Watson, "subject to none of the misapprehensions and self-deception of the other heroines" in Austen's fiction (Litz, *Jane Austen* 89), will provide a challenge to earlier feminist readings critical of Austen's work. In 1978, Litz argued that *The Watsons*, standing "unique in Jane Austen's achievement," "deserves more attention than has usually been accorded it" (*Jane Austen* 85). Feminist literary criticism, whether one considers it a boon or a bane, deserves much credit for bringing that well-deserved critical attention to Austen's only surviving manuscript from the Bath years.

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## Jane Austen's *Sanditon*

*Peggy Huey*

This final, partially completed Jane Austen work is referred to variously as “The Last Work” (in the King’s College listings), *Sanditon* (after the town where most of the action occurs) or “Two Brothers” (the planned title for the work according to Austen family tradition) (Southam, Introduction vii). In 1925, Clarendon Press of Oxford first published the piece using the title “Fragment of a Novel”; this edition, which includes R. W. Chapman’s Preface and the textual changes he made as editor, seems to be the standard edition still available for study. In 1975, Marie Dobbs attempted to fashion an ending for the novel; however, the general critical reception of this attempt was unfavorable, although it did become the subject of a 1993 dissertation (Viola James-Cavan). The interest Dobbs’s attempt created in this incomplete work led more favorably to an interest in the manuscript itself, first with B. C. Southam’s 1975 facsimile reproduction and finally with Teran Lee Sacco’s 1995 detailed reexamination of Austen’s corrections and additions to the manuscript.

As Southam observed in the Introduction to the facsimile of the author’s manuscript, Jane Austen is an “acknowledged perfectionist in the finest detail of diction and phrasing and in the arrangement and presentation of her material” (v). Significantly, as Sacco later reminds us, this edited manuscript plus two chapters containing the original ending of *Persuasion*, the first draft of *The Watsons* (also incomplete and approximately 70 percent of the length of *Sanditon*) and a “fair copy transcription of *Lady Susan*” are the only fragments of Austen’s original work that survive (175). These documents in general, but *Sanditon* in particular, are important because they allow critics to analyze Austen’s creative process as she was drafting these texts (see Drabble’s notes to the text in the Penguin edition and Sacco’s analysis of the transcription for more details on this aspect). The revisions Austen makes in *Sanditon*, according to

Sacco, stress “the important theme of appearance versus reality” that seems to be evolving in this novel (170).

Austen’s work on *Sanditon* began on January 27, 1817, and concluded on March 18 of that year. Some of the changes she made confirm that the intentions that critics perceive evolving in the work were conscious on her part. In one of the earliest reviews of the text, E. M. Forster notes Austen’s change of tone in this work; this change of tone, he posits, might ultimately become a criticism of life. The portion of the text that she completed clearly indicates that the author is satirizing both hypochondria and the attention given to invalids that was prevalent in the early 1800s. Austen’s ridicule of hypochondria as an insidious form of passive-aggression even provides the subject of Claudia Jeanette Lockhart’s 1993 master’s thesis. Paradoxically, given Austen’s apparent attitude toward illness, *Sanditon* is also the work of a dying person; she died of Addison’s disease (a failure of the adrenal glands, with symptoms that include anemia and total exhaustion) on July 18, 1817, exactly four months after she last worked on the manuscript.

In the light of this intriguing biographical connection to the work, we could join critics like Forster and take a biographical approach to this consideration of *Sanditon*. This approach allows us to admire what Southam initially describes in his discussion of “The Seventh Novel” as “Austen’s creative resilience in embarking on a fierce satire of hypochondria and invalidism at such a dire moment in her own life” (2). Or we can follow Southam’s ultimate lead and attempt to place the novel in a more important context—its relationship to her other novels. Southam observes “only the sharp and ruthless portrait of Sir Walter Elliot (in *Persuasion*) prepares us for *Sanditon*’s hard comedy” (Introduction viii); otherwise, *Sanditon* is markedly different from Austen’s earlier six novels, right from its first words.

## THE STORY

The story begins, in comparison with her other novels, a bit awkwardly: “A gentleman and lady travelling from Tonbridge towards that part of the Sussex coast which lies between Hastings and Eastbourne, being induced by business to quit the high road, and attempt a very rough lane, were overturned in toiling up its long ascent half rock, half sand” (154). The “business” that takes the Parkers off “the high road” is the search for a surgeon to move to the seaside resort Mr. Parker is developing “along the coast of Sussex” (159). After the accident, the couple is rescued by a gentleman farmer, Mr. Heywood, who takes them to his house for some refreshments and to tend to Mr. Parker’s injured ankle. A consummate promoter, though he would loathe being referred to that way, Mr. Parker expounds on the worthiness of his pet project, a seaside resort at Sanditon, encouraging the Heywoods to visit, in part to pay back their hospitality. The Heywoods, however, much prefer staying home; they would rather encourage their children to get “out into the world, as much as possible” (164).

After a fortnight (and two chapters), the Parkers leave Willingdon, taking Heywood's oldest daughter, Charlotte, with them as they continue their journey back to Sanditon. During the journey from Willingdon to the shore, Mr. Parker provides Charlotte with background information about some of the people she will meet, the most important of whom is Lady Denham, codeveloper of Sanditon. Two miles from their destination, they pass the Parkers' former family estate, a house that significantly, according to Charlotte, "seems to have as many comforts about it as Willingdon" (169), and which Mrs. Parker seems to regret leaving. Finally, at the end of the fourth chapter, they reach the village and Trafalgar House, the Parkers' new home, which sits "on the most elevated spot . . . about a hundred yards from the brow of a steep, but not very lofty cliff" (173).

After dinner, the group sets off to show Charlotte the town, especially the circulating library, which functions, as we observe, primarily to indicate who is currently in town and only secondarily as a place from which to borrow books. As they leave the library to continue their tour, they run into Lady Denham and her niece (and heir), Clara Brereton, and all return to Trafalgar House for tea. The next morning, Lady Denham's second husband's nephew, Sir Edward Denham, and his sister Esther briefly visit the Parkers; then everyone quits Trafalgar House to continue the tour. While they are walking, we learn from Lady Denham that "Sir Edward *must* marry for money" (187), and "Mis [*sic*] Esther must marry somebody of fortune too" (188). Observing the interrelations between her new friends, however, Charlotte divines that "Sir Edward's great object in life was to be seductive. . . . It was Clara alone on whom he had serious designs; it was Clara whom he meant to seduce" (191).

A few days later, the Parker family expands with the arrival of Mr. Parker's sisters Diana and Susan, and brother Arthur, who take lodging at the hotel in town. Diana has been busy recruiting visitors for Sanditon, including Mrs. Grif-fiths and her three charges and Miss Lambe, a wealthy young heiress from the West Indies who is in delicate health. Ten days after Charlotte arrives in Sanditon, she meets the final Parker sibling, Sidney, who arrives in town just as Charlotte and Mrs. Parker are heading over to Sanditon House to visit Lady Denham. The story ends as they settle into Lady Denham's sitting room to await the lady's arrival.

## THE CRITICS

As B. C. Southam explains, "The awkwardness of [the story's] beginning, its trailing length, its windings and turnings, are deliberately contrived to convey a strong sense of the driver's recalcitrance, the difficulty of the road and the foundering of the coach" (Introduction xi). John Lauber logically perceives the opening's symbolism as presenting "the principal builder of Sanditon [being] overturned and injured . . . while climbing an impassable road . . . towards an imaginary goal" (355), imagery that Austen conceivably intended to become

markedly significant as she completed the journey she had planned for her characters. Lauber also makes obvious the analogy of the resort's name—"Sanditon" or "Sandy-town"—with the parable found in Matthew 7:26–27 about the foolish man who built his house on the sand (354), as well as the significance of the name *Heywood*, with its natural, organic connotations of "hay and wood" (356), representing an older, more stable England.

After its intriguing opening, Austen's novel moves on to pay "attention to the economic and social facts of life" (Southam, Introduction xii), presenting "the contrast between old England and the new commercial society" (Martin 87), with the gentry (represented by the Denhams) expressing concern about keeping their suppliers, including the shopkeepers, in business, while, more important, developing and exploiting the countryside around Sanditon. Southam notes:

For the first time in Jane Austen the sense of *place* is strong and deeply rooted, not only topographically but socially, historically, and morally. For in its transition from fishing village to seaside-resort Sanditon epitomises the spirit of change, of "improvement" in Regency England, a process which Jane Austen catches here in all its ambiguities: its freshness and attractiveness and dynamic energy alongside its trampling of the past; its unrootedness; its restless, exploitative appetite; its Romanticism both solid and tawdry, idealistic and silly. (Introduction xii)

This type of comment makes it clear that Sanditon itself becomes a character in the novel, and we should perhaps consider the other characters in the light of their relationship with the place. For example, Teran Lee Sacco observes that "the atmosphere at Sanditon is conducive to peace of mind and body" (167); after all, that is why Mr. Parker's sisters Diana and Susan come to visit. In her dissertation abstract, Lalitha Mehta similarly finds Sanditon a place that "speaks for moderation in the pursuit of every form of self-gratification" (DAI 2113), which seems to be where Sir Edward is heading.

*Sanditon* the novel itself sits in stark contrast to an earlier abandoned novel, *The Watsons*; the heroine of the latter follows familiar ground during the development of her story, making the probable outcome inevitable. In *Sanditon*, however, Austen's patterns, though delivered with broad strokes, are not standard. In this last novel, though we have a resident seducer in the person of Sir Edward Denham, who plainly admits his intention to carry off Clara Brereton by force, if necessary, Clara clearly sees through him and refuses to be seduced. Also vague from the twelve chapters available is whether Austen has cast Clara or Charlotte Heywood in the role of the heroine. Logic suggests that Charlotte would be the heroine, because her first visit to Sanditon provides the basis for most of the story that we have; however, in the first twelve chapters that we have, she is not very sympathetically created; she is more an observer, a reporter of the events she experiences and the eccentrics she meets, perhaps very much like Austen herself at this stage of her life.

Based on the information Austen gives the reader in those first few chapters, it is difficult to find any of these characters sympathetic. Lauber, for one, observes that “the majority of the principal characters of ‘Sanditon’ are fools” (360). For example, Austen describes Mr. Parker as “an enthusiast” (161), which Lauber explicates as “a man blinded to reality by total absorption in his cause,” comparable to a nineteenth-century snake oil salesman or a twentieth-century promoter (356), or “victims of disordered imaginations” (360). Parker has cut his ties with his past by renting out his former estate while he desperately tries to be up to date, naming his house quite modishly “Trafalgar House” (in recognition of Admiral Nelson’s defeat in 1805 of the French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar in Spain), then wishing he could change it to “Waterloo” after the duke of Wellington decisively defeats Napoleon in 1815. The location of the new house, “high on a bare hill, exposed to all the fury of winter storms, seems,” according to Lauber, “as flimsy as everything about Sanditon” (357), meanwhile indicating Parker may not have the good sense necessary to develop a seaside resort.

Cheryl Ann Weissman explores the evolution of Austen’s narration. She sees *Sanditon* as a continuation of the development observed within *Persuasion*, the last novel Austen completed. In these final works, Weissman observes, Austen has developed a “heightened symmetry and patterning in the diction [that] express[es] an increasingly unstable, unstructured world” (DAI 5099). In fact, Austen’s last completed novel, *Persuasion*, represents for many critics, including Irene Taylor, Austen’s efforts to move women into the nineteenth century as it is characterized by writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Madame de Stael. Taylor describes *Persuasion*’s heroine’s story as “the story of [Anne’s] move from the periphery of the decaying world to the center of the rising one” as she marries the “nobody” Frederick Wentworth, then “boldly and happily” goes to sea with her navy husband (427). Might this type of liberation be what Austen had in store for Charlotte, had she finished the novel? The world will never know.

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# Jane Austen's Letters in the Nineteenth Century: The Politics of Nostalgia

*Stephanie Moss*

We can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question.

—Louis Montrose

According to Hans Robert Jauss, reception theory studies the hermeneutic phenomenon that occurs when an alien text meets the familiar world of the reader. It is an analysis of the interaction between that text, the reader and the tradition in which the reader is grounded. Jauss calls this the “horizon of expectation”—the sum total of responses and prejudgments that receive a work upon its appearance. The daily lives of readers who create this horizon forge a link between otherwise unconnected works, thereby assembling independent texts into literary sequences. The horizon of expectations that greeted Austen’s work at the end of the nineteenth century was prompted by a national identity crisis.

Jane Austen’s novels were not accepted into the popular canon until the end of the nineteenth century, over fifty years after their first appearance. It was not until then that general readers were able to recognize the qualities that Robert Southey, G. H. Lewes, and the early “Janeites” had identified in Austen’s novels earlier in the century. In 1830, Southey found Austen’s novels more “true to Nature.” They contained “passages of finer feeling than any of others of this age” (“Jane Austen” 1863, 236). In the December 1847 issue of *Fraser’s Magazine*, G. H. Lewes anticipated later analyses by making Austen canonical. He remarked, “We would say that Fielding and Miss Austen are the greatest novelists in our language” (“Jane Austen” 1863, 238).

Lewes’s observation linking Austen to Fielding illustrates a type or category of nineteenth-century literary reception. Reasserting English superiority in the

field of belles lettres assuaged anxiety over an increasingly unstable national identity. By placing Austen at the top of a literary hierarchy, the British demonstrated their continuing domination over literature written in the English language. At a time when both American and European incursions into Africa challenged British naval and colonial superiority, the “horizon of expectation” that greeted Austen was determined by the increasing vulnerability of the empire. By inserting a literary “newcomer” in the ranks of dead geniuses, the British were able to shore up their crumbling colonial virtue and forge a stable past in order to steady a mutable present. By comparing Austen to Shakespeare, Scott, Trollope, Dickens, Thackeray and the Brontës, the reviewers were flexing their belletristic muscles.

The rapidly changing geopolitics meant that there was an ideological investment in recuperating national identity. This can be discerned in several reviews that equate Austen’s work to proved genius. Quoting an 1843 *Edinburgh Review* in 1863, *Atlantic Monthly* reported that “Shakespeare has neither equal nor second; but among writers who . . . have approached nearest the manner of the great master, we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen, as a woman of whom England is justly proud” (“Jane Austen” 1863, 239). In the same article in which Lewes joins Austen’s name to Fielding’s, he praises her as “a prose Shakespeare” (“Jane Austen” 1863, 238). At the end of the nineteenth century, a report in *Temple Bar* quotes Tennyson on Regis Lyme: “Don’t talk to me of the Duke of Monmouth. Show me that precise spot where Louisa Musgrove fell” (F.C.L. 633). By citing the poet laureate, this reviewer (who was actually Fanny Caroline Austen) makes use of a literary lion to dissolve canonical barriers, admitting Jane into the pantheon. This is the sequencing process that Jauss sees operating in reception theory. Reviewers temporarily removed canonical boundaries, thereby increasing the number of England’s great works. In this fashion, Jane Austen provided a smoke screen that camouflaged the nation’s fading military image. “Miss Austen,” a reviewer writes in *Fortnightly Review* in 1885, “could hardly be appreciated by any one not thoroughly English” (685).

Seemingly in opposition to this strategy of national recuperation, a second schema in late-nineteenth-century reviews of Austen restored British identity by constructing her works as remnants of a superior past. This nostalgic yearning represented a conservative longing for qualities that would act as a corrective to the present. There is no logical conflict between Jane Austen as evidence both that the present is commensurate to the past and the past superior to the present. Both strategies are two sides of the same coin, alleging British cultural superiority. Assertion of this superiority had always been the ideological force behind imperialism. Now it could be deployed to conceal a national identity crisis. Fabricating a present equal to the past denied current vulnerability; believing that past to be superior to the present constructed a nostalgic asylum. On the subconscious level at which ideology operates, identity was recuperated.

Reviewers who made use of the past as an asylum by transforming Austen’s world into a virtual yesterday did so by expressing dissatisfaction with both the

status of Victorian literature and the technological culture from which it emerged. For example, *Modern Review* elevated Austen at the expense of a more popular writer, Charlotte Brontë. The reviewer notes that as late as 1882, the general public was more drawn to Charlotte Brontë than to Austen: "Since her death Charlotte Brontë has been exalted into a literary heroine. . . . It is not so with Jane Austen. No pilgrims wander to her grave as a shrine; no curious literary studies can be made of her life or her character." The totality of her readership had yet to equal that of *Jane Eyre*, despite the fact that this reviewer believed Brontë to be the "lesser genius of the two" (Armitt 370, 368). Other nostalgic reviews compare Jane's spare, elegant prose to the preaching artifices, "the asides and colloquies" of the Victorian novel. "Never for one single instant," a reviewer in an 1885 *Fortnightly Review* avers, is Austen "guilty of the crime of preaching" (683). This recuperative device uses canonical snobbery to brace the present; popular taste may have slipped, but the literature of the past continues to uphold cultural standards.

Nostalgic comparisons between Austen and Victorian writers also measured her vision of early nineteenth-century rural England to that of George Eliot. John Blackwood, editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, says of *Adam Bede*: "I am not quite sure how I like the scenes in the wood and I hope things will not come to the usual sad catastrophe" (Gill 12). Another reviewer found Austen's rural England "all that could be seen from the window of a quiet English parsonage" where "the middle and upper classes melt[ed] into each other." *Adam Bede*, he continues, has "all the "seriousness of purpose" without "any power of [Austen's] humor" (Kebbel 684). To the late-nineteenth-century reader, Austen's irenic ideal far surpassed Eliot's naturalism. "The lesson her life seems to teach us," one reviewer sums up, is, "Don't let us despise our nests—Life is as much made of minutes as of years; let us complete the daily duties; let us patiently gather the twigs and the scraps of moss, of dried grass together; and see the result!" ("Jane Austen" 1871, 653).

With the publication of James Edward Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1870, the romanticization of Austen's world intensified. Her name was transformed into a household word, and sales of *Memoirs* proved so lucrative that a revised second edition was published a year later. Embedded in this first substantial biographical account of Jane Austen's life was a sizable collection of epistolary extracts. These fragments admitted readers into Jane's life, a life in which the same quotidian pleasures that Austen depicted in her novels resonated. "Here is a day for you," she writes to her sister, Cassandra. "Did Bath or Ithorpe ever see such an 8th of April?—It is March & April together, the glare of the one & the warmth of the other. We do nothing but walk about" (Le Faye no. 43 to Cassandra in 1805. I will use Le Faye's numbering system throughout). Reaction to these autobiographical fragments, like many responses to her novels, focused on their picture of a simpler life.

Raymond Williams and many other critics find in Austen's readers a tendency to construct an idealized abstraction of her world. This suppresses the economic

tensions of “an acquisitive, high bourgeois society at the point of its most evident interlocking with an agrarian capitalism that is itself mediated by inherited titles and by the making of family names” (115). Applying Williams’s observation to readers of the late nineteenth century, their idealization of Austen’s world made it tidier than the “realities” of her life because that world provided an escape from their own unpleasant “realities.” Although the economics of the late Victorians was different, the sense of chaotic change was the same.

The first of Jane Austen’s letters reached the public six months after her death on July 18, 1817. When the four-volume edition of *Northanger Abby* and *Persuasion* was published (the first of her novels to appear under her name), the edition included a “Biographical Note” written by Jane’s brother Henry. It was dated December 20, 1817, and in it Henry stated that he was submitting “without apology” some portions of [Jane’s] personal correspondence “as being more truly descriptive of her temper, taste, feelings, and principles than any thing which the pen of a biographer can produce” (Modert xx, quoting H. Austen).

Critical reception of the letters has been marked by a continual recalibration of their importance. From the beginning there have been both detractors and apologists. The conclusions of scholars whose names are most often linked to the letters are protean. In 1932, R. W. Chapman stated that the letters “have received little whole-hearted praise even from the ‘idolaters’ of the novel. It has been assumed that they have little interest except for the few brief rays with which they illumine the history of the novels, and would be hardly readable if their author were not otherwise famous” (Chapman, Introduction ix). Marilyn Butler, editor of the 1985 *Selected Letters*, stated that the tone of the letters is so prosaic and so focused on discrete items of news without comment that they leave little room for the subjective. When Jo Modert finally produced her volume of facsimile letters in 1990, she wrote: “Why is it that Jane Austen’s letters, the most important primary source material we have to her life and works, remain the most neglected of all great writers’ biographical resources?” (xx).

When Deirdre Le Faye reissued her edition of the letters in 1995, she found critical response enthusiastic: “Literary critics hunt through [the letters] for the most minute details of [Austen’s] opinions, actions, family, and friends, as source-material for biographies and for studies on the composition of the novels.” Indeed, so vital have the letters become to Austen scholarship that “social historians immediately turn to them to find Jane’s precise and accurate information on contemporary manners, styles, and cost of living” (Le Faye, Preface xiv). Despite the disparagement often heaped on the letters, Le Faye’s conclusion about the biographical importance of the letters has been true from the moment they appeared. J. E. Austen-Leigh, William and Richard Austen-Leigh and all subsequent biographers have drawn heavily on the information culled from them.

Although the critical influence of the letters is often unacknowledged, the number of debates about the ways in which they structure and restructure both biography and Regency history confirms their biographical importance. The let-

ters are combed for biographical and cultural clues; they are scoured for signs of Austen's writing techniques. Examiners of her correspondence with her publisher, Richard Crosby, have established that Austen labored over her correspondence as she did over her novels. Deciphering the palimpsest that erasure and overwriting have created, Arthur Axelrad finds that Austen desired to "create a finished product even for a short business letter" (36). Much of the criticism is also concerned with dating and redating, numbering and renumbering the 455 facsimiles that Modert has located. Errors in indexes, debates about numbering and unexplained references have all generated articles (Noel-Bentley; Vick).

Le Faye has placed the letters into groups configured by the consistent style or tone in those directed to regular recipients: to Cassandra, Austen wrote in a relaxed and conversational manner, as one would talk on the telephone today; those to her niece Fanny are full of motherly advice; others to her niece Anna offer advice about writing fiction; those to her sailor brother, Frank, are more restrained, regular and considered ("Jane Austen's Letters" 82). Valuing the importance of the letters, Le Faye remarks that they made her aware "of just how much Jane was a part of her family, and how her life had to be bound up with theirs, whether she liked it or not. As a single woman, it was difficult to if not impossible for her to travel any distance without a father, brother, or nephew to provide a protective male escort" ("Jane Austen's Letters" 85).

Predictably, as this comment suggests, much of modern scholarship on Austen's letters participates in the feminist heteroglossia that has occupied so much recent criticism. The letters are an unmediated and detailed chronicle of female life during the Regency period. Deborah Kaplan, for example, examines the stylistics of feminine writing that she sees emerging from the pressures of a double consciousness. While Austen's novels as public documents participate in the masculine culture of the gentry class, her letters express multiple and often opposing cultural values. Kaplan reverses the prioritization of novels over letters. She finds that the uncensored material of the latter reveals the intensity of female friendships that resulted from living in a culture in which women relied on men for survival.

Susan Sniader Lanser also examines the letters as evidence of Austen's world of sisterhood. While the novels are concerned with the quest for marriage, Austen's life, Lanser states, concerned sisterhood. Referring to the censorship of the letters by Austen's sister, Cassandra, Lanser suggests that what Cassandra destroyed were letters that laid bare the secrets shared by two women. Jane and her sister were as close as any two people in the marriages that end Jane's novels. Indeed, Jane's relationship to Cassandra was like a marriage, paralleling the felicity of Austen's fictional couplings. It gave Jane the freedom to write while Cassandra managed household affairs. Their union, like those of men and women, produced children—of the literary variety.

The cataloging of Jane's letters has undergone its own historical process. Initially ordered by date in Lord Brabourne's 1884 edition, the letters were recataloged in 1932 by R. W. Chapman. The numbering system that Chapman

initiated survived until Le Faye's recent update. Chapman's landmark work, *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, also added fourteen new letters and fragments of others. However, as the letters were redated and new ones recovered, it became clear that Chapman's system had become outdated. As Jo Modert has observed, Chapman's numbers obscured some letters by making them seem ancillary and gave a false sense of the total number recovered.

Therefore, when Modert published the facsimile volume of the letters in 1990, the dating errors that had been preserved by Chapman's numbers became too evident to disregard. Modert prefaces Chapman's numbers with a facsimile number, designated by an "F," which clearly displays the number and order of the extant fragments. These facsimile numbers show the consolidation of fragments that had been listed separately by Chapman. The letters are thus recataloged to account for new additions, dates and fragments. Finally, in 1995 Deirdre Le Faye eliminated Chapman's numbering altogether in her third edition of *Jane Austen's Letters*. Here the letters are numbered according to the latest scholarship with a concordance to Chapman's numbers included in the front.

The publication history of the letters in the nineteenth century documents their incremental release. The first suggestion that a cache of Austen's letters existed emerged in Henry Austen's "Biographical Note," published just after Jane died. The "little bit of personal correspondence" that Henry includes consists of at least two letters, an excerpt from no. 146 and three excerpts from a letter written shortly before Jane died. Modert lists the latter as now missing. The excerpt from no. 146, a letter written to Jane's nephew, James Edward, is noteworthy because it contains Jane's famous self-assessment of her writing as a "little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which [she] work[s] with so fine a Brush." The "Biographical Note" was revised and reissued in 1833 by Richard Bentley, who included it in a one-volume reprint of Jane's works.

In 1870, when James Edward Austen-Leigh published his *Memoirs*, the letters became a primary source of biographical data. *Memoirs of Jane Austen* included excerpts from twenty-three letters plus the extracts that had already appeared in the "Biographical Note" (Modert xxvii). In these letters, more information pertinent to the novels appears; for example, no. 85 tells of Jane's attendance at an art exhibition where she looked for a likeness of her *Pride and Prejudice* characters: "I was very well pleased . . . with a small portrait of M<sup>rs</sup> Bingley, excessively like her. I went in hopes of seeing one of her Sister, but there was no M<sup>rs</sup> Darcy;—perhaps however, I may find her in the Great Exhibition which we shall go to if we have time" (to Cassandra, May 24, 1813). We also learn from Austen that "every Copy of S&S is sold & that it has brought me 140£ besides the Copyright, if that s<sup>hd</sup> ever be of any value.—I have now therefore written myself into 250£" (no. 86 to Jane's brother, Francis, July 3, 1813). When the second edition of *Memoirs* was issued in 1871, several new letters were made public.

In 1882, Fanny Knight, Jane's first niece, died. Lady Brabourne, as she was

known after her marriage, had inherited seventy-nine letters written by Jane to Cassandra. These letters and others to Lady Brabourne's cousins, Anna, Caroline and little Cassy, were published by her son, Edward, Lord Brabourne, in 1884. Under the title *Letters of Jane Austen*, the two volumes contain extracts from ninety-six letters, ninety of them previously unpublished (Modert xxviii).

Additional letters were published in the twentieth century. In 1906 a biography, *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*, contained five new letters, and in 1913 William and Richard Austen Leigh's *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters* added ten more. In 1925 R. Brimley Jonson edited a volume containing thirty-eight of Jane's letters, and Chapman's landmark edition followed in 1932. Modert's facsimiles appeared in 1990, and the latest edition of Jane's letters, edited and renumbered by Le Faye, appeared in 1995.

The issue of censorship of the letters has sparked significant critical debate. Bentley bowdlerized the letters in his 1833 revision of Henry Austen's "Biographical Note," deleting a reference to women's petticoats that had appeared in the original (Austen-Leigh; William 242; Modert xx). Bentley also removed some stanzas that Jane had written immediately before her death and that Henry had included in the original. The reason for this deletion is suggested in a letter written by Caroline in 1871 but not recovered until 1988. Caroline, Jane's niece by her brother James, wrote to her own brother, James Edward, that the deletions had been fortuitous. The stanzas included a "joke about the dead Saint . . . [that] would read badly as amongst the few details given, of the closing scene." As Modert points out, this was not the end of the expurgations and amendments that later relatives and publishers in the nineteenth century would make to the letters. "Bowels" became "Stomach," and Jane's record of various physical ailments was deleted altogether (Modert xxiv). Caroline again provides an insight into the reason for this bowdlerizing in a letter she wrote to her sister, stating that Jane and Cassandra were not as refined as they ought to have been. Modert believes that the Victorians were embarrassed by the sisters' "more robust Regency spirit" (xxiii).

Cassandra executed by far the most controversial and significant censorship in 1843. In a letter accompanying her will, Cassandra states, "As I have leisure, I am looking over & destroying some of my Papers—others I have marked 'to be burned' " (W. Austen-Leigh 243). This information was embellished by Caroline. She wrote in 1867 that Cassandra destroyed some of the letters because they were open and confidential. This suggests that the letters were destroyed because they contained information that either Cassandra or Jane, in Cassandra's estimation, deemed too private for public airing. Modert chronicles the continued progression of this embellishment. In 1883 Fanny Caroline Lefroy, Jane's grand-niece, defended her aunt against criticism that had appeared in *Temple Bar*. The article claimed that the letters revealed the Jane did not feel deeply. Fanny Caroline replied that her aunt (whom Fanny Caroline had never met) was a creature of great sensibility. Because of her aunt's delicacy, it was the family's duty to destroy any information that Jane herself would not have revealed. As



Modert has suggested, the “sensibility” that the letters shed light on may have been the family’s.

In a reply to this same article in *Temple Bar*, one reviewer appropriated the censorship hearsay, using it to defend Jane’s character: “Jane Austen was a woman most reticent as to her own deepest and holiest feelings; and her sister Cassandra would have thought she was sinning against that delicacy and reserve had she left behind her any record of them. To destroy every trace of everything that Jane would never have had revealed, was in [Cassandra’s] eyes a sacred duty” (“Miss Austen” 692).

As Modert relates, this discursive game of telephone sent the censorship rumor from person to person and gathered steam in 1902. Fanny Caroline’s statement was printed in Constance Hill’s *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends*, a volume published in both England and the United States. Thus, this biography spread the censorship account across the Atlantic to America. In 1920, Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, the daughter of *Memoirs* author James Edward and author of *Personal Aspects of Jane Austen*, exaggerates to hyperbole. Not only did Cassandra destroy letters, but also she destroyed great masses of them. In fact, Cassandra retained only those so devoid of general interest that all that is left to history is “‘a gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done’—when all that was precious had been safely gathered up and garnered in Cassandra’s faithful memory, and nothing had been left behind excepting that which even she deemed to be altogether negligible” (M. Austen-Leigh 49).

There is, however, proof that some of the letters are indeed missing. A significant gap occurs in the correspondence between May 26–27, 1801, and September 4, 1804, during which it is believed that Jane experienced her one romance. Although this narrative remains sketchy, Caroline reports that something undocumented by the letters occurred. Hers is the only “firsthand” report of the incident, received second hand by Caroline when Cassandra told her the story. In Caroline’s words:

All that I know is this. At Newtown, Aunt Cassandra was staying with us . . . when we made acquaintance . . . with a certain Mr. Henry Edridge. . . . My aunt was very much struck with him, and I was struck by her commendation; she so rarely admired strangers. [She] said that he reminded her strongly of a gentleman whom she had met one summer when they were by the sea . . . that he seemed greatly attracted by my Aunt Jane . . . and that when they had to part . . . he was urgent to know where they would be the next summer. . . . I can only say that the impression left on Aunt Cassandra was that he had fallen in love with her sister, and was quite in earnest. Soon afterwards they heard of his death. (W. Austen-Leigh 126–27)

Both Le Faye and Modert contend that Cassandra’s “censorship” of this incident has been distorted. Modert radically amends the general understanding of Cassandra’s statement that was attached to her will. She believes that Cassandra would not have destroyed anything that bore the handwriting of her

beloved sister; her testamentary of burned documents refers to miscellaneous papers other than the letters themselves. Le Faye does not dispute the fact that Cassandra probably disposed of a group of letters. However, she contends that Brabourne did the greater damage by tidying them up to make them conform to his own time. This literary grooming, having only come to the light in the twentieth century, was all the more harmful because it was "silent" ("Jane Austen's Letters" 81).

Regardless of what the truth is regarding the censorship of Austen's letters, readers in the late nineteenth century were left with an intriguing discontinuity that could be filled as they wished, and what many wished was to sentimentalize Jane Austen so that she fit the cultural consensus of a romantic figure. According to this fantasy, the narrative of Jane's romance goes this way: Jane and Cassandra met two men, one a clergyman who fell in love with Jane. Some unknown time later, the sisters received a letter from the clergyman's brother, informing them of his death: "Of [Jane's] suffering no word has reached us, but we do know that her sister so cherished his memory that many years afterwards, when an elderly woman, she took a good deal of trouble only to see again the brother of the man who had been so dear to Jane—surely proof enough of how dear he had been to her, and how mourned!" ("Miss Austen" 695). This illusory Jane Austen was molded out of the bits and pieces of a powerful nostalgic desire to purge the past of what the Victorians considered its disconcerting imperfections.

Nostalgia is a political strategy. It is a desire to create specific meaning. Nostalgia is memory transformed into myth and stems from a potent need to keep the present intact through a carefully fabricated vision of the past (Bennett 5). It recuperates the past selectively, leaving gaps and fissures in which the suppressed lies only partially hidden. As Michel de Certeau explains, history functions as "a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at any given moment, has become unthinkable in order for a new identity to become thinkable" (4). For the late nineteenth century, the great defining gulf that lay between the present and the past was the Napoleonic Wars. It was an abyss that had to be negotiated, a space in which Napoleon's aggression both had and had not occurred.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, history had been unmade and reassembled in an epistemological pattern that constructed a post-Trafalgar ontology. Indeed, Trafalgar had become the master narrative, and all that occurred before the heroic battle was relegated to the scrap heap of unpalatable memory. Feelings of vulnerability, the potential spread of the French Revolution with its guillotine and *sans culottes*, fear of invasion and bloodshed, had been, if not expunged, at least reformed, tamed and comfortably contained. Jane Austen's writing represented a surviving remnant of this precarious time that had to be resolved in acceptable terms. When Jane Austen's letters were published, therefore, they were not received as a material token of unpleasant historical occurrences. These occurrences were repressed so that the letters could partici-

pate in the maintenance of a post-Trafalgar national self-image, one that was circumscribed by the defeat, the rout, the ruin of Napoleon Bonaparte by the forces of the British Navy. The fact that Austen was complicit in this quixotic transformation has become a part of modern literary history.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged," Raymond Williams states, "that Jane Austen chose to ignore the decisive historical events of her time," or, as James Edward puts it, Jane "never touched upon politics, law, or medicine" (Williams 114; J. E. Austen-Leigh 186). There seems to be a general need for both Victorians and moderns to efface Jane's sparse but extant epistolary and novelistic acknowledgments of the Napoleonic Wars. Austen wrote her first three novels before the battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and her early letters are dated 1796. References to the events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries leave their inevitable ideological, historical and political traces prudently in the fissures of Jane's discourse.

Eliza Austen was Jane's first cousin on her paternal side. Fourteen years Jane's senior, Eliza became her sister-in-law when she married Jane's brother Henry in 1797. However, Eliza's first marriage was to a French officer guillotined in 1794. In December 1786, one year prior to the fall of the Bastille, when Jane was eleven, Eliza left France for a month-long visit to the Austen family at their home in Steventon. William Austen-Leigh writes that Jane was much impressed by "Eliza's charm and cosmopolitan vivacity, and this initial childish admiration grew into a steady and affectionate adult friendship that lasted to the end of Eliza's life" (54). Indeed, Jane dedicated an early work, *Volume the Second*, to Eliza.

Fanny Caroline Lefroy suggests in her unpublished manuscript, *Family History*, that many letters were written from Eliza to the Austens while she was in France during the Reign of Terror. These have not survived. However, many of Eliza's letters to her maternal cousin do survive, including one written sometime in 1790 from Steventon that speaks of the Revolution and her husband's predicament: "My private Letters confirm the Intelligence afforded by the public Prints and assure me that nothing we there read is exaggerated, M. de F. is at present in Paris, He had determined on coming to England, but finds it impossible to get away" (W. Austen-Leigh 72). It is obvious that the Revolution was a relevant topic in the Austen household and that Jane was exposed to much of the anxiety that it engendered.

In 1803, Eliza and Henry went to France in an attempt to reclaim the property that had been confiscated when her first husband was executed. "During the short peace of Amiens," James Edward Austen-Leigh reports in *Memoirs*, "she and her second husband [Henry] went to France, in the hope of recovering some of the Count's property, and there narrowly escaped being included amongst the *détenus*. Orders had been given by Bonaparte's Government to detain all English travellers" (J. E. Austen-Leigh 196). Eliza's name appears in many of Jane's letters dating from January 21, 1799, until Eliza's death after a lingering illness in 1813. However, there are no extant letters from the period when Eliza was

in France with her first husband or from the time when Eliza returned there with Henry in 1803.

In Jane's letters that have survived, there are references to the history that would later be rewritten by the Victorians. In between reports that the furniture had been rearranged and a new table acquired (no. 25) or that Jane found inexpensive gloves in a shop that did not look like a glove shop and that she ate four buns, two while traveling (no. 79), are shards of the political events that engulfed England at this time. Embedded as both absence and presence, these scraps establish a relationship between text and context during the years before Napoleon's defeat at Trafalgar on October 21, 1805.

Jane's two sailor brothers, Frank and Charles, saw active service. This is reported not only in Jane's letters but also in one written by Admiral Nelson in March 1805: "I hope to see [Captain Austen] alongside a French 80-gun ship, and he cannot be better placed than in the *Canopus*, which was once a French Admiral's ship, and struck to me. Captain Austen . . . is an excellent young man" (W. Austen-Leigh 134–35).

Jane makes several references to both brothers in 1804 and 1805 before the battle of Trafalgar. On September 14, 1804, she writes: "I have not heard from Charles yet, which rather surprises me" (no. 39 to Cassandra). On August 24, 1805, Jane refers to Frank: "I have been used very ill this morning, I have received a letter from Frank which I ought to have had when Eliz<sup>th</sup> & Henry had theirs, & which in it's way from Albany to Godmersham has been to Dover & Steventon" (no. 45 to Cassandra). On April 11, 1805, she again writes to Cassandra: "The Ambuscade reached Gibraltar on the 9th of March & found all well; so say the papers.—We have had no letters from anybody. . . . To [Charles] I wrote in consequence of my Mother's having seen in the papers that the *Urania* was waiting at Portsmouth for the Convoy for Halifax" (no. 43). Despite the well-known efficiency of the British postal system, much news about the two brothers was drawn from newspaper reports, a process that must have been accompanied by considerable apprehension.

Several letters make reference to the brothers before the gap where the letters break off. On November 1, 1800, the anxiety over Frank is subdued but authentic:

We have at last heard from Frank. . . . You must rest satisfied with knowing that on the 8th of July the *Petterell* with the rest of the Egyptian Squadron was off the Isle of Cyprus, whither they went from Jaffa for Provisions &c., & whence they were to sail in a day or two for Alexandria, there to wait the result of the English proposals for the Evacuation of Egypt. (no. 24 written to Cassandra)

In no. 25 written to Cassandra on November 8–9, 1800, the only further news about Frank again must be learned from the newspapers: "Mr Holder's paper tells us that sometime in last August, Capt: Austen & the *Petterell* were very active in securing a Turkish ship (driven to a port in Cyprus by bad weather)

from the French.” By February 1801, Frank’s whereabouts was unknown. Jane writes to Cassandra that Charles has reported that Frank had not been seen lately: “nor does [Charles] expect to find him arrived” (no. 34).

Incontrovertible anxiety over Charles’s welfare is expressed in a letter written to Cassandra on May 27, 1801: “The *Endymion* has already received orders for taking troops to Egypt—which I should not like at all if I did not trust to Charles’ being removed from her somehow or other before she sails. He knows nothing of his own destination he says” (no. 38). It is at this point, in May 1801, that the letters break off, not to resume until September 1804. The gap not only obscures Jane’s reported romance; it also shrouds three and a half very important years of the Napoleonic Wars during which her two most beloved brothers were at sea.

Despite the need to obfuscate the artifactual traces of war, the fading way of life that Jane protected so fiercely in her novels—the stately family homes and the peaceful country lanes—was threatened. It was not only changing economics that endangered her world but also the concrete practices of the French. However, by the time Austen’s letters were released in the late nineteenth century, the reading public knew that both the sailor brothers and England had survived. This survival was made heroic, and this heroism became the master trope of the Victorian self-image. James Edward reveals the new psychic space in *Memoirs*: “[Jane’s] two youngest brothers, Francis and Charles, were sailors during that glorious period of the British Navy which comprises the close of the last and the beginning of the present century” (184).

Once they had reconstructed this history, the Victorians could submerge the pressures of their own historical moment in the constructed memories of yesterday. Reviews of the letters are steeped in nostalgic yearning, praising Regency England while deprecating their own time. “[Jane] has nothing to say,” one reviewer rejoices, “about evolution and the Jews” (“Jane Austen” 1882, 46). Jane never admired the love of dress that by the 1880s “affords a man as keen a delight to see his wife and daughters decked out in costly and fashionable garments as it ever afforded any woman to wear them.” Not yet enslaved by the conspicuous consumption of late Victorian capitalism, Jane exposed “vain, pretentious, second-rate women.” (“Miss Austen” 697). Her work let Victorian readers stand in the residual imprints left by “post-chaises and sedan-chairs, when the rush of the locomotive was unknown” (“Jane Austen” 1863, 235). Through Jane, the Victorians could live “with all the best company in the neighborhood, meeting to play whist and drink port wine at the Dog and Gun, or the King’s Arms, or any other village inn of similar calibre.” Families like those in Jane’s books and letters, they mourned, were “gradually retiring before [civilization’s] advances like the otter and the badger” (Kebbel 682).

What specific events prompted this nostalgia? What was the “unthinkable repressed” that prevented thinking the new Victorian identity forged after Trafalgar? By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the “empire upon which the sun never set” was faced with a rapidly approaching twilight. The two prime

ministers who dominated this period were William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. The conservative Disraeli replaced the liberal Gladstone in 1874. In 1880 Disraeli lost to Gladstone, who took office for the second time on a platform of nonintervention and minimum foreign involvement. The “forward-thinking” policies of Disraeli had overextended the nation; it was time to gather in the resources and build internal strength. In a campaign speech delivered on November 27, 1879, Gladstone stated:

The first thing is to foster the strength of the Empire by just legislation and economy at home . . . to reserve the strength of the Empire, to reserve the expenditure of that strength for great and worthy occasions abroad. . . . Because by keeping all in union together you neutralize and fetter and bind up the selfish aims of each. I am not here to flatter either England or any of them [Europe]. They have selfish aims, as, unfortunately, we in late years have too sadly shown that we too have had selfish aims. (Bourne 420–21)

However, radically changing geopolitics would make that campaign promise impossible.

Unlike the liberal Gladstone, Disraeli recognized the expanding population of England and increased production that resulted from industrial growth. This meant that Britain was outgrowing its traditional markets and sources of supplies. He stated in a speech that he made during Gladstone's first term that “the old establishments of this country, now the United States of America, throw their lengthening shades over the Atlantic, which mix with European waters. These are vast and novel elements in the distribution of power” (Bourne 403). His response to these elements was colonial expansion.

After Disraeli was voted into office, he extended British power in West Africa, Malay, Zululand and Afghanistan; he annexed Fiji in 1874 and the Transvaal in 1877 (largely in order to prevent Boer domination in the latter area); and he declared Victoria empress of India in 1876. The relatively stable world situation that had resulted from Gladstone's policies during his first term, the “voluntary ties” and the “largely self-governing empire held together by ties of kinship and affection,” was no longer possible (Eldridge 101).

The discovery of both gold and the large Star of Africa diamond in the late 1860s began an international “Scramble for Africa” in earnest (Eldridge 150). Egypt was in crisis. Britain had purchased shares in the Suez Canal in 1875, and although the canal had been built by French money and engineers, “most of the traffic that passed through it was British. . . . It was on the high road to India” (Paul 58). British acquisition of the Suez shares meant that the canal would operate under the dual control of England and France. When France pulled out of their pact to defend the canal in 1882, England was left alone to contend with an area that was in political and economic crisis. In Egypt, liberal Egyptian reformers, Muslim conservatives, landowners, peasants and a mutinous army threatened a *jihad*, an anarchy that could have disrupted Britain's lifeline

to its Indian colony's precious resources. Gladstone, despite his nonintervention policy, was forced to support the British occupation of Egypt.

From 1879 on, Great Britain's position as a leading power was imperiled by world events. The later years of Disraeli's term had witnessed both the Zulu and Afghan wars, and there was the lingering possibility of Zulu and Swahili aggression during Gladstone's second term. This and the instability of the Boer republics challenged the security of British Africa. Germany, Russia and a United States that had recovered from the Civil War were all looking to foreign expansion. When Gladstone began his second term as prime minister in 1880, both global and internal affairs had produced dissensions in the government that were so rife that it became "virtually impossible to follow any consistent Irish, foreign, or colonial policy without offending some faction with which it was necessary to work in other matters" (Eldridge 154).

Gladstone was at a loss as to how to deal with these new phenomena. Events took him by storm. By 1884, England was so embroiled in difficulties in Egypt that when Germany and France teamed up in Africa, Britain was highly vulnerable to inroads into that colonial prize. For the rest of the century the late Victorians strove to retain their position in the world and to keep their markets and their sources of raw material intact, a task complicated by myriad and changing international circumstances.

Indeed, by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when Lord Bra-bourne published Jane Austen's letters, the supremacy of the British Navy had passed. Is it any wonder, then, that in the reception of the letters, readers sought to remember their country's glory and "disremember" the terrifying psychopolitical past that the letters both mask and expose. Behind Jane's gentle humor and her homely reports of daily events lies exposed the past of a country so unprotected, a past so unsafe that it had to be disarticulated and sealed over. The vulnerability of the present had rendered the past "unthinkable." In order for the late Victorians to fit the template they had cut out of scientific progress and military glory, the "unthinkable" had to be repressed.

Raymond Williams notes that Jane Austen's world has become an idealized abstraction for readers, an unsophisticated hinterlands in which traditional values are articulated. However, her characters, both novelistic and autobiographical, are governed by real situations. To the list of material practices that Williams finds in Austen's world—the changes of fortune, the monetary distress, the confusion and change—I add the cultural and psychic response to a vulnerability that gripped the nation from the fall of the Bastille until the battle of Trafalgar.

The horizon of expectation that shaped the reception of Jane Austen's letters at the end of the nineteenth century was built on an illusory system that denied this vulnerability. Readers found in Austen the mythology of social and cultural superiority on which their empire had been built; they annexed this mythology to Austen in order to shelter an identity no longer fully present. They knotted together into a single logical aporia a past made superior to the present and a

present rendered superior to the past. From this aporia they fashioned a single pattern of recuperation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British masculine virtue that had been created by Nelson's defeat of Napoleon had become a nostalgic asylum, a sheltered space from which ideological pressures were debarred. That space was propped up by the slight but elegant figure of a young English woman who did a little writing.

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## Humor and Wit in Jane Austen's Poems and Charades

*Laura Cooner Lambdin and  
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Concerning the corpus of her works, Jane Austen will probably never be confused as one of the great poets of the eighteenth century. Indeed, although Paul Poplawski notes that Austen “clearly enjoyed producing light verses” and that examples of her poems “exist from more or less every period of her life” (304), the quality of these works is average at best. David Gilson (392) finds that George Henry Lewes, in a letter to Charlotte Brontë, found Austen to be “not a poetess” because she had “none of the ravishing enthusiasm of poetry” (Southam 127), and a modern reader must respond similarly. Poplawski considers whether the small amount of extant verse means that Austen was unable or unwilling to write poetry, offering that many of her novels, particularly *Emma* and *Persuasion*, include passages exhibiting a certain poetic lyricism (127). While Austen was clearly capable of writing verse, the textual evidence of fifteen short poems versus her six fairly long novels suggests that poetry was not her writing style of choice.

The bulk of Austen’s verses may be found in R. W. Chapman’s 1954 edition of *Minor Works*, which includes Austen’s *Volume the First*. These compositions, usually written for entertainment or amusement, or as individualized compositions for Austen’s friends and relations (Gilson 392) were titled posthumously (Poplawski 304). Also included in the *Minor Works* are three charades. Perhaps the most definitive volume concerning the verses is David Selwyn’s *The Poetry of Jane Austen and the Austen Family* (1997), which contains many fine references, notes and details, all compiled by the editor himself. Selwyn creates several titles for the works, which differ from those found in the *Minor Works*, which Poplawski correctly (127) notes are renamed for good reason.

Indeed, other than this reference volume, the critical history for the verses is sparse. Rare is the text that even refers to them. A search of the Modern Lan-

guage Association's data bank produced only three articles: Deirdre Le Faye's "Jane Austen's Verses and Lord Stanhope's Disappointment," Gilson's "Jane Austen's Verse," and Earl Miner's "Some Issues for the Study of Integrated Collections." None of these explicates or discusses the poems beyond their publication history. Further details about the publishing history and audiences of the poems can be found in Poplawski's *A Jane Austen Encyclopedia* and J. David Grey's *The Jane Austen Handbook*. Perhaps the most noteworthy point from these texts is the problem that in the *Minor Works* are printed two extra verses, "On the Universities" and "On Capt. Foote's Marriage," both falsely attributed to Austen (Poplawski 127).

For our purposes, it seems beneficial to examine the poems from the perspective of wit and humor. Gilson has noted that many post-Austen Victorian literary figures found fault with her work (392). Charlotte Brontë's simple baited response to Lewes's question quoted earlier was, "Can there be a great artist without poetry?" (Southam 127). Austen's nephew noted that his aunt's favorite authors included "Crabbe in verse, and Cowper" (Gilson 392), writers whose works are artfully poetic. It is clear that the composition of Austen's poems occurred when the terms *humor* and *wit* referred to "two major types of writing whose purpose is the evoking of some kind of laughter" (Holman 244). Further, in the eighteenth century, "humor" denoted that lightheartedness related to comical elements that were sympathetic or kind to a situation, especially when compared to the bitter, biting comic, satiric and intellectual overtones of "wit" (244). The difference in terms of literary studies is much like that between horror (blood spurting out of a chopped-off leg) and terror (deep psychological trauma) found in the gothic texts published before and during Austen's lifetime. In Austen's poetry, the gentler humor seems largely reserved for female companions, and they are more sympathetic characters to a reader than the males who were handled with more wit and distance.

While this oversimplifies the distinction between humor and wit, it does clearly present the one major element that most critics use to distinguish between the two. Wit is a more intellectual, distant humor, such as the ironic "perception of similarities in seemingly dissimilar things" (Holman 530). Given Jane Austen's proclivity to use humor and wit throughout her novels, it should be safe to hypothesize that these same elements would find their way into her poetry, especially since we know that many of her verses were written expressly for her own amusement or the entertainment of friends; the bulk of Austen's poetic works were untitled until after her death and were clearly unintended for publication.

The use of humor as opposed to wit is no more prominent in the verses of Jane Austen than in the poem "Mr. Gell and Miss Gill," composed around 1811. This simple verse of two stanzas plays on the obvious similarities in the names of the couple. Reflecting the themes of love and marriage one finds in her novels, Austen's verse here initially falls almost into the absurd—a type of mock-courtly love when we are told that Mr. Gell, a previously healthy gentleman, "Became

dreadfully ill / For the love of Miss Gill" (l. 3–4). This poem is a light, little lilt that exudes humor. The simplicity of the work heightens the comic twist of the second stanza wherein the courtly conceit is continued. Mr. Gell tells his beloved, "[I am the] slave of your *eyes*," an odd assertion that works only because it will play off the final word of the poem, *ease*, meaning the only difference in their names are the *i*'s and the *e*'s. The very idea that his beloved will become his by replacing her "eyes" with his "ease" works as a funny and energetic demonstration of the depth of the man's passion. It is ironic and humorous that Mr. Gell notes with sighs that he is her slave. Perhaps the courtly attitude is not all it was meant to be.

This work, in terms of our definitions provided, is much more humorous than witty. It is basically a clever poem that plays with the language to push its very limited point. However, it also exudes a great knowledge of past practices and a keen ability on the part of the poet to demonstrate how the names relate and are to be related (since the woman is about to become Mrs. Gill-Gell).

Perhaps more important for a reader interested in Austen's craft is the impetus through which this poem was evidently created. The text notes that the germ of the poem was "On reading in the newspaper, the marriage of 'Mr. Gell of Eastbourne to Miss Gill.'" If this is the case, then we have to speculate that Austen composed the poem as some sort of rhetorical exercise or a written word game. Thus, she probably had little conception that her work would appear in print. The poem is merely a ditty, but it does have its value in that it shows Austen's sense of humor, her grasp of the language, and, since the germ of the poem came from the newspaper, perhaps even her desire to be "in the know" about current affairs. One can easily see how this work would amuse her friends.

The humorous romantic tone is reflected in several of Austen's other verses, especially her work of 1812, "A Middle-Aged Flirt." A mild variation occurs in a poem she composed in 1792 for her brother's wife, "Verse Given with a Needlework Bag to Mrs. James Austen," wherein her poem serves as an emblem of both the bag she gives to her sister-in-law and the friendship that the two share. The "needles and threads" (l. 3) that she may need to "afford her aid" (l. 4) are not unlike the materials through which their friendship has been knitted. In essence, they have sewn together a bond of amity. Thus, although they are "about to part" (l. 6), the bag will serve as a reminder of their feeling. In effect, it is the needle and thread that connects the two—until they are reunited. Again, this is little more than a gift tag, a cute poem that exudes a type of light humor and was meant to accompany a present; nevertheless, it is touching.

In these poems, it appears as though Austen was more concerned with producing mirth than literary masterpieces. The points seem to be clear and concise. She has fun with Gell and Gill without mocking them. She uses metaphor without sarcasm. Oblivious to the blistering notions of wit, such poetry falls into the category of merely humorous.

The same cannot be said for the character of Mr. Best in Austen's 1806 poem, "Lines to Martha Lloyd." Perhaps this poem was composed as a response to the

author's hope "that a Mr. Best would escort her [Martha Lloyd] to Harrogate" (Austen, Ed. Chapman, *Minor Works* 445). This verse of three four-line stanzas, begins with a simple assault on the character of Best, who is "very bad / And all the world shall know it" (l. 1–2). The tone of this work about a gentleman gone away differs from the previous sunny lilt. This poem nearly borders on the malicious. Instead of simply expressing her displeasure with Mr. Best, the author is determined to expose his "base behavior" to the world through her words as "a tuneful poet" (l. 4). In a rather nasty vein, the verses also reveal Best's weaknesses by discussing the aging process, its ridiculousness and how he has been touched by it. In this poem that we assume the writer circulated among friends, it is important that Austen refers to herself as the author because it intensifies her poetic stance.

Holman and Harmon remind us that humor relates to character (123); in this poem that is a concern, not so much in the character of Mr. Best but in what the author says she is going to do to him. In the second stanza she relates that Best has gone to Harrogate every previous summer and questions his refusal to return this year. In this case, the implication is clear: he is not going, at least in the eyes of the author, because he does not want to be with Martha Lloyd. Whether this is true is vague, for even in the third and final stanza, we never get a lucid understanding of Best's rationale for not summering in Harrogate. The reader assumes that the lady has frightened off the would-be vacationer by some past transgression. Austen notes that the path to the resort is smooth and clear, and that Best is not getting any younger, or less fat with time, in terms that would surely spook T. S. Eliot's Prufrock character. Therefore she cannot understand his reluctance to be among the party at Harrogate.

The stilted portions of this poem are humorous when contextualized against the social setting. It was probably anticipated that the "regulars," such as Mr. Best, would be following their typical routines; in this example that would mean spending a summer away among a party of old friends. Social plans would be created in advance, and, as was typical in an Austen work, pairings would be made. As in life and in Austen's novels, the majority of the fun to be had here would be in the anticipation and the planning of the various couples' activities. If we are to believe that Martha Lloyd's anticipation of perhaps a romance with Mr. Best has been usurped by his lack of consideration for her, then what better vengeance would there be than for the poet to let the world know her disdain for his decision? There is a certain irony in the third stanza that the road to Harrogate is smooth. It is now far from that for Mr. Best, as the poet has placed major potholes in his path with her ridicule of his growing physical unattractiveness and poor decision making. Even if he changed his mind and decided to summer with his friends, there would always be a question as to his intent: did he return because of the pressure or because he realized his folly?

What is clear is that the author has accomplished her mission. If the poem was composed only for Austen's friends and acquaintances, it would serve its purpose in her telling the world of Best's error. The most important element of

her society would be made aware of his decision and would recognize the impact on Martha. Clearly this would put Best in the unenviable position of having to atone, or at least clarify the true reason for his choice. The thought of watching someone sputter, hem and haw and struggle for an answer when presented with this little ditty would be amusing.

This type of witty humor exudes throughout Austen's poems. She is clever in her choice of words, but she is not particularly lyrical. It may be that Austen was more concerned with simple demonstrations of her ability to create light poems that are more remarkable for their simplicity than for their literary prowess. Surely Austen is aware of the power of her verse; at times she seems to revel in it. Her verse "On a Headache" (1811) clearly demonstrates this by opening with the vision of a medieval torture rack. Few find humor in the thought of being sent prone by an excruciating headache. Austen's work recounts in a concise manner the agony of "a fierce-throbbing head" (l. 2) that is so severe that the general gossip and events of the world—once so exciting—become trivial. The work is humorous in its account that when all is said and tabulated, what goes on in other lands or even neighbor's lives becomes completely esoteric and uninteresting because of a personal physical ailment.

This idea continues in the third through the fifth stanzas, where Austen minimalizes many of the social nuances of her day. Included in this poem is a catalog of events and their potential repercussions, which are not always positive. For example, in the second stanza, she decries the splendor of the balls and dances normal in her segment of society, for they may not always lead to love and romance. In fact, when struck down by a headache, even the idea of love and romance is unappealing. Austen continues the theme of the inconsequential in the third stanza, which slights the rousing social feasts as well as the guests of these banquets, "be they beggars or Lords" (l. 15). Here she shows the banality of social forms prevalent; the idea that a simple headache can cause such intense introspection and selfishness is very clever.

Also, the poem has progressed much the way of a major social night. The evening that began with some dancing progresses to dinner and then to the bells of the fourth stanza. The implication is that romance has flourished at the event, and the end result may be marriage. Sadly, not everyone finds amour at these events. Unfortunates end up attending either of two events: the marriage of other lucky couples or the funerals of friends. And the bells that peal at either event are tortuous to a hurting head! Such a turn of events leads to the realization that social gatherings are fine, as is the consummation of a relationship in marriage. But just as marriages are performed in churches, so too are funerals. Thus the great dialectics of life and death are demonstrated against the backdrop of a committed couple. In this way, the idea of accommodating social mores provokes somewhat less ennui.

Austen's verses cannot compare with her novels; however, it is interesting to see a bit of the cultural attitudes and responses she examines in her novels here reflected on a more personal level in little ditties written to family, friends

and acquaintances. In eighteenth-century terms, most of her poems appear to be shaped in the mode of humor. Austen provides small tidbits and interesting items about manners and observations, keys to the compositions of her more detailed works. Yet another side to Austen's verse demonstrates that she was aware of the difference between wit and humor. Included in the *Minor Works* are three of the charades that she composed. As Poplawski notes, these three charades are "in the style of the charade on 'courtship' by Mr. Elton in Chapter 9 of *Emma*" (96). The charades can be categorized as witty because they are primarily intellectual exercises. Austen's charades are very difficult games, but they do serve their purpose concerning intellectual word play by describing hemlock, an attorney and a bank note in clever ways. The clues and hints of the charades demand intense scrutiny before the answers can be discovered. These seem to be the best of her poetical works, perhaps because they demand intellectual prowess.

Jane Austen's verses are often charming, particularly when they extol the virtues of her female companions and her deep appreciation of the qualities that she particularly admired in women, such as grace and charm. Austen complimented her friends, both living and dead, in verses sometimes designed to accompany gifts. The tributes seem so genial and heartfelt that one wonders how the term *passionless* (Gilson 392) could be considered appropriate. It is easy to imagine Austen as a fast and a true friend, and, although her verses to Anne LeFroy, Mary Lloyd, Marsha Lloyd, Miss Bigg and Maria Beckford reflect a certain heightened, warm tone common among female companions in the eighteenth century, Austen's praise sounds genuine. The rest of the verses generally have a spontaneous, happy feel of good humor. They are probably largely unrehearsed and unedited ditties, much like greeting cards to mark a ceremony of little import.

Austen's verses will never be confused with those of the great poets of her age; however, they are interesting to an Austen scholar, for a reading of the works shows interesting insights and ideas that, although not greatly valuable in poetic terms, reflect themes apparently never far from Austen's thoughts, particularly those concerning female friendships and matchmaking. One should not condemn Austen because her poems are of less than great literary quality; readers must keep in mind that she never had any idea that these verses would eventually be published in collections of her works, and as an author of the sort who tirelessly edited and reedited her novels prior to publication, Austen would most likely be appalled to discover her poems in print. They are personal items that she composed for her friends or relations as tokens to show her appreciation or as games to entertain and amuse. In essence, grouping these works with the novels that she tirelessly and repeatedly revised or even with her *Minor Works* is tantamount to including Tennyson's unedited notes to his housekeeper with *Idylls of the King*. Examinations of these verses should be undertaken only to accentuate themes and ideas as they are germinated in Austen's much more beautifully written novels.

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# Jane Austen's Prayers: Deism Becoming Theism

*Elton E. Smith*

Does the distinguished-looking church building have any social value beside being a venue for marriages, baptisms, funerals and neighborly chit-chat? Non-believers might say no; believers might insist yes. Where did Jane Austen fit?

Jane Austen could claim gentry genealogy by descent from John Austen of Horsmonden (d. 1620), a line that included minor landowners, clergymen, sailors and (by marriage) a couple of French counts before the French Revolution. From her mother, Cassandra Leigh, a more aristocratic lineage emerges, beginning with a lord mayor of London (Sir Thomas Leigh, 1498–1571), including sister to the first duke of Chandos and the master of Stoneleigh Abbey. But in both lines there was a special weakness for clergymen, such as the reverend master of Balliol, the rector of Harpsden, the rector of Great Bookham, the rector of Whaddon and Sonning and the Holcombe prebendary of Wells Cathedral, climaxing, for literary interest, in the Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh (1739–1827), parents of Jane Austen and seven other children.

Thus in her own lifetime, her father and two of her brothers were clergymen along with her mother's father, grandfather and several cousins. In addition, her sister, Cassandra, was engaged to a clergyman, and the family memory was that Jane herself fell in love with a clergyman. The eighteenth-century English church was the frequent recipient of well-born younger sons, appointed to rural livings bestowed by landed families. When Colonel Brandon presents Edward Ferrars with such an ecclesiastical living, the author of *Sense and Sensibility* does not show us a young clergyman engrossed in the visitation of his new parishioners and other clerical duties, but instead discusses his marriage, choice of wallpaper and the planting of shrubs. Rather than a divine calling, this was often an enforced career choice.

Although this was characteristic of Austen's three novels written in the 1790s,

the author and England were shortly to change attitudes. However, Jane Austen remained constant in her preference for well-born clergy and her willingness to ignore pluralism in livings.

Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, a fashionable blade at Bath and nonresident of the parish his father had bestowed, comes under no special condemnation, since he was of good family. Thus in *Catherine*, the Reverend Richard Morland has two good livings, and the Reverend Mr. Wynne occupies the living of Chetwynde and “two or three curacies.” Jane’s father was himself rector of two adjoining parishes. But his eldest son, James, already rector or curate of four small parishes, when he had the offer of an additional parish, declined, apparently in deference to changing times. “What she does suggest throughout her work is that Church of England clergymen are better when they are born gentlemen” (Butler). Ferrars, Tilney, Bertram and Catherine Morland’s brother James are all of good family, capable of maintaining the alliance between the mansion and the rectory on a level basis of social equality, whereas Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton have great difficulty in maintaining the dignity of the English church against such shocking county magnates as Lady Catherine de Bourgh *Pride and Prejudice*.

But times and attitudes were changing in both the Austen family and in England. Jane’s sailor brother Frank had as his naval patron a noted evangelical, Admiral Gambier. Frank returned from two trips to Antigua in the West Indies with a strong distaste for the treatment of slaves, and Jane’s sister, Cassandra, was not only reading works by such evangelicals as Thomas Gisborne and Hannah More, but was also recommending them to Jane. Once brother Henry finally decided, in 1816, to return to his original bent for an ecclesiastical career, he became an earnest and effective evangelical preacher. As early as 1814, Fanny Knight of stately Godsmersham Park (who had earlier described her Aunt Jane as dowdy) consulted with that same aunt concerning the proposal of John Pemberton Plumtre. From the grand and sophisticated viewpoint of Godsmersham, Fanny found her suitor rather comical, unfashionable and especially evangelical. But Jane, with characteristic sharp edge, replied: “I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals” (*Letters*, November 18, 1814). To the Austens, who were themselves displaying the tendency of country gentry to merge with the rising professional and business classes (D’Arcy’s best friend, Mr. Bingley, was of mercantile origin), evangelicalism was not simply the Wesleyan revivals or the outdoor preaching of George Whitefield. Instead it allied itself with William Wilberforce, a landed Tory gentleman, and the “Clapham Set,” represented by the wealthy London merchant, publisher of the *Christian Observer*. Such a genteel periodical was interested in setting a high standard for a hierarchical structure shaken by the Revolution in France. Their modest purpose was for the upper classes to show a good example to Matthew Arnold’s *hoi polloi*, to honor parents, respect private ownership of property, exemplify honesty with fellow citizens and competence in their chosen vocation (Koppel).

Stuart M. Tave quotes from Archbishop Whately’s 1821 essay, which as-

sumed that Jane Austen was “evidently a Christian writer,” whose tact and artistry ensure that her religion is “not at all intrusive.” This is a telling quotation at a time when comfortable, distant Deism was making room for intensely personal Theism. The resemblance between Augustan reason and its shift toward the Romantic Agony in literature is highly analogous.

Deism, with its arbitrary rationality (cf. the American Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights), tended to state absolute truths held by all men in an essentially unchanging universe. God is the creator of a universe so perfect it needs no tinkering. The Great Chain of Being is as immovable as the “music of the spheres” is perpetual. The problem Mark Twain wrestled with in *The Mysterious Stranger* is really not strange at all. If the perfect God made the perfect world, the prayer for any particular adjustment is heretical, one evil deed expunged from history's pages would throw off all subsequent deeds. The planets, the seasons, the religious and political hierarchies are unchanging and unchangeable. No individual complaint or request is acceptable.

When we discuss the three great written prayers of Jane Austen, we note deistic remnant and evangelical intrusion. We shall consider these very revealing prayers as prayer 1, echoes from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1771); prayer 2, their deist foundation; and prayer 3, their evangelical innovation.

### **BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER**

As daughter of a clergyman and sister of clergymen, Austen surely attended church regularly, perhaps daily and in the evening and participated in home prayers with family and servants. So, when in prayer 1, she desires “to address thee with our hearts, as with our lips,” she is quoting from *Common Prayer* just as she quotes from Daniel 4 with “from whom no secrets can be hid,” as well as from the collect that opens the communion service. “Give us a thankful sense of the blessings in which we live,” reflects the General Thanksgiving: “And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful.” “Be gracious to our necessities, and guard us, and all we love, from evil this night” may be a variation of the collect for aid against all perils, from the service of evening prayer: “By thy great mercy, defend us from all perils and dangers of this night.”

The longer petition from prayer 1—“May the sick and afflicted, be now and ever thy care; and heartily do we pray for the safety of all that travel by land or by sea, for the comfort and protection of the orphan and widow and that thy pity may be shewn upon all captives and prisoners”—is surely analogous to the Great Litany: “That it may please thee to preserve all that travel by land or by water, all women labouring of child [oddly omitted by J.A.] all sick persons and young children, and to shew thy pity upon all prisoners and captives. . . . That it may please thee to defend and provide for the fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed.”

Austen's “We bless thee for every comfort of our past and present existence

. . . which thou hast bountifully bestowed on us and with which we close this day, imploring their continuance from thy Fatherly Goodness” (prayer 2) echoes and expands upon the postcommunion prayer: “We thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness. . . . Give them patience under their sufferings and a happy issue out of all their afflictions.”

“However divided and far asunder, we know that we are alike before thee, and under thine eye, may we be equally united in thy faith and fear” (prayer 2) very much resembles the language and sentiments of the Prayer for the Whole State of Christ’s Church Militant: “And we also bless thy Holy name, for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear.”

Prayer 3, which begins with the affirmation, “Father of Heaven! whose goodness has brought us in safety to the close of this day,” is almost a quotation from the collect for grace in the service of morning prayer: “O . . . heavenly Father . . . who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day” and, in the next line—“Bring us in safety to the beginning of another day” repeats the collect for grace.

The last echo, but certainly not completely so, is the petition: “May thy mercy be extended over all mankind, bringing the ignorant to the knowledge of thy truth” (prayer 3)—a restatement of the Prayer of St. Chrysostom, used at the conclusion of the service of evening prayer: “granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth.”

## DEIST FOUNDATIONS OF JANE AUSTEN’S PRAYERS

These references, for Austen’s generation, represent the rationality rather than feeling and conduct rather than faith of the deist tradition in which they had been reared.

Prayer 1, “to *deserve* to be heard,” is a starchily stiff position; “*teach-* us” represents an educational rather than conversational relationship with Deity. “Take *inventory* of all thought, words, actions” sounds like a respectable tradesman. In regard to evil, we are to “*acquit ourselves*” rather than humbly to seek forgiveness. “Evil habit,” “indulged,” “discomfort” treat evil as just a bad habit needing to be broken—a self-indulgence, not an active positive evil or temperamental malignancy. “Willingly given pain” sounds like a humanistic dismissal, blunting the distinction between sins of commission and omission.

The prayer reference to “thoughts, words and actions” evokes the old deist trinity of mind/spirit/body. This is followed by another darker trinity of irreverence, disobedience and neglect of any known duty. The adjective *known* once again states a deist limitation: we are not responsible for unknown duties, only known ones, and the governing object is duty—a key concept of the later Victorian era.

When Austen warns herself (prayer 1) of “deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity,” we are reminded of the dominant roles played in her novels by these very forms of self-deception. The “comforts of our lots” exudes the creature

comforts her characters require and warn us not of romantic rebellion (Captain Ahab, Satan) but only the minor sins of “discontent or indifference.”

The prayer ends with the adjuration not to “neglect” that “Holy Religion in which we have been brought up.” The only sin is venial “neglect,” and the appeal is to Augustan conservatism, “in which we have been brought up.”

Prayer 2 takes up again the theme of “neglected duties” just as the “strong desire of resisting every evil inclination and weakening every habit of sin” once more emphasizes the deist insistence that we are in essential control of our lives. Our sins arise from frailty and inclinations, which we must resist and thwart. After all, sin is only a bad habit, and we have the power to resist, weaken and ultimately throw off. When Austen reinvokes “every comfort” and other sources of “happiness,” we are reminded of the Benthamite utilitarians with their golden rule of the greater happiness of the greatest number. “Obedience of thy commandments and a benevolent spirit toward every fellow-creature” establishes obedience and benevolence as prime deistic virtues.

Prayer 3 begins with the desideratum of coming to the close of each day in safety and includes “those, for which we were before accountable.” Accountability may properly be required of men because it is an extension of the deistic key of duty and because, by our accountability, we are capable of pleasing God.

Christ's Passion on the Cross is strangely absent from the “forbearance and patience of which our blessed saviour has set us the highest example.” The “best enjoyment of what this world can give” is a lovely Tory sentiment, along with “spiritual happiness of the life to come,” as a Browningsque assurance that the same achievements of this life continue uninterrupted in the life to come. “Every hour of safety, health and peace, of domestic comfort and innocent enjoyment” sounds suspiciously like the lord high executioner's “and make each prisoner pent / unwillingly represent / a source of innocent merriment” in Gilbert and Sullivan's later *The Mikado*. Elizabeth Bennet might have penned “the presumption of our desires” about her own mother, or “severe only in the examination of our own conduct” both before and after Mr. D'Arcy's proposal. There surely comes to her the recognition she had been “ignorant to the knowledge of thy truth” in dealing with both family and lovers.

The closing—“so conduct ourselves on earth as to secure an eternity of happiness with each other in thy heavenly kingdom”—clearly claims that we “secure” heaven as reward for our own virtuous lives. John Betjeman's fashionable lady spending a few spare moments in Westminster Abbey before dashing to “a luncheon date” also considers that “God has a crown reserved for me” because she will make the supreme sacrifice of attending evening service “whensoever I have the time.” All gentility, the perquisites of class, with absolutely no passion, certainly no surrender, and perish any thought of “submission.”

## FROM DEISM TO THEISM

Marilyn Butler claims that the evangelical reform movement not only significantly changed the Anglican church in the early nineteenth century, but also

had a molding effect on Jane Austen: “Jane Austen’s last three novels were profounder than the first three not because they express an inward religious intensity, but because they are caught up in a national mood of self-assessment and regeneration.” With denser texts, they deliver profounder truths. An examination of Austen’s prayers supports the idea of a national movement away from a self-contained deism toward a more emotional and confessional evangelicalism.

Prayer 1 asks permission to address God “with our hearts, as with our lips.” A British prime minister, at first favorably impressed by the genteel appearance, accent and obvious education of John Wesley, left the meeting regretting his fall into “lamentable enthusiasm.” “From thee no secret can be hid” admits that men have well-hidden secrets, but God has powers to unlock them, no matter how well concealed.

When Austen asks God to “look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed and in mercy make us feel them deeply,” she sets the stage for the evangelical drama of sin, repentance and conversion, even though the remainder of the sentence slips back into deist “steadfast resolutions” and personal “endeavor.” She expresses almost a Methodist introspection and self-inventory when she suggests, “May we now, and on each return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves [which sounds like self-exoneration] of evil.” Then, having considered her many blessings, she “implores” God to quicken “our sense of thy mercy in the redemption of the world . . . that we may not . . . throw away the salvation thou hast given us.” The evangelical use of *implore*, *redemption* and *salvation* is notable. But deism remains in the conservatism of “the value of that Holy Religion in which we have been brought up.”

Prayer 2 displays the evangelical passion of remorse when it implores: “Pardon oh God! The offences of the past day . . . we remember with shame and contrition, many *evil* thoughts” and proceeds to make the familiar distinction between sins of commission and omission: “We have perhaps sinned against thee and against our fellow-creatures in many instances of which we have no remembrance. Pardon oh God.” Further passages from the second prayer move away from deist pride and self-sufficiency to the evangelical insistence on natural depravity—“To creatures so formed and situated” and “We are helpless and dependent.” Even our prayers are filled with the “imperfections” of our sinful natures.

Prayer 3, in addition to repeating many of the petitions of the *Book of Common Prayer* as well as Austen’s prayers 1 and 2, adds the evangelical demand for “*fervent* prayer” and the theistic recognition of the necessity for grace rather than deistic reward: “We feel that we have been blessed far beyond anything that we have deserved”—so different from the deistic threat of receiving our own just desserts! Nevertheless, prayer 3 concludes with the distinctly deistic: “May we . . . so conduct ourselves on earth as to secure an eternity of happiness

with each other in thy heavenly kingdom." The only concession to the new theism requests "the assistance of thy Holy Spirit" in order to produce such worthy "conduct." So despite Archbishop Whately's imprimatur (1831) that Jane Austen was "evidently a Christian writer" whose tact and artistry ensure that that religion shall be "not at all obtrusive," also evident is the new individualizing and emotionalizing of the national slide toward theism.

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