

in which readers since the nineteenth century have associated Austen with a reading situation that is distinctive for its qualities of intimacy and exclusivity: see "Jane Austen and the Common Reader: 'Opinions of *Mansfield Park*,' 'Opinions of *Emma*,' and the Janeite Phenomenon," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 37, no. 1 (1995): 54–69.

19. Raymond Mortimer, introduction to Colette, *Chéri* and *The Last of Chéri*, trans. Roger Senhouse (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), vii.

20. Introduction to Southam 1987, 2:15; cf. 2:58.

21. Raphael Samuel commented insightfully on the misogynist strain in many of the complaints made about the commodification or Disneyfication of the past (complaints that also function to mark off the practice of history as the prerogative or even invention of professional historians): see *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1994), esp. 261–67.

22. See, in addition to those three essays, Ruth Vanita's discussion of how "the English text may either become a means for avoiding our own position as Indian women, or help us come to terms with and endorse it": "*Mansfield Park* in Miranda House," in *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, ed. Rameswari Sunder Rajan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 90–99.

Azar Nafisi, who is completing a book on her experiences writing about and teaching Western novels in the Islamic Republic of Iran, reports that her students at Tehran University find Austen—and not, e.g., Maxim Gorky—the truly "revolutionary" writer on her syllabus. "By the end of the course [*Pride and Prejudice*] becomes the most exciting topic, because they discover [that] a subject like marriage, which in this society is counted as 'trivial,' is really the basis of a lot of values and norms which we call revolutionary" (interview with Jacki Lyden, *Weekend Edition*, 15 April 1995, transcript courtesy of National Public Radio).

23. Clifford Siskin also pairs Austen's afterlife with Literature's. He suggests that study of Austen can provide us with a vantage point that would enable us to stand outside the disciplinary parameters of literary study and see what is culturally contingent about the discipline's classificatory and evaluative principles. Outlining the enigmas that Austen and her canonicity have represented for literary studies (i.e., was Austen a "Romantic"? was Austen a feminist? why, when so many of her female contemporaries were forgotten, has her work been remembered and canonized?), Siskin suggests that these questions should not be adjudicated solely "in terms of her individual beliefs." Instead they represent "problem[s] in the historicity of the category of Literature." See "Jane Austen and the Engendering of Disciplinary," in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 63.

24. Saintsbury declared himself a "Janite" in his 1894 introduction to a new edition of *Pride and Prejudice*. On the history of "Janeites," see Lorraine Hana-way, "'Janeite' at 100," *Persuasions* 16 (December 1994): 28–29.

25. Arthur Ransome, *History of Story-Telling: Studies in the Development of Narrative* (1909), quoted in Southam 1987, 2:78.

26. Trilling, "*Emma* and the Legend of Jane Austen," 32.

I

The Divine Miss Jane: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies

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On the level of common sense it is not hard to wish Mr. Kimball well in his war [against "tenured radicals"]. Even when his examples of academic idiocy are funny, they are also hair-raising. . . . A proponent of feminist studies argues that "gynophobia is structured like a language." Sessions of the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association are devoted to "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl" and to "Desublimating the Male Sublime: Autoerotics, Anal Erotics and Corporeal Violence in Melville and William Burroughs."

(Roger Rosenblatt, "The Universities: A Bitter Attack" [review of Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals*], New York Times Book Review, 22 April 1990)

If we now turn to the significance of the macho-style for gay men, it would, I think, be accurate to say that this style gives rise to two reactions, both of which indicate a profound respect for machismo itself. One is the classic put-down: the butch number swaggering into a bar in a leather get-up opens his mouth and sounds like a pansy, takes you home, where the first thing you notice is the complete works of Jane Austen, gets you into bed, and—well, you know the rest. In short, the mockery of gay machismo is almost exclusively an internal affair, and it is based on the dark suspicion that you may not be getting the real article. The other reaction is, quite simply, sexual excitement.

(Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*)

JANE AUSTEN always seems to inspire radically contradictory appeals to self-evidence. For Roger Rosenblatt, as for Roger Kimball, "common sense" dictates that Austen is obviously straitlaced and straight, and would

have seemed off-limits to the nonsense of sex and gender analysis if tenured radicals had not turned the world, the obviously prim Miss Austen included, upside down. Pressing fantasies about the serenity of Regency England into the service of heterosexual presumption, Kimball and Rosenblatt place Austen *before* the advent of such ills as industrialization, dubiety, feminism, homosexuality, masturbation, the unconscious. In her novels, men are gentlemen, women are ladies, and the desires of gentlemen and ladies for each other are intelligible, complementary, mutually fulfilling, and, above all, *inevitable*. Not that such assumptions are articulated. The whole point is *not* that they do not have to be but that they must never be; as David Halperin has suggested, heterosexuality is the love that dares not speak its name, and argument would denaturalize and *out* it.¹ Recoiling from this possibility as from apocalypse itself, Rosenblatt describes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's paper on *Sense and Sensibility* as one of the many "horror stories" that make Kimball seem like a bearded prophet of old: the world may indeed be coming to an end; even Jane Austen is not safe.²

For Leo Bersani, the case is different, testifying inadvertently as he does to Austen's status among gay men. His anecdote comes to us as an old and disappointing story. Like Rosenblatt, he relies on "common" knowledge and on an audience that similarly will recognize his anecdote as a *classic*, a story *you*—which is to say, "we gay boys"—all know and that for this reason will require no elaboration. Calling attention to the ambivalences about effeminacy and macho within the gay community itself, Bersani's anecdote shows that homosexuality and the *Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen* are not strange bedfellows. Even as we speak, some leather-clad "butch number" may be "swaggering" up to a not-so-unsuspecting boy in a bar, his mind full of the ball at Netherfield and hot sex. Sure, he is, as Bersani puts it, a "pansy": "you" may pretend "you" had no inkling of this until later, but "you" knew it as soon as he "open[ed] his mouth," and obviously liked it well enough to go home with him in the first place. But his passion for Austen, recognized later, makes him doubly so, guaranteeing that he will be a bottom: "well, you know the rest." Bersani's complex and rather Austenian mockery aside, Austen's novels appear often to have facilitated rather than dampened conversation between men. In 1899, when he was a student at Cambridge, E. M. Forster was whisked to a fellow's room expressly to examine a new deluxe edition of Austen's novels;³ and Montague Summers remembers "hotly championing the cause of Jane Austen" to the "charming" poet Robert Nichols, a man "distractingly violent . . . but most attractive in his flaming zeal and pale vehemence."⁴ The precise nature of these Austenian encounters we do not know. This much is clear, however: the real joke in Bersani's story is not

the "complete works of Jane Austen" but the "leather get-up," and their simultaneously denied and desired conjunction.

A comparable clash of assumptions over what Austen is like and what kind of converse her novels promote reemerged in 1995 in the *London Review of Books*, when Terry Castle discussed Austen's intense attachment to her sister Cassandra and claimed that sister-sister relations are just as important as marriage in the novels, if not more so. The editors of the *LRB* sought controversy: why else entitle the review "Was Jane Austen Gay?" without Castle's say-so? But no one expected the vehemence that followed, as scores of people rushed to rescue Austen from the charge of "sister-love": one reader, assuming that "Terry" was a man, damned the "drip-drip" smuttiness of "his" discussions of women's familiarity; some swore up and down that marriages in Austen's novels were perfectly felicitous without requiring the supplemental pleasures of sororal love; others insisted testily, if inanely, that since sisters commonly shared beds in those days, it is anachronistic to imply that their intimacy meant anything "more." Austen scholar B. C. Southam entered the fray: does Austen describe women's bodies with "homophilic fascination," as Castle suggested? Not to worry: Austen was an amateur seamstress and thus had a perfectly innocent reason for attending to how gowns hugged the persons of her female acquaintance. The outcry, extensively covered in the British media, even reached *Newsweek* and *Time*, where one reader grumbled, "So Jane Austen may have been a lesbian. . . . Who cares?" only to continue by complaining about the "questionable practices" of psychoanalyzing historical subjects unable to speak for themselves and of reading too much into the "love language of women." Vainly did Castle plead that she had never asserted the existence of an incestuously lesbian relationship between Austen and her sister: the words *homophilic* and *homeroatic* provoked readers to announce that the limits of tolerance had been reached. Castle had "polluted the shrine," and this would not be suffered.⁵

The heteronormativity of Austen seems as obvious to Rosenblatt, Kimball, and outraged readers of the *LRB* as her queerness does to Castle, Bersani, and the men in his anecdote. How can we account for this anomaly, and why should we bother? In attempting to answer this, I make no claims to neutrality. I cast my lot with the queer Austen and believe that the question of Austen's reception and readerships merits substantial consideration. Such is the enormity of Austen's status as a cultural institution, however, and such is her centrality to the canon of British literature in general, that the issues surrounding these controversies are really much larger. What if Austen *were* "gay" (as the *LRB* put it)? I hope to show that modern Austen criticism labored to occlude this possibility when a middle-class professorate wrested Austen from upper-class Jancites, and when the disciplined study of the novel was being founded. Central to this un-

dertaking, then, is a consideration of different traditions, motives, and modes of valuation regarding Austen.⁶ While I will begin by tracing the sexual politics of Austenian valuations and how these get appropriated by constituencies of different class and sexual positions, I will go on to uncover the terms on which Austen's place in the founding of the disciplined study of the novel was established. Although my principal aim will be to illuminate the history of Austenian reception as it sheds light on the institution of novel studies,⁷ at the same time, by considering the phenomenon of "Janeiteism," I also hope to genealogize the perceived queerness of many of her readers, as this queerness has been played out euphemistically in (sometimes overlapping) oppositions between macho and "effeminate" standards of masculinity, and between academic and belletristic models of novel criticism.

To listen to the readers who attacked Sedgwick and Castle, we might imagine that no one had *ever* doubted Austen's normativity before. This is so far from the case that the wonder is rather that Austen's normality itself now appears beyond question to so many. "Is she queer?—Is she prudish?" (230). So asks the rakish Henry Crawford of *Mansfield Park* as he wonders about Austen's nerdiest heroine, Fanny Price. For some reason, the erotic charm that makes married and unmarried women in that novel yield to Henry's desire fails to make a dent on this mousy, inhibited, and intense girl. Stymied by Fanny's resistance to his allure, Henry tries to determine Fanny's "character" (230). Is something *wrong* with her (is she odd, out of sorts, cold, and thus peculiarly resistant to normal heterosexual seduction)? Or is something "wrong" with him (do his multiple and serial flirtations deserve the censure this unusually, but not abnormally, moral young lady levels against them)? Fanny decides in favor of the severity of rectitude, but the novel refuses to settle between propriety and pathology, and insists on their confusion.

Henry's reading of Fanny as either queer or prudish describes two traditions of Austenian reception.⁸ Ever since Archbishop Whately claimed in 1821 that Austen was "evidently a Christian writer,"⁹ many readers have been either pleased or infuriated to find that her novels are given over to orthodox morality, conservative politics, and strenuous propriety. This view is hardly the handiwork of the academic right wing, much less of heterosexist readers. Such are the asymmetries of the sex-gender system brilliantly elucidated by Judith Butler, among others, that it is not hard to find critics working within the camps of feminism, deconstruction, and queer studies who view Austen as Rosenblatt and Kimball might wish.

D. A. Miller, for example, who has done so much for the study of "gay fabulation," reads Austen much as Allan Bloom does: what Bloom admires as wholesomely instructive and disciplinary in Austen's style and narrative structures, Miller can describe as violently hygienic and correctional. Different valuation: same Austen.¹⁰

Even though Kimball and Rosenblatt cast themselves as righteous amateurs opposing the lunacy rampant in the academy, the Jane Austen prevailing in the British and American academies today actually belongs to this normative tradition. It is only recently, however, that this Austen became the only widely visible one. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, an antinormative tradition developed. Ever since Mrs. Oliphant praised the "feminine cynicism" and "quiet jeering" of her fiction,¹¹ another set of readers has been either pleased or infuriated to find that Austen is not committed to the values of her neighborhood or to any values *qua* values at all, that she is disengaged from dominant moral and political norms, particularly as these are underwritten by the institutions of heterosexuality and marriage.

Because Austen's heterosexuality was not guaranteed by marriage, doubts about her sexuality have been played out in different historical moments as asexuality, as frigidity, and as lesbianism. This "queerness," as we might now term it, has been used to account for her fiction from the get-go. Charlotte Brontë linked the formal perfection of Austen's novels—her attention to "the surface of the lives of genteel English people"—to her indifference to "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through."¹² Lionel Trilling attributed many readers' "feral" hostility to Austen to "man's panic fear at a fictional world in which the masculine principle, although represented as admirable and necessary, is prescribed and controlled by a female mind."¹³ His explanation, however, misrepresents such animosity as a conflict between the sexes, when it is a conflict about sexuality. It is not because she is a woman that D. H. Lawrence and Brontë deplore her, but because she is a woman whose fiction does not reverence the love of virile men. Thus Lawrence decried "this old maid" for typifying "the sharp knowing in apartness" rather than the "blood connection" between the sexes; and George Sampson complained, "In her world there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but just the make-believe mating of dolls. . . . Jane Austen is abnormal . . . because [her characters] have no sex at all."¹⁴

The history of Austen criticism has often been darkened by the scorn Austen-haters express for novels in which men and women are more absorbed in village tittle-tattle than in each other. For this reason, male admirers of Austen have had much to endure at the hands of a world that frowns upon their love. H. W. Garrod's famous "Jane Austen: A Deprecia-

tion," an address delivered to the Royal Society of Literature in 1928, attacks the whole notion of Austen's greatness on sexual grounds. Austen is an "irredeemably humdrum" writer precisely because she holds herself aloof from sexual passion for men, and so "was as incapable of having a story as of writing one—by a story I mean a sequence of happenings, either romantic or uncommon." Garrod's misogynist "Depreciation" is aimed just as much at male Janeites in the audience as at Austen herself: "There is a time to be born and a time to die, and a time to be middle-aged and read Miss Austen." A man content to read novels by "a mere slip of a girl," as Garrod describes her, must be a mere slip of a girl himself. Having unmanned themselves not simply by admiring a woman writer—which is bad enough—but, even worse, by idolizing a sharp-tongued woman unimpressed with men (Garrod takes offense at Austen's quip, "Admiral Stanhope is a gentlemanlike man, but then his legs are too short and his tail too long"), men who *like* Austen are like the "pansy" in Bersani's story, doubly feminized.¹⁵

The Janeites Garrod ridicules are not the philistine consumers of "their 'dear,' our dear, everybody's dear, Jane" whom Henry James castigated decades earlier, readers who valued Austen as an instance of high culture in its least challenging form, and whose Janeitism was a badge of gentility.¹⁶ On the contrary, in its most influential forms, the Janeitism of the early twentieth century was, with the prominent exception of Shakespeare scholar Caroline Spurgeon, principally a male enthusiasm shared among an elite corps of publishers, professors, and literati, such as Montague Summers, A. C. Bradley, Lord David Cecil, Sir Walter Raleigh, R. W. Chapman, and E. M. Forster. At the Royal Society of Literature, in particular, Austen's genius was celebrated with a militantly dotty enthusiasm. Far from regarding their interest in Austen as "work," Janeites flaunt it as the ecstasy of the elect: she was not merely their *dear* Jane, but their *divine* Jane, their *matchless* Jane, and they were her *cult*, her *sect*, her *little company* (fit though few), her *tribe* of adorers who celebrate the *miracle* of her work in flamboyantly hyperbolic terms. Although their zeal is genuine, the self-parody implicit in these encomia tells us that we are in an insider's society of scholar-gentlemen at play.¹⁷

In much the same way the trekkies, fans, and mass culture media enthusiasts of today are, as Henry Jenkins has shown, marginalized by dominant cultural institutions.¹⁸ Janeites constitute a reading community whose practices violate a range of protocols later instituted by professional academics when novel studies emerged—dogmas holding, for example, that you cannot talk about characters as if they were real people; that reading novels requires specialist skills and knowledge developed at universities; that hermeneutic mastery, as exemplified in a comprehensive "reading,"

is the objective of legitimate novel criticism; that the courtship plot celebrating marriage and maturity is the determinative event in Austen's fiction; and that the business of reading novels is solitary rather than sociable. To exemplify what Janeite reading looked like before novel criticism and readings per se existed, I will turn to Rudyard Kipling's "The Janeites."

A story within a frame-story and further enframed by poems, "The Janeites" is set at a London Masonic Lodge in 1920, where shell-shocked veteran Humberstall talks about a secret society into which he was inducted years earlier while serving under the supervision of Sergeant Macklin as an officers' mess waiter with his World War I artillery battery in France.¹⁹ One day, as the officers discuss whether "Jane" (DC, 124) died without leaving "direct an' lawful prog'ny" (DC, 124), Macklin (who is very drunk) loudly interrupts the officers' conversation with the claim, "She *did* leave lawful issue in the shape o' one son; an' 'is name was 'Enery James'" (DC, 124). Puzzled that the superior officers, far from punishing this insubordinate intrusion, have the sergeant taken off to bed and cared for, Humberstall finds out more about the secret club whose membership brings such privileges. After selling him the password ("Tilniz an' trap-doors," from *Northanger Abbey*), Macklin imparts to him the mysteries of Jane, which make the war front companionable: "It *was* a 'appy little Group'" (DC, 132), he later murmurs nostalgically. When half the battery is blown up in a German artillery attack, Humberstall is the only Janeite to survive. As he struggles to board a hospital train, only to be pushed back by a woman insisting that the train is too crowded, Humberstall implores a nurse to "make Miss Bates, there, stop talkin' or I'll die" (DC, 136), and she—evidently an initiate herself—recognizes a fellow's allusion and obliges, even filching a spare blanket for his comfort.

Unlike most academic readings of Austen's fiction, this story backgrounds the courtship plot. The love story is less than inevitable for Janeites. In their civilian lives, they are chilly toward women (Jane "was the only woman I ever 'eard 'em say a good word for" [DC, 123], Humberstall remembers), and chary of domesticity (the senior Janeites are a divorce court lawyer and a private detective specializing in adultery cases). The Janeites recognize that novels are "all about young girls o' seventeen . . . not certain 'oom they'd like to marry" (DC, 126). But for them (unlike non-Janeites in the story), this detail is leveled with other details that are also part of what the novels are "all about"—including "their dances an' card parties an' picnics, and their young blokes goin' off to London on 'orseback for 'aircuts an' shaves" (DC, 126), a fact that, like the wearing

of wigs, intrigues Humberstall, who is a hairdresser in civilian life. As for Austenian plots, "there was nothin' to 'em nor in 'em. Nothin' at all" (DC, 128).

Defended by school lads, equipped with superannuated cannons, and mobilized by a dilapidated train rather than modern transport Caterpillars, the Janeites' battery is pitifully doomed. Indeed, they cathect onto Austen's novels precisely because "there was nothin' to 'em." Unlike current scholars of narrative, for whom plot bears the lion's share of narrative significance, Janeite readers ignore plot with its forward-moving moments, its inevitabilities, its "maturity," and its closure, and dwell instead on atemporal aspects of narration, descriptive details, catchy phrases, and, especially, characterization (as the appreciations of real-life Janeites such as A. C. Bradley and Spurgeon attest). In this story, identifying people and things in their own experience, and renaming them according to Austen's characters, the soon-to-be-slaughtered Janeites piece together a shattering world.

Because "real-life" Janeites would soon be decried as escapist retreats to the placidity of Austen's world, it is worth stressing that Kipling's Janeites do not do this. Their Jane Austen—as distinct from the Austen celebrated in the prefatory poem as "England's Jane" (DC, 120)—is never described by them as a repository of ethical wisdom; nor is she linked with a feminine elegiac ideal of England whose very vulnerability is what knightly menfolk must fight to protect. After the war, Humberstall reads Austen's novels not because they help him recover the prior world unshaken by war but precisely because they remind him of the trenches: "It brings it all back—down to the smell of the glue-paint on the screens. You take it from me, Brethren, there's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place" (DC, 137).

As for that tight place. We have already seen that many in the academy and outside it assume that Austenian admirers are properly and aggressively heteronormative. For this reason, it is also worth emphasizing that Janeite confederacies had little truck with domesticity. Kipling's story mentions two secret homosocial societies—the Masons and the Janeites—but several details suggest that Austen's fiction promoted a secret brotherhood of specifically homoerotic fellowship, too. When Humberstall chalks the names of Austenian characters onto the guns, he infuriates the battery sergeant major (BSM), who reads his Cockney spelling "De Bugg"—for De Bourgh—as a reference to sodomy. Determined to punish him for "writin' obese words on His Majesty's property" (DC, 131), the BSM takes the case to the officers on the grounds that "'e couldn't hope to preserve discipline unless examples was made" (DC, 121). What the BSM does not know, of course, is that the Janeites exist, and that the officers will not discipline one of their own: the officers dismiss the charges, send

the BSM away, and entertain themselves by quizzing Humberstall on Janeite discourse—which would later be trivialized as "gossip" by presumptively masculine professional critics—has the cultural value of promoting fellowship among a group of people living under the aegis of the closet, and their coded and otherwise specialized speech indicates their membership in a "club" that exists covertly within a hostile world.

The narrator of the story, not a Janeite, closes by observing that Austen was "a match-maker" and her novels "full of match-making" (DC, 138), and by hinting at a secondary character's marriage to Humberstall's sister. Kipling also attaches a sequel poem, entitled "Jane's Marriage," in which Austen enters the gates of heaven and is rewarded in matrimony by Captain Wentworth. These multiple efforts to reinstate the marriage plot are risible in themselves (Wentworth is not only fictional but already married) and at odds with the Janeiteism elsewhere in the story: the frame-story is thus a sop thrown to "a pious post-war world" (DC, 129), which requires what the narrator calls "revision" of the truth. One of these truths is that Janeites are committed to club rather than domestic society. They are as barren of "direct an' lawful prog'ny" as Austen herself, leaving no issue, the surviving Humberstall being a stranger to women. The reproduction they are interested in pertains to the dissemination of Janeite culture itself. Just as Austen brought forth James, Janeites bring forth other Janeites—by recruitment. Macklin is pleased when Humberstall renames the guns after Austenian characters: "He reached up an' patted me on the shoulder. 'You done nobly,' he says. 'You're bringin' forth abundant fruit, like a good Janeite'" (DC, 130).

Early-twentieth-century Janeiteism emerges from specific historical needs. Before World War I, Frederic Harrison described Austen as a "rather heartless little cynic . . . penning satires against her neighbors whilst the Dynasts were tearing the world to pieces and consigning millions to their graves."²⁰ Harrison deplored Austen's isolation, but once the dynasts of our century went at it, many readers loved her presumed ahistoricity, indulging in elegiac yearnings through Austen that Kipling's story both conjures and undermines. To Janeites outside Kipling's story, her novels evoked a world *before* history blew up, before manners were archaic. As Christopher Kent has shown, Austen's novels were recommended to British veterans suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome after the war.²¹ For soldiers whose minds were shattered by dynastic history, the famously limited dimensions of Austen's fictional world could feel rehabilitative; her parlors could feel manageable; her very triviality could feel redemptive. Assumptions about *feminine* propriety embedded within this fantasy—about transparency, restraint, poise—shored up masculine lucidity and self-definition when these, along with English national identity itself, were under duress.

D. A. Miller's compelling, latter-day conviction that when he was ill, Jane Austen's novels "did more than accompany [his] return to health; they accomplished it"²² owes much to this postwar Janeite construction of Austen as a restorative to sensitive men. But as the more ambiguous core of Kipling's story attests, whatever "normality" Austen's novels might foster is attenuated given the indifference to heterosexual passion, domesticity, and heroic masculinity expressed there. In any case, when W. J. Blyton wrote in 1947, "Men as masculine as Scott and Kipling have been Janeites and have been enthralled by her sly humour and fidelity to reality,"²³ his defense of a manifold readership demonstrated what he sought to deny: that Janeites were already suspected of being not masculine enough.

This suspicion motivates the emergence of what we now recognize as modern Austenian criticism, which begins with D. W. Harding's "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen" (1940). The principle of this pathbreaking essay is that Austen's "books are . . . read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked."²⁴ The "people" Harding refers to are clearly Janeites, described by Harding with withering contempt as the "exponents of urbanity," the "sensitive," and the "cultured," the "Gentlemen of an older generation than mine" who disseminate Austeniana "through histories of literature, university courses, literary journalism, and polite allusions" ("RH," 166).²⁵ Although the Janeitism of this period was actually more productive than he acknowledges—giving us, for one thing, Chapman's 1923 edition of Austen's novels, the first scholarly edition of any British novelist—Harding dismisses Janeites as weakling escapists who resort to the idyllic figure of Jane as a "refuge" when "the contemporary world grew too much for them" ("RH," 166).²⁶

Absolutely foundational to the practice of Austenian criticism in the academy was the discrediting of Janeites such as existed in Kipling's story and in the Royal Society of Literature. Deploying an invidious distinction between the "attentive" and the "urbane," Harding calls Janeites her worst readers: "She is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine" ("RH," 167). Harding's qualifications as a good reader, it is implied, derive from his alienation from upper-class mores, an alienation Austen is said to have shared. Claiming that Austen would never "have helped to make society what it was, or ours what it is," Harding trumps the Janeite "posterity of urbane gentlemen" by disaffiliating Austen from them ("RH," 179, 170).

Harding's depiction of Austen as subversive was valuable to the next generation of academics, especially feminists. But his motives were hardly emancipatory. In order to champion middle-class values, Harding and others after him reshuffle the relations between gender norms and sexual practices and/or identities. Defining Janeites as upper-class gentlemen of

doubtful virility, Harding hinted that Austen was more of a real man—tough-minded, astringent, unblinking—than they were. F. R. Leavis carries this project of reshuffling forward in *The Great Tradition*, which is, among other things, a running diatribe against Janeite extraordinaire Lord David Cecil. Leavis dignifies Austen and the great tradition of fiction she originated by insisting on her moral seriousness; accordingly, the leisured enjoyment of Janeites—with their fondness for entertainment, character, and comedy—is hateful to him. Lord David's influence—detected in books, lectures, exam questions and answers at Cambridge—is so deep that Leavis treats him not as a scholar-dandy but as a downright pervert. The homophobic gender component of Leavis's class-based critique tars Lord David as a homosexual despite his evident heterosexuality. Leavis makes this insinuation by playing up Lord David's Bloomsbury connections, taunting him for regarding Jane Austen as "an ideal contemporary of Lytton Strachey" rather than as a dour moralist and as a formative influence on George Eliot. Assailing Lord David's perceived preference for Austen's stylized comedy over Eliot's "puritan" morality, Leavis champions bourgeois virtue at the expense of Bloomsbury aestheticism: Eliot (like Austen, it is implied)

admired truthfulness and chastity and industry and self-restraint, she disapproved of loose living and recklessness and deceit and self-indulgence. . . . I had better confess that I differ (apparently) from Lord David Cecil in sharing these beliefs, admirations and disapprovals. . . . [T]hey seem to me favourable to the production of great literature. I will add . . . that the enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority to them leads, in my view, to triviality and boredom, and that out of that triviality comes evil.²⁷

Janeites might be so debilitated or so depraved or so despairing as to enjoy triviality as a reprieve from the business of productive signification, but the brisk and booming Leavis is here to assure us that triviality and its advocates alike are heinous.

What makes Harding's and Leavis's attacks on Janeites different from Garrod's, of course, is that they *like* Austen. They clear themselves from the charge of effeminacy by making Austen safe for real men engaged in real study, driving a wedge between the good (masculine) queerness of Austen and the bad (feminine) queerness of etiolated Janeites. Post-World War II Austenian reception thus participates in that demand to consolidate and reinvigorate masculinity elsewhere visible in the larger context of British and American culture. While such criticism conduced to the rise of Austen studies, some time elapsed before it generated a countermethod of reading that value-coded the marriage plot as the preeminent significance-bearing structural or thematic element of her novels, and devalued Janeite discussions as gossip that promoted the silly sociability of the brethren

rather than the production of moral earnestness.²⁸ Edmund Wilson, for example, chides G. B. Stern and Sheila Kaye-Smith's Janeite book, *Speaking of Jane Austen* (1944), for treating characters "as actual people . . . and speculating on their lives beyond the story."²⁹ But when Wilson argues that Emma's offstage lesbianism is "something outside the picture which is never made explicit in the story but which has to be recognized by the reader before it is possible for him to appreciate the book," he carries on the Janeite practice of reading beyond what is printed.³⁰ And when he trails off into a fantasy about how Emma will bewilder Knightley by continuing to invite lovely new female protégées into the household after they are married, he shows that the marriage plot is no bar against the imagination or enactment of futures different from, or even inimical to, it.³¹

It was not until the sixties that the marriage plot gained the prestige it now enjoys in academic readings of classic British fiction. Marvin Mudrick's profoundly influential *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* moved in this direction, but this, too, was by omission. Expecting Austen's novels to narrativize the maturing processes of heterosexual love, Mudrick is scandalized to find that her heart just isn't in this project. Whereas Harding and Leavis attacked the deviance of Janeites, Mudrick dwells on the deviance of Austen; he sees the bachelor toughness they admired in her as a spinster's sick resentment. For him, irony—Austen's most celebrated stylistic achievement—is diagnosed as a defense mechanism against that "great, unknown, adult commitment," that is, "sexual love."³² Mudrick's book elaborates earlier suspicions about Austen's sexual peculiarity by alluding to same-sex love directly in his chapter on Emma—that heroine deemed most like Austen in her fear of commitment, her coldness, her irony, her penchant for authorship, and her need to dominate, to "play God" by playing *man*: "The fact is that Emma," he writes, "prefers the company of women. . . . Emma is in love with [Harriet]: a love unphysical and inadmissible, even perhaps undefinable in such a society; and therefore safe" (DD, 193, 203).³³ Appearing in 1952, when a discourse of psychosexual pathology was readily at hand, Mudrick's book assumes that Austen's queerness is homosexuality tout court. All future attempts on behalf of Austen's normativity would succeed or fail to the extent that they could answer him.

Austen's massively definitive normalization came with Wayne Booth's widely reprinted "Control of Distance in Jane Austen's *Emma*" (1961), which not only passionately defends Emma Woodhouse's heterosexuality but also links the proper reading of Austenian narrative with a proper respect for the self-evidence of marital felicity in novels and outside them: "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—whatever they may say about the 'bitter spinster's' attitude towards marriage." According to Booth's formalism, marriage is not a matter of pairing character *x* to character *y*, as it is in Stern and Kaye-Smith's book *Speaking of Jane Austen*. If it were, novel studies would be a species of gossip (of the sort in which Janeites revel), novel critics would be lightweight, and novels themselves would not deserve the respect accorded to poetry and drama. Equating the ending of the novel with its telos, Booth elevates the structural and moral import of marriage as the novel's inevitable, its only possible, meaning: plot brings about "the reform of [Emma's] character," and heterosexual love is what Emma must "learn" for the novel to end. Evidence is unnecessary to sustain this standard of value. Countless readers have claimed that the infamous absence of "love scenes" in Austen's novels must mean *something*. Not so for Booth: norms about gender and sexuality are encoded onto plot so that representation in the form of kisses, palpitations, and embraces is superfluous.³⁴ If you don't see this, you don't know how to read novels.

Rescuing Austen from Mudrick,³⁵ Booth succeeded in celebrating Austen's mastery over voice and plot as a positive thing, advancing novel studies as an analytic discipline. In the process, he equated the perversity of women who indulge same-sex "infatuations" with the perversity of readers who refuse to credit a happy ending when they see one. Sedgwick has remarked that Austenian criticism belongs to the bottom-spanking "Girl Being Taught a Lesson" mode of criticism.³⁶ As a description of criticism since the late fifties, this seems quite right. Critics as diverse as Tony Tanner, Ian Watt, and Mary Poovey all concur in maintaining that character development, formal control, voice, and ideological resistance/complicity are mediated through marriage, as an institution and plot device.

Indeed, so entrenched is this respect and so short our institutional memory that we have forgotten that there are other ways to read courtship plots. E. M. Forster, whose *Aspects of the Novel* was still taught in fiction courses when Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* was cresting, accorded the courtship plot less power: "A man and woman . . . want to be united and perhaps succeed." The compulsory nature of the love story as described here is acknowledged, and that compulsion has ideological import that we know weighed very heavily on Forster's own career. Still, it seems important to observe that Forster describes these events *not* under the headings "Plot" or "Story" but under the heading "People," classifying it not as an overarching structure but as one among many "facts of human life"—alongside birth, food, sleep, death, and other people—that interest people and novelists who write about them.³⁷ Many similar Janeite reading practices discussed earlier with respect to Kipling's story flourish today in the Jane Austen Societies, where fans convene to stage teas, balls, games, readings, and dramatic representations; to take quizzes (bringing together

minutiae with no hierarchy or agenda-driven priority); and to imagine together how a character in one novel might behave toward a character from another, all of which practices render Austen's novels one loose, baggy middle.

The discipline of novel studies that evolved in England and America during the fifties and sixties was bent first on devaluing Janeites as effete—excessive, aberrant, frivolous, undomesticated, contemptibly weak yet morally pernicious at one and the same time—and next on eradicating everything in Austen and her fiction that might legitimize their way of reading. I began by asking what would happen if Austen *were* “gay,” as the *LRB* put it. Now I will venture to answer with a hunch: If the “case” of Rock Hudson showed that our icon of masculinity was gay, the “case” of Jane Austen presented the unnerving possibility that *manners* are gay, that civility (of which Austen has been deemed the preeminent exemplar) may rest on a basis different from what is commonly imagined, and that (the terror of the prophet Kimball about the end of the world notwithstanding) gay manners are profoundly productive. This, indeed, seems to be Leavis's fear, and unless we recognize this, his attacks on Lord David will seem bizarrely out of place. Furiously resisting Lord David's seemingly innocuous statement that Austen's novels are “entertainment,” Leavis attacks Lord David for holding that Austen creates “delightful characters” and “lets us forget our cares and moral tensions in the comedy of pre-eminently civilized life.” Lord David's opinion might well seem so tepid as not to deserve attacking, but as Leavis sees it, the “idea of ‘civilization’ invoked [here] appears to be closely related to that expounded by Mr. Clive Bell,” which is to say, conducing to “the cult of the stylized, the conventionalized, the artificial, just for their own sakes.” In saying this, Leavis is damning the homosexual's Jane Austen, the decadent's Jane Austen, damning all persons for whom manners bear no relation to nature—which, here, is shorthand for bourgeois morality and heterosexual desire. Leavis's target is all readers who take for granted that manners and morality are different things, who regard manners as publicly recognized fictions that make it possible for people with other things on their mind to behave well.³⁸ Similarly, when Mudrick complained that Austen “was interested in a person, an object, an event, only as she might observe and recreate them free from consequences, as performance, as tableau” (*DD*, 3), he shows that Austen's novels yield up the amoral readings Leavis deplores as Bloomsburian, though Mudrick, of course, shares Leavis's anxiety about them. For Mudrick, Austen queers the courtship narrative so that the love story is presented “not sentimentally, not morally, indeed not [connected] to any train of consequences, but with detached discrimination among its incongruities” (*DD*, 3).

Fearful of the campy space Austen opens up between manners and desire, critics such as Booth and Trilling, as Susan Winnett has suggested, collapse manners into morals, making it possible to bring Austen (along with James) safely into a middle-class canon.³⁹ C. S. Lewis's essay “A Note on Jane Austen” continues this process for Austen studies by regenealogizing her: “[Austen] is described by someone in Kipling's worst story as the mother of Henry James,” he taunts, referring to “The Janeites,” “[but] I feel much more sure that she is the daughter of Dr. Johnson.” Assailing proponents of the comic, mannered Jane Austen—those who turn her into a Regency James, or, worse, a Regency Wilde—Lewis manfully insists that Austen's comedy is inspired by “hard core morality” and “religion.”⁴⁰ The process of straightening Austen out, then, occurs in conjunction with the development of a view of narrative that presumes its province to be desire (hegemonic, heteronormative) rather than manners (which may be practiced self-consciously, skeptically, and strategically).

The success of this enterprise is proven by the present invisibility of what was so glaring in the forties and fifties. Even Sedgwick and Castle—in their initial papers, and in their responses to the furor they caused—appear unaware that their positions have ample and rather recent precedent. Likewise, when Southam accounts for Garrod's claim that Janeites liked women too much by insinuating that Garrod did not like women enough (“He spent much of his life at Oxford, unmarried, where he had rooms in Merton College for over fifty years”),⁴¹ he shows, among other things, that Austen is presumptively a straight man's writer, putting admirers—from Wilde, to Swinburne, to Housman, to Forster, whose “I am a Jane Austenite” sounds like a coming-out statement—beyond consideration.⁴²

This review of Austen's recent revaluations suggests several opportunities for further study. First, it is now a given that the novel “rose” to ideological prominence by the 1740s; but this essay shows that the work of “raising” the novel was still undone as late as 1940, when the curriculum at Oxbridge was being revised, and that the elevation of novel studies has a distinct relation to Austen. Second, in attempting to resist what are, to my mind, rather inflexible desire-driven models of “realistic” narrative that prevail today, this project also suggests that it may be worth our while to distinguish between the theory of the novel and the theory of narrative, and to historicize both. While it is widely assumed that novels are a branch of the police, this discussion suggests that it is not novels but rather the professionalization of novel studies which deployed methods of reading that guaranteed certain outcomes and devalued others. And third, for Austen study more specifically, this review shows how much we have to gain by bringing nonnormalizing Austenian readings back into view. For the denial and outrage of Kimball, Southam, and others notwithstanding, it has been not only Austen's detractors but her admirers, too, who have

suspected that the "Passions" were (as Brontë put it) "entirely unknown" to her not because Austen was such a good girl but because in some secret, perhaps not fully definable, way, she was so bad.

Notes

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1. David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 48. See also Paul Morrison's *Sexual Subjects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

2. *New York Times*, 22 April 1990, 36. Sedgwick discusses neoconservative attacks on her MLA paper in "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," in *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993). I have found Sedgwick's remarks on self-evidence particularly suggestive.

3. See Southam 1987, 2:60.

4. Montague Summers, *The Galantry Show* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1980), 225.

5. Terry Castle's "Was Jane Austen Gay?" appeared as a review article of Deirdre Le Faye's new edition of Austen's letters in the *London Review of Books*, 3 August 1995. Her response, along with that of several other readers, appeared in the next issue, 24 August 1995. B. C. Southam's letter was published in the 7 September 1995 *LRB*. *Time* magazine reported on this "kerfuffle" in its 14 August 1995 issue; responses appeared in the 4 September 1995 issue.

6. My sense of Austen's cultural value owes much to John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) in general, and more to Eric O. Clarke in particular, whose work on Shelley is profoundly suggestive. See "Shelley's Heart: Sexual Politics and Cultural Value," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 8 (spring 1995): 187-208. I am moreover grateful to Clarke for providing me with so many challenging suggestions for this essay.

7. The conflict rehearsed here about Austen not surprisingly recalls debates about the novel, too, whose narrative structures and agendas have been seen as repressive and "policing," or as resistant and theatrical. See, for example, D. A. Miller, *Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), and Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

8. For a fuller discussion of the development of Austenian reception, see my "Austen Cults and Cultures," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Juliet McMaster and Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 211-26.

9. Southam 1968, 1:95.

10. Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 191-208. Bloom, interestingly enough, attributes Austen's disciplinary lucidity precisely to her sexual detachment: "Perhaps her position as a novelist outside of the marriage game that is her subject matter permits her relative clarity and free-

dom from self-deception" (205). D. A. Miller, "The Late Jane Austen," *Raritan* 10 (1990): 55-79.

11. From "Miss Austen and Miss Mitford," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1870, reprinted in Southam 1968, 217.

12. Also: "Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete, and rather insensible (*not senseless*) woman" (Charlotte Brontë, letter to W. S. Williams, 12 April 1850, in Southam 1968, 128).

13. Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 209.

14. See D. H. Lawrence, "A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover," in Southam 1987, 2:107; George Sampson, "Jane Austen," *Bookman* 65, no. 388 (January 1924): 193.

15. H. W. Garrod's "Jane Austen: A Depreciation" was published in *Essays by Divers Hands: Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* 8 (1928): 21-40; it has been reprinted in numerous other places. The version I have quoted is from William W. Heath, ed., *Discussions of Jane Austen* (Boston: Heath and Company, 1961), 32-40.

16. James's remarks, originally appearing in "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905) and reprinted in *The House of Fiction*, are included in Southam 1987, 2:230. Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) traces James's at first satirical response to aestheticism, especially as exemplified by Wilde, which then modulates into an attempt to create a purified, creative, and moral (because productive) aestheticism in his major fiction. Although Freedman is hesitant about engaging the erotic transgressiveness and especially the homoeroticism associated with aestheticism, his discussion of professionalism is quite relevant to my study. In attempting to wrest criticism from the *hoi polloi* and assign it to professionals, James is anticipating strategies that would later marginalize him, and James's own place in the genealogy of the novel is curiously unstable.

17. See Montague Summers, "Jane Austen: An Appreciation," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* 36 (1918): 1-33. Summers's language of divine election is typical of all Janeites.

18. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Jenkins draws from Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) and from Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) to show how high culturalists feel tainted by the adoption of their protocols for use with respect to low-culture objects and to suggest that fans transgress bourgeois structures of cultural valuation, which are bent on legitimizing their own objects and protocols of expertise.

19. Rudyard Kipling's "The Janeites" is included in *Debts and Credits* (1926). It was begun in 1922, finished in 1923, and first published in 1924, in a slightly different version from what appeared in the 1926 volume. All quotations are from *Debts and Credits*, ed. Sandra Kemp (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 119-40. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *DC*.

20. Frederic Harrison, letter to Thomas Hardy, 10 November 1913, cited in Southam 1987, 2:87-88.

21. According to Kent, H. F. Brett Smith, an Oxford tutor, served in World War I as an adviser in British hospitals. His special responsibility was the prescription of salubrious reading for the wounded, and he recommended Austen's novels to "severely shell-shocked" soldiers. I am much indebted to Kent's fine essay, "Learning History with, and from, Jane Austen," in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1989), 59.

22. Miller, "The Late Jane Austen," 55.

23. W. J. Blyton's words are cited in the supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (3:434), illustrating the word *Janeite*. The editors of the *OED* cite *English Language and Literature* 7 (1947) as their source, but I have been unable to locate this publication.

24. D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), 166. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as "RH." Harding's essay was originally delivered before the Literature Society of Manchester University on 3 March 1939 and was originally printed in *Scrutiny* 8 (1940): 346-62.

25. In some respects, Harding's characterization recollects Woolf's review of the Chapman edition, which also codes Janeites as dotty and superannuated men, "elderly gentlemen living in the neighbourhood of London, who resent any slight upon her genius as if it were an insult offered to the chastity of their aunts"; in "Jane Austen at Sixty," *Nation*, 15 December 1923, 433, and reprinted without these opening swipes at the Chapman edition in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925).

26. Harding singles out Eric Linklater's Janeite prime minister in *The Impregnable Women* (1938) and Beatrice Kean Seymour's *Jane Austen: Study for a Portrait* (London: M. Joseph, 1937), where she wrote, "In a society which has enthroned the machine-gun and carried it aloft even into the quiet heavens, there will always be men and women—Escapist or not, as you please—who will turn to her novels with an unending sense of relief and thankfulness."

27. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1954), 19. Although the Austenian criticism of Queenie and F. R. Leavis surely differs profoundly from that of earlier, more belletristic Janeites, Leavis's animus sometimes prompts him to misrepresent Lord David's positions. In his *Jane Austen* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935), which originated as a lecture at Cambridge, Lord David flatly states, "Jane Austen was profoundly moral" (32), and though Leavis would probably scorn the conception of morality that Lord David attributes to her, it is stretching things, indeed, to suggest that Lord David describes Austen's morality as aesthetic or sophisticated.

28. The brilliance of Mary Lascelles's *Jane Austen and Her Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939) I regard as exceptional to the argument I am making here in its formal emphasis, which is in keeping with American models of fictional analysis. Although Lascelles's study is indeed blissfully free of nastier gender- and class-based attacks, like those of Harding, Leavis, and Mudrick, she does have a professional ax to grind, opening her book by noting that Austen's "professed"

admirers indulge in biographical minutiae rather than engage in the work of sustained criticism.

29. Austen seems to have authorized this practice when she entertained her nieces and nephews by consenting, when asked, to tell them particulars about the careers of her characters subsequent to her novels' conclusions.

30. Edmund Wilson, "A Long Talk about Jane Austen," in *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1950), 196-203.

31. It is worth noting that Wilson's essay also argues that the homoerotic bond between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* is stronger than the heterosexual bond that yokes the sisters to their male lovers.

32. Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 19. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *DD*.

33. As Mudrick himself acknowledges, this take-on Emma's lesbianism is indebted to Edmund Wilson's "A Long Talk about Jane Austen."

34. Wayne Booth's essay first appeared in *Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 243-66; it was reprinted in David Lodge, *Jane Austen: Emma, a Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 137-69. A generation of "New Critics" continued along the path Booth forged, claiming to discuss Emma's "growth" and "development" formally, but actually discussing narratives of gender and sexuality normatively.

35. According to Mudrick, Austen "converted her own personal limitations into the very form of the novel" (*DD*, 194).

36. Sedgwick, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," 125.

37. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1927), 67-82. In an excellent discussion of Forster's *Aspects*, Paul Morrison argues that Forster's remarks on narrative are much less emancipatory than what I suggest here. See "End Pleasure," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993): 53-78.

38. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 14-15 n. 6.

39. Susan Winnett pays particular attention to Trilling's 1950 essay, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in her *Terrible Sociability: The Text of Manners in Laclos, Goethe, and James* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 27-32. While I admire Winnett's study, I think she may well inherit a view of Austen that Trilling and others handed down.

40. C. S. Lewis, "A Note on Jane Austen," originally published in *Essays in Criticism* (1954), 4:359-71, reprinted in Watt, *Jane Austen*, 34, 33.

41. Southam writes that "a clue" to Garrod's dislike of Austen lies in the fact that he was "a distinguished classical scholar who moved to English studies in the 1920s" (Southam 1987, 2:154 n. 13). Of course, many passionate Janeites answer to this description, so this "clue" explains nothing.

42. Forster, cited in Southam 1987, 2:154. Wilde writes from Reading Gaol in a letter of 6 April 1897, "Later on, there being hardly any novel in the prison library for the poor imprisoned fellows I live with, I think of presenting the library with about a dozen good novels. Stevenson's, some of Thackeray. . . . Jane Austen

(none here)." Wilde writes on 1 September 1890, "My dear Robbie, thank you for the cheque. Your letter is very maddening: nothing about yourself, and yet you know I love middle-class tragedies, and the little squabbles that build up family life in England. I have had delightful letters from you in the style of Jane Austen." According to biographer Richard Perceval Graves, A. E. Housman "enjoyed some of Hardy's novels, though he preferred Jane Austen." Evidently Housman's friend Arthur Platt, who held the chair in Greek at University College, London, "knew the novels of Jane Austen practically by heart." See *A. E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 84, and *passim*. Swinburne appears to have liked Austen as well, or at least he wrote Chatto (on 26 December 1882), asking him to send the "Steventon [*sic*] edition of Miss Austen."

2

Jane Austen's Friendship

MARY ANN O'FARRELL

RECENTLY, taking up Valerie Grosvenor Myer's *Jane Austen: Obstinate Heart*, I found myself—when the opening chapter title asked "What Was She Like?"—turning to the chapter with a certain eagerness, as if expecting that it would fulfill its promise, and as if expecting that, having read it, I might know.¹ The chapter did not satisfy—how could it?—but in catching me in naive desire, it reminded me of my implication in the subject of this essay. To want to know what Jane Austen was like—to want to personify—is to want something in excess of what historicist contextualization or biographical detail might yield; such knowing demands a relation that includes me, that ultimately is about me. To wonder what Jane Austen really was like is speculatively and tentatively to initiate the structure of identification and complementarity and difference that is friendship. Would she have liked me? Was she like me? Would she have challenged me or scared me? Shopped with me? Found me too much? Would I have liked those things? Would she? Is it possible she was writing to me?

An answer to Myer's question that does begin to satisfy comes from Marianne Knight's account of Austen's visits, manuscripts in hand, to Marianne's older sisters: "I remember that when Aunt Jane came to us at Godmersham she used to bring the MS. of whatever novel she was writing with her, and would shut herself up with my elder sisters in one of the bedrooms to read them aloud. I and the younger ones used to hear peals of laughter through the door, and thought it very hard that we should be shut out from what was so delightful."² The scene Marianne describes is most easily readable as according with a certain fantasy: that being with Jane Austen must simply have been the most fun thing in the world. And yet, acting out friendship for this little sister and for themselves, Austen and the Knight girls also educate Marianne in the classic little-sister mix of resentment and desire. Peals of appealing laughter articulate for Marianne the intimacies of friendship, even as they sound friendship's hardness. Made by and demonstrable through a shutting out, Jane Austen's friendship, overheard, promises what friendship promises: the somatic exchanges and delights of private laughter, the protections of seclusion, the bonds of a self-conscious exclusivity. Responses to reading Jane Austen

have often involved constructing her from fantasy as a kind of friend. Shut out alongside Marianne, Austen's desiring readers strain to hear her laughter or her voice, as from upstairs, but finally can know Austen only—as Marianne seems to know her in this recollection—by her effects. Even for someone alive when she was—someone just downstairs—Austen remains an absence (more fully, a space) at the center of that laughter, a desire that is the perceptible remnant of her invisible agency.

The material response to Austen that has meant the acquisition of purchasable goods which evoke her confuses Austen's effects (those consequences of her agency as author) with reproductions of what one could imagine to have been her property (her effects). Such items as "A Wallet of Jane Austen Writing Paper & Envelopes," "Jane Austen Card Games," the tchotchkes in the relevant pages of the *Past Times* catalog,³ the home furnishings and food represented in Susan Watkins's *Jane Austen in Style*, are conjuring objects, goods that together articulate an oddly bounded and consumerist space at their center that is the suppositional and unsumable Jane Austen, person (rather than the tantalizingly legible Jane Austen, text): the author-friend whose gift of stationery with her words already on it is vanity's marketable testimony to relationship, or whose recipe for white soup or negus (this one, at last, the most authentic) will tempt her forth, the spirit who raps at the call of Loo or Speculation on a table that serves equally for *objet*-shrines, for séances, or for Whist.⁴ Popular culture's figurations conjure Jane Austens of their own: for the compilers of *Jane Austen's Little Advice Book*, Jane Austen is the sage friend whose epigrammatic remarks about "Worldly Things," about "Men and Women" and "The Human Condition," are just worldly enough not unduly to oppress;⁵ for the producer of *Jane Austen Songs*, she is "a discerning musical amateur," available for children ("It is likely that Jane entertained her young nieces and nephews thus");⁶ for readers of *Jane Austen in Style*, the helpful friend, trendy and *au fait*, with a gift for tasteful interior design.⁷

Implicating in their consumerism the conjured Austen of Regency materiality and masquerade, Jane Austen shopaholics make Austen a shopper as well as a commodity, speculating her into companionable existence in market and world. Speculation, too (the imaginer's occupation, this time, rather than the Jane Austen Card Game), informs Virginia Woolf's account of Austen's "personal obscurity." Considering Austen's retired life and early death, Woolf imagines Austen into another life: "Had she lived a few more years only, all that would have been altered. She would have stayed in London, dined out, lunched out, met famous people, made new friends, read, travelled, and carried back to the quiet country cottage a hoard of observations to feast upon at leisure."⁸ The country cottage leisure, perhaps, and certainly the urban active leisure sound like those of Woolf herself, and it seems possible to imagine that, dining and lurching,

maybe shopping, Woolf's virtual Austen might not have wandered unaccompanied, and would perhaps have counted Woolf among her new fit friends. Like Austen shoppers, like downstairs Marianne, like me, Woolf makes an Austen-friend of her desires, fantasizing relation in the space created by activity and circumstance. And yet, as Woolf conjures an Austen into her life, she is not conjuring wholly from herself but responding to the Austen of effects: lunching, dining, befriending, walking into town are products of the materialist Austen of the novels. (So, too, is Emma Thompson's Oscar night promise to stop at Austen's grave to report to her collaborator their movie's grosses, a response to Austen's notorious precision about finances.) If Austen is knowable only through her effects, those effects—goods and outcomes, both—have been most often understood as her novels, her letters, her juvenilia.

In thinking through some instances of the critical and popular fascination with Jane-Austen-our-friend, this essay turns sometimes to the novels (to Jane Austen's effects) in considering as well what is involved in construing authorship and readership as friendly activities. Talk of friendship often idealizes or reduces that complex and intense relation, describing it from outside its enclosure. Like Austen herself, those Austen critics who befriend her have tended—voluntarily or not—to work with or within a tougher and more difficult version of friendship than the culture generally allows, not censoring and denying friendship's difficulties but enacting (acting out) the edginess of its intimacies, its embarrassments and angers, tricky balancings and resentments. Examined alongside Austen, their imaginings contribute to an essay on the workings of friendship, as well as to a history of the cultural Jane Austen.

"A dislike so little just." Austen's *Emma* makes the question of Emma Woodhouse's dislike of the admirable Jane Fairfax into a challenge; even for Emma the question "might be a difficult question to answer" (167). The novel itself, immediately upon posing it, posits answers to the question, and these have been pursued by readers of the novel. Jane's elegant reserve, it suggests, so often contrasted with Emma's apparently more open temperament, makes her hard to know (Emma "could never get acquainted with her" [166]), hard to like, an icicle ("such coldness and reserve" [166]) in being hard to warm up to. And, though Emma benefits when their tempers are contrasted, Mr. Knightley suggests that she would not fare so well in a more serious comparison with Jane Fairfax: "Mr. Knightley had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself" (166). Jane is also dislikable by association; represented by Mrs. and Miss Bates,

she cannot fail to irritate Emma. Jane's discretion is a constant frustration for Emma the newsgatherer and prevents even in possibility the exclusiveness that forms friendship out of gossip. Too, Jane Fairfax's appearance of "indifference whether she pleased or not" (166) must be painful for Emma—and not only by contrast—given the slippage between Emma's armor-vanity and her superattentiveness (learned at a valetudinarian father's beck) to the signs of peevishness and displeasure, a subtlety that, if not always accurate in its readings, is yet always on guard.

The plethora of answers to the question of why Emma so dislikes Jane Fairfax, seemingly an endless supply of justifications for Emma's feelings, are recognizable as overdetermination, but—as overdetermination—these explanations seem to collapse into the undetermined and unaccountable: Emma's dislike "so little just" is so excessively justified that explanations become indistinguishable, and Austen, poet of irrational dislike, ends in seeming most forcefully to establish that dislike (like its rival, affinity) is finally an eruption of the arbitrary.

And yet Emma's refusal of friendship with Jane Fairfax may be less an intrusion of the arbitrary than the product of the contingent structure which demands that friendship: "[I]t had been always imagined that they were to be so intimate" (166); the Highbury community thinks that they should be friends. The initial statement of Emma's dislike ("to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like through three long months!") is also a statement of its genesis in obligation ("to be always doing more than she wished, and less than she ought!" [166]). Emma's dislike and withdrawal are her responses to the pressure of an expectation that she and Jane will be—because they ought to be—intimates. Explaining Emma's dislike of Jane, Mr. Knightley reveals that he needs it explained, and, doing so, exerts the pressure of *his* expectation in particular. As a response to Emma's statement that Jane is reserved, Mr. Knightley's "I always told you she was—a little" (171) shows the eagerness and insistence of his interest in the project of their friendship (he always told her) as much as it concedes to Emma the existence of a barrier to that project. And his pressure is endangering: Mr. Knightley's account of Emma's feelings overturns them and would (though it does not) teach her to mistrust herself. If Emma dislikes Jane because she "sees in her," as he suggests, a "really accomplished young woman," then Emma's plausible dislike of Jane becomes implausible ("what's not to like?") even as it becomes, implausibly, a covert admiration of her; Emma's dislike would be, then, no more than an indication of her liking.

If Emma dislikes the Jane Fairfax who is "so idolized and so cried up" (203), it is because she recognizes, quite rightly, that the injunction to like Jane and to be her friend is an implied correction. And, like the unhappy and well-behaved classmate wielded by ill-meaning parents as a

weapon against their children, Jane Fairfax is made into an imperative categorically rejectable. If "it is natural to suppose" that Emma and Jane "should be intimate" and that they "should have taken to each other" (203), as Emma has learned to believe, the apparent naturalness of this supposition rests upon an unpleasant principle of complementarity. If Openness is enjoined to like Reserve, it is imagined to *want* it, and the apparent complementarity of the friendship one can see in advance of its existence ("those two should be friends") is revealed to be a one-sided supplementarity: the friend urged upon one is perceived as able to complete, to answer, to compensate. If this logic works in reverse—if Reserve lacks Openness—Openness cannot know this, and it seems impossible to see the corrective friend's lack as anything but the recessive form taken by what is in fact an excess and a compensation for what one *has* oneself.

At one moment in the novel, Emma and Jane Fairfax seem to fulfill one version of the collective fantasy that would impel them toward friendship. As one another's escorts into the dining room at Hartfield, "they followed the other ladies out of the room, arm in arm, with an appearance of goodwill highly becoming to the beauty and grace of each" (298). Arm in arm, Jane and Emma (a wholeness made by complementarity) are mutually dependent bodies making an attractive picture, gratification of a desire by now so familiar as to have become clichéd. If Hartfield—if Mr. Knightley—would see them together, this is because their friendship, despite the apparent high-mindedness that urges it, would become their persons as much as their world opines that it would become their characters; the arranged friendship is a public one, on view, and is certain to gratify only its arranger (the goodwill of Jane and Emma is suspiciously apparent), unless the arranged friends, finding themselves upstairs, also find something to laugh about there.

"Why do you like Miss Austen so very much?" Students in my Austen seminar unite in decrying a dislike so little just as Charlotte Brontë's of Jane Austen. But, if it is so little justified, Brontë's dislike is nevertheless well amplified. Her Austen is "shrewd and observant" (by contrast with George Sand, who is "sagacious and profound"),⁹ unfeeling ("anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works" [127]) and proud of it ("all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer" [127–28]); for Brontë, Austen is superficial and pedestrian ("her business" is "with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet" [128]), "sensible" (127) (damned with faint praise), disembodied ("the Passions are perfectly unknown to her" [128]), heartless ("what the blood rushes through . . . *this* Miss Austen ignores" [128]), and dismissable ("she cannot be great" [127]).

Brontë's responses to Austen are most directly responses to George Henry Lewes, written in two rapid letters to him (on 12 January and 18 January 1848) that follow upon his recommendation of Austen to Brontë, in letters now lost,¹⁰ and upon his extravagant praise of Austen in a *Fraser's* review. A third letter, to William Smith Williams (reader for *Jane Eyre's* publisher Smith and Elder), continues Brontë's comments on Austen, triggered this time by Williams's having sent her three Austen novels in a parcel of books he had chosen for her.¹¹ The loss of Lewes's letters means that their language is unavailable, which makes it possible only to speculate that as a chiding and guiding Mr. Knightley he fantasizes for Brontë, his contemporary, a textually articulated friendship with an earlier woman writer, fantasizes their friendship for himself. But his writings elsewhere indicate something about how Lewes may have seen Austen, and how he may have introduced her to Brontë. Commenting in 1847, for example, on what he believed to be Macaulay's citation of Austen as a "Prose Shakespeare," Lewes domesticates Austen, as he fantasizes for her an embodiment that is appealing and girlish: Shakespeare's "power of dramatic creation . . . [and] of constructing and animating character . . . may truly be said to find a younger sister in Miss Austen."¹² Not Judith, then, but Jane Austen Shakespeare is Lewes's elegant corrective to Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen Shakespeare who is the really accomplished young woman so idolized by Lewes and so cried up, as accomplished as Emma-Brontë might have wanted to be thought herself. Lewes's recommendation, reiterated as often as Mr. Knightley's of Jane Fairfax (he always told her, in multiple letters and in published reviews), introduces Austen as Brontë's most becoming supplement ("One might gather from her works that she was personally attractive")¹³ and thus announces Brontë's unattractive need: Currier Bell, he writes a few years after her death, "was utterly without a sense of humour."¹⁴

Brontë accepts Lewes's guidance, reading Austen for the first time at his suggestion, though she rejects his chiding (his defense of Austen, she writes him, has been "a strange lecture" [127]) by rejecting Austen. But Brontë's dislike of the admirable Austen, with its evident disruption of her complacency, is a dislike Austen herself would recognize. Brontë is petulant in her questioning (like Austen, yes, but why "so very much?" [126]), pointed and sarcastic ("have I not questioned the perfection of your darling?" [127]), and so unguardedly disturbed by the recommender's suggestion that her disagreement and distress arise, unbidden and irresistible, to overwhelm even correspondence not addressed to him. Of the "heresy" of her expressed dislike of Austen, Brontë writes to Williams but implicitly engages with Lewes: "If I said it to some people (Lewes for instance) they would directly accuse me of advocating exaggerated heroics, but I am not afraid of your falling into any such vulgar error" (128).

Flattering Williams, Brontë asks him to choose sides but, unable to contain herself, does so most unflatteringly; recommending Austen, "some people" will always be Lewes.

Like an Emma made mistrustful of her own perceptions—made briefly to imagine her dislike as liking—Brontë politely contemplates concession, when she writes to Lewes, and feigns interest in reforming herself: "If I ever do write another book, I think I will have nothing of what you call 'melodrama'; I *think* so but I am not sure; I *think* too I will endeavour to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen's 'mild eyes'; 'to finish more, and be more subdued'; but neither am I sure of that."¹⁵ Brontë is unable to sustain her repudiation of the expansively melodramatic in favor of a bounded realism, but her emphatic *thinking* signs her refusal to commit to the concessionary gesture. Brontë's account of Austen has been most notable for its portrayal of an Austen who has chosen containment in a well-regulated domesticity, and the strength of her rejection of Austen is its dismissal of Brontë's own small step toward all that would contain and subdue, all that would make mild. Austen's world, Austen's novel, is "a carefully fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers," with "no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck" (126). In contrasting Austen's confinement with her own open spaces—with the open country, fresh air, blue hill, and bonny beck she would want to claim for her own writing—Brontë spatializes openness and reserve, and Austen becomes a Jane Fairfax, if Brontë herself is not quite an Emma.

Brontë's dislike so little just works itself out vis-à-vis Austen in the way that some dislikes (but perhaps some likings, too) have a tendency to do—through the oppositional casting that will always determine that I am openness and she reserve.¹⁶ This oppositionality is a way in which Brontë establishes, accepts, and perpetuates a relation to Jane Austen.¹⁷ The friendship that is a rivalry is woven of contrasts and conditionals, and it is always represented as a proposition: if she is this, then I am that.

However obvious it has seemed to readers of *Pride and Prejudice* that Charlotte Lucas and Elizabeth Bennet are this and that, the novel makes clear that it is less obvious to themselves. Charlotte imagines, for example, that—despite Elizabeth's avowed dislike of Mr. Darcy—"all her friend's dislike would vanish, if she could suppose him to be in her power" (181). Doing so, Charlotte thinks that, at her core, Elizabeth acts from Charlotte's own prudential account of marriage, in which a husband is managed (sent gardening, kept out of a parlor) by a wife's power. For her part, Elizabeth imagines that—despite Charlotte's own words—Charlotte

thinks about marriage as Elizabeth herself does, that Charlotte's engagement to a man like Mr. Collins would be "impossible!" (124), and that Charlotte would never act in accordance with her explicitly stated positions on happiness in marriage ("entirely a matter of chance" [23]). Their mutual Cole Porter fantasy of friendship as "just the perfect blendship" is dependent on simultaneous refusals of difference. If Elizabeth's blockage in acknowledging and accepting Charlotte's difference from herself poses a greater problem for the continuance of their friendship—Elizabeth's early persuasion that "no real confidence could ever subsist between them again" (128) seems a resentment cherished, though later relinquished—this is in part because her stubborn remakings of Charlotte are, apparently at least, the more hurtful because the more open; Charlotte's recastings of Elizabeth occur most often as thoughts and feelings reserved to herself. Elizabeth's betrayals of the friendship seem greater and more serious because she herself seems so in the novel dominated by her presence; the story is hers, and Charlotte is in its service.

Though Charlotte's serviceability to Elizabeth in their relationship is both voluntary and friendly, it respects Elizabeth's dominance as an object of interest. In egging Elizabeth on to make impertinent remarks to Mr. Darcy, Charlotte facilitates and participates in the fun of a friend's social triumph, and she means to do so as well, one suspects, in prompting Elizabeth to play and sing against Elizabeth's ostensible will; if Elizabeth's vanity has not, as Elizabeth claims it has not, "taken a musical turn" (24), it does turn toward the pleasures of display, and Charlotte sets her up and off nicely. Charlotte also serves in performing for the Bennets the social labor of engaging Mr. Collins, in life and in conversation; though this work furthers her "scheme" of diverting his attentions from them to herself (121), the Bennets do not know that this is so, and, despite their gratitude, seem not so very concerned about what they must presume is its tedium for her. But Elizabeth's constant recourse to Charlotte as retreat and as refuge from social exertions ("she returned to Charlotte Lucas" [90]; she "withdrew to Miss Lucas" [96]; she "owed her greatest relief to her friend Miss Lucas" [102]) makes Charlotte a value, their friendship a kind of home.

Still, their friendship seems tougher than this and sometimes more equitable, articulated as the product of difference from its first appearance in the novel; while Elizabeth "safely" promises never to dance with the man who has mortified her, Charlotte wishes instead that "he had danced with Eliza" (20). At its best, their friendship seems textured (given character) by disagreement. Their discussion of how a woman should or should not show her feelings to a man—which means thinking about how or how well she can know those feelings given the constrictions of sociable interaction—is an impressive *process*, a complex working out of how Char-

lotte and Elizabeth each and together will cope with relegation (as to a place) and with regulation.

But something in their friendship demands the not-seeing that results in Elizabeth's inability to know that her impossibility is the possibility most available to Charlotte. "[T]he Lucases are very good sort of girls," says Mrs. Bennet, "I assure you. It is a pity they are not handsome! Not that I think Charlotte so *very* plain—but then she is our particular friend" (44). Discouraging on Charlotte's plainness, Mrs. Bennet embarrasses, this time, because she tells the truth, not only about Charlotte's looks but about their place in Bennet/Lucas, Elizabeth/Charlotte relations. The pity (Charlotte is not handsome) that inspires Mrs. Bennet to comment is not evinced by Elizabeth ("very pretty, and . . . very agreeable" [11]), whose feeling for her "particular friend" must mean ignoring (with a gracious "but then" inattentiveness) the evidence of Charlotte's plainness and the burdens that follow upon that plainness in a world where looks are a determinant of consequence. But in not seeing that about Charlotte which would make them unequally advantaged, "Mrs. Collins's pretty friend" Elizabeth (172) denies the circumstances that make Charlotte into Mrs. Collins. Elizabeth's ignorance (her capacity for ignoring) means not seeing something about Charlotte that makes a difference between them.

Elizabeth's entirely mistaken declaration that Charlotte would not behave as Charlotte finally does is explicable as a kind of forbidding; not seeing, Elizabeth would not allow, and it is a formidable and unseen Elizabeth whom Charlotte fears telling about her marriage plans and a forbidding Elizabeth whose adjective ("impossible!") functions as a negating imperative. Elizabeth models here friendship's own fascism, assisted in its work by friendship's somatic fixative, laughter: you know you don't mean that; "You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself" (23). Fearing difference as a wound to friendship, and fearing its capacity to wound self, one friend coerces agreement by spells woven of personality and by means of what the other friend has already agreed will charm. Friendship's fantasy of perfect blendship proves illusory and imperfect, inevitably so, as blendship frightens with indifference and demands difference's self-assertions. But if difference began this Lucas/Bennet friendship, then it is perhaps less difference itself than the alluring fantasy of indifference that threatens it.¹⁸

"I am not romantic you know. I never was" (125). Some bit of vitriol released, Charlotte Lucas perhaps gets some relief from the strains of friendship in telling Elizabeth that she "never was" what Elizabeth's laughter encouraged only Elizabeth to think her. Telling Elizabeth what Elizabeth did not know, Charlotte insists on a recentring for herself, per-

mitted (made) by Austen to disrupt the governing narrative in refusing—for herself and for the friendship—to know that the story is not hers.

Readers of Jane Austen have often felt disappointed by her, whether because of her marital endings or because of her reticences about them, because she supports a regime of manners and participates in the policing of bodies, because she seems to like or not to like children, because she is acerbic in her letters, or because she shocks one “unawares” with levity. This expressed disappointment is also readable sometimes as a kind of embarrassment that would deny and disavow her and itself; some sense of that embarrassed disappointment inheres as well in the strained readings by which, all Elizabeths here, some of us have tried to repudiate the ways in which our Austen is not sound by insisting on their impossibility. Thomas R. Edwards articulates these desires and disappointments as part of considering “the borderline of life and art,” working with them in a way that grants friendship’s charming power to Austen while reserving the power of separation to himself. Acknowledging the powerful fantasy of blendship, Edwards rejects its bland denegation (its not seeing) of Austen’s particularity and of the sometimes cutting niceness of her perceptions in favor of the relief and recentering wrought by his friendly self-assertions.

In an essay that appeared in *Raritan*, Edwards establishes himself as a reader who is “[e]mbarrassed by Jane Austen,”¹⁹ which is to say he understands himself (by his notion of embarrassment) as overtaken or overwhelmed by her. Edwards’s concept of embarrassment, derived from “a Low Latin word that simply means ‘a bar’ ” (62), is an obstruction or obstacle, a surrender to something outside the self. Though Edwards’s embarrassment is not an explicitly somatized notion, embarrassment’s bodily cognate—blushing—empiricizes the experience he describes of being in some sense *taken* in embarrassment, taken *with* that which embarrasses. That is, for Edwards embarrassment by Jane Austen is finally a kind of charm that overtakes (“the book is not *our* book, while reading it we submit to another mind, whose interests and purposes are not identical to ours” [79]); embarrassment by Jane Austen is a charm that—as fiction—misleads (“[w]e are asked in some way to credit and care about untruth, to trust an illusion we have good reason not to trust” [79]) and that endangers (“[s]uch fiction improves on life as we know it, and the danger is that it will improve life out of all recognition” [79]), but that—as the act of charming—is deeply relational in nature. The Austen who embarrasses (and whom one can imagine being embarrassed *by*) is implicated in the play of difference and indifference—of possession and separation—that is friendship, as she is implicated in the traumas and delights of reading imagined as a blending and an overtaking.

Much of Edwards’s essay focuses on embarrassment *in* Jane Austen, but, though somewhat dismissive of them (moments when readers and characters share embarrassment are handled “more successfully” [74]), he is most interesting on those moments when the reader alone (when he himself) is embarrassed. One such instance is Austen’s disparagement in *Persuasion* of Mrs. Musgrove’s grief for her dead son; for Austen, the grief is manifest in “large fat sighings” produced by the “unbecoming conjunctions” of “personal size and mental sorrow” (68). Negotiating the unsettling embarrassments of his response, Edwards flirts with the “impossible!” that terrorizes Charlotte (“Perhaps she means only that such conjunctions are unbecoming in books” [74]), but this flirtation seems an excuse that lets him flirt more as if he means it with another and likelier reading: “If, however, she thinks that such conjunctions are unbecoming anywhere,” he writes, “in life or art, as her sometimes quite heartless ridicule of real people in her letters might suggest, then my embarrassment is complete, my freedom as a reader has been intolerably abridged, and I don’t know what to say except that I wish she hadn’t said it, or that she had lived to revise the passage as she reportedly intended to do” (74). Edwards’s strong response depends upon a more workaday understanding of embarrassment than he elsewhere articulates. If this sounds indeed like reading as an intolerable abridgment of freedom, it does not sound like the voluntary surrender that makes reading fiction, as he has suggested, “structurally an embarrassment” (79). Here, Austen’s effects personify for Edwards an Austen with whom one might splutter and quarrel (“I don’t know what to say,” I wish you hadn’t said it), the embarrassing friend whose behavior induces the briefest fantasy of her death (even if by wishing she had lived) and the contrary-to-fact rewriting of the world that would most literally rewrite the offense.

If Edwards ends by rejecting both his proffered accounts of embarrassment (the moments of embarrassment by Jane Austen are those times when “we most fully appreciate that a successful experience of any fiction is neither a docile submission to its illusion-making powers nor a literal-minded rejection of them” [79]), and if he rejects them in favor of a stabilized and balanced account of instability (embarrassed reading experiences instead are “a difficult and unstable negotiation with those powers, in which no final resolution of forces can occur” [79–80]), this balancing is at some cost. Achieving balance, Edwards loses some of the force of his socialization of reader relations with Jane Austen and some of the power he has forged in his relation to an embarrassing Jane Austen. If embarrassment itself, *chez* Edwards, means blendship and surrender, making embarrassment into a story makes it mean something else. Edwards’s conception of Austen as sometimes an embarrassment understands the story as his (re)centers the narrative on himself, effecting a separation even as it

marks the site of a strong and seductive indifference. Seeing Jane Austen as an embarrassment means *seeing* her and doing so without recourse to a constraining impossibility; it entails disrupting the oppressive blendship by acknowledging the otherness of the friend and insists upon allowing Charlotte's plainness.

Considering the passages that some readers have thought of as intruding upon the "romantic climax" of Austen's *Emma*, Wayne Booth writes:

The intrusions in no way diminish the portrait of the happy marriage to come, as we read in our roles as credulous participants in the conventional world of Hartfield and environs. But they provide us in our other roles, as readers who know we are reading a fiction, a climax to our friendship with a woman who lives very much in the world as we know it, who knows that *we* know that she has been presenting an idealized fiction, a woman whose gifts of imagination and wisdom far surpass Knightley's—and indeed yours and mine. In short, the most lasting demonstration of this novel, concerning men and women in the world, is that most of us, male and female, are as children compared with this one glorious human being, quite real on the page.²⁰

The honors Wayne Booth bestows on the Jane Austen who has been a friend to him throughout his reading of *Emma* articulate a hierarchized friendship. The Jane Austen created by Booth's response to her is all-knowing (his "we" can only "make a stab at . . . correct inferences" [187], and, if we manage to know something, she knows we know it); she is untouchable, implacable (though she does so gently, she habitually "corrects our misreadings" [187] in his description of her); she is complete. Booth's Jane Austen as friend is somehow better (her "gifts of imagination and wisdom far surpass") so globally (surpassing "Knightley's . . . yours . . . mine") as not to need a particular object for her comparison; she is herself a superlative. The distanced product of a confusion of intimacy and authority, Booth's Austen is the person who abjects, who always gets to be the boss of you—the friend construed as mother. She *is* the mother (we "are as children" compared with her), imagined to be sufficient in her own resources, imagined to need placating, and no less desirable for all that.²¹ Abstracted by her distributive capacities (better than all of us), Booth's Austen is not someone elected to friendship by the contingencies of affinity or of dislike, not someone to squabble or laugh with ("[y]ou know it is not sound"), not someone to complain to or about; she cannot be seen to need, and so she cannot be touching. The friend endowed with omniscience and omnipotence—made the all-giving or all-frightening mother of fantasy—is a friend deprived by means of such endowment.

When Edmund Bertram leaves Mansfield, in *Mansfield Park*, to be ordained with his friend Mr. Owens, Mary Crawford frets. Worried about the possible consequences of Edmund's time with the three "grown up" Miss Owens, she peppers Fanny Price with questions about Edmund's visit, his plans, his letters, and his friend's sisters. And when she does not receive from Fanny a conclusive answer to her question "Are they musical?" Mary babbles:

"That is the first question, you know," said Miss Crawford, trying to appear gay and unconcerned, "which every woman who plays herself is sure to ask about another. But it is very foolish to ask questions about any young ladies—about any three sisters just grown up; for one knows, without being told, exactly what they are—all very accomplished and pleasing, and *one* very pretty. There is a beauty in every family.—It is a regular thing. Two play on the piano-forte, and one on the harp—and all sing—or would sing if they were taught—or sing all the better for not being taught—or something like it." (288)

Austen notes Fanny's calm (read—exaggeratedly—cold, heartless) response to Mary: "I know nothing of the Miss Owens." A friend might not answer the hysterical gaiety, the desperation and disintegration of Mary's question, as Fanny does, vacantly and "calmly." Untouched by Mary, Fanny misreads her and continues to give only grudging answers throughout the conversation ("Fanny felt obliged to speak"; she "could not bring herself to speak" [289]). Certainly Fanny has reason enough to be unsympathetic to Mary, whose feelings for Edmund are reciprocated, whether or not that reciprocation will lead to presumptive happiness in marriage. And Fanny has been made to witness and to participate in Edmund and Mary's courtship, her own feelings (at best) unregistered or (at worst) absorbed by the blank egotism of their infatuation. Though Fanny, too, of course has reason not to want to add the Miss Owens to her list of disturbing rivals, and though she is thought to be unable to "speak or write a falsehood" (411), she is certainly here ungenerous and unkind, and she is those things because unmoved by Mary ("Fanny did not love Miss Crawford" [147]), whose company—after all—she too has been seeking, and whose recognitions have brought her from serviceable isolation into the company of others. If Mary's friendliness to Fanny is, as a contemporary Fanny might say, only the signs of friendship, it is not so clear what friendship is without its signs, and Fanny deprives Mary even of these.²² Fanny does not conceive of herself as unkind here (upright, perhaps, truthful) because she does not believe in Mary's feelings for Edmund ("The woman who could speak of him, and speak only of his appearance!" [417]) or believe in Mary's professed feelings for herself ("So very fond of me!" 'tis nonsense all. She loves nobody but herself and her brother" [424]). Like a reverse of Booth's Jane Austen, Fanny's Mary is complete and self-

sufficient; refusing to pity Mary, "Fanny could have said a great deal, but it was safer to say nothing, and leave untouched all Miss Crawford's resources, her accomplishments, her spirits, her importance, her friends, lest it should betray her into any observations seemingly unhandsome" (199). Fanny's safe and unfriendly logic denies Mary the right or the capacity to have a need and leaves Mary, like all her resources, untouched by Fanny. If her pity is to be earned and only by those without resources, Fanny misunderstands that resources are husbanded and drawn on so that they may satisfy a prior or anticipated condition of insufficiency.

As readers have struggled to name the powerful and authoritative intimacy that is made in the course of reading Jane Austen, they have struggled also to name the overwhelming (some might say embarrassing) sense of inclusion and relation they produce and experience in the presence of her effects. One such reader, having rejected the name "Janeite" for herself, contemplated other options at the 1979 inaugural meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America. Quizzed about alternatives by an anonymous "Talk of the Town" contributor to the *New Yorker*, Edith Unila considers the alternatives before settling on one:

"Austen fans" doesn't sound right either, does it? "Austen lovers"? I don't think so. "Austenites"? That's even worse. How about "friends of Jane Austen"? I've always thought of her that way. I read her when I'm sick or feeling sorry for myself. I read her when I'm trying to understand people, or the way the world is. Jane Austen *is* like a friend. I think that I can truly say that I am a friend of Jane's.²³

The signs of friendship to which she refers—help in sickness or in self-pity, help in developing an appropriately worldly air—point in just one direction: this solacing and socializing Jane Austen is a friend to Unila ("Jane Austen *is* like a friend"). In saying that Jane Austen is my friend, I might take possession of her (by friendship's deepest, sickest logic, since she is mine, implicitly she is not your friend), claiming her to claim associative status. Yet Unila's final statement—the conclusion to which her careful review of options and evidence leads her—leaves her the possessed. Imagining myself a friend of Jane Austen's, I imagine *both* of us in need. If I can "truly" say I am a friend of hers, the intensification of that statement lies in my having proven myself, conjuring her with books and objects and syntactic echoes that I decide must satisfy her desire (I imagine it, too) for me. But that which "I think that I can truly say" I use my saying to make so. Making an Austen in need, I read her effects (her novels) as an appeal made with those peals of laughter from which no Marianne would be shut out. Like those of the orchestra or the library, the friends of Jane Austen construe her as an institution to be endowed, a space at the center of her effects and their desires. Fantasizing myself a friend of

Jane Austen's, I give myself in friendship to that space the better to ask things of it; and asking of an absent object, I desire possession and recognition for their own sake and for my own.

Notes

1. Valerie Grosvenor Myer, *Jane Austen: Obstinate Heart* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997), 1–9.
2. Marianne Knight's recollection appears in Constance Hill, *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends* (1901; reprint, Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1977), 202. Quoted in Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 103. Biographical record continues to inscribe and to validate Marianne's sense of her outsider status; as the daughter of Austen's brother Edward (who had been adopted by the wealthy Knight family), Marianne was younger sister to Fanny Knight, most often honored in biographical prose (with a designation that fantasy suggests Marianne might have coveted) as Austen's favorite niece.
3. *Past Times*' Austen offerings vary from catalog to catalog and have included an "Emma Woodhouse Figurine" and the "Austen Sisters' Citrine Cross," as well as the Card Games. The figurine, indistinguishable from countless other china ladies, is made Emma Woodhouse not iconographically but by means of the catalog's designation, indication and invocation of the consumer magic produced by Austenian association. The Sisters' Cross, inaccurate as a reproduction, merely (catalog copy is careful to note) "recalls" crosses given to Jane and Cassandra Austen. But, as fantasy, the cross also recalls the sacred utility of the relic, while creating for Jane Austen's friend a relation of somatic connection through the material object. To wear something that the friend has worn (or to imagine that one is doing so) is to enjoy the mediation that negotiates an impossible meeting of body and body.
4. The Jane Austen writing paper was designed and produced for the National Portrait Gallery and made in the United Kingdom. The wallet itself explains what is inside: "Ten Folded, Letterheaded Sheets each featuring a Cameo Detail from A Portrait of JANE AUSTEN together with a Quotation: 'FOLLIES and NONSENSE, WHIMS and INCONSISTENCIES DO DIVERT ME, I OWN, and I LAUGH AT THEM WHENEVER I CAN.'" The Jane Austen Card Games, from the *Past Times* catalog, come with a rule book for "Round Games and Whist Tables . . . together with appropriate extracts from her writings."
5. Cathryn Michon and Pamela Norris, *Jane Austen's Little Advice Book* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996). Michon and Norris see Austen as paradoxical: "her image," they write, "(which seems to be that of bonnets and crinolines, tea and gentility) is sometimes completely at odds with her writings, which are always sly, often biting, and sometimes actually vicious . . . in an extremely entertaining way" (xii; ellipsis in the original), but, epigrammatized, Austen seems less paradoxical than rather simply cynical. Though Michon and Norris warn those of us who are "[s]erious students of Jane Austen" to, well, know we have "been

warned" (xiii) about their decontextualization and their humor (O.J. Simpson is *Persuasion's* Wentworth, "making love, by breaking his mistress's head" [123]), they insist on their fidelity to Austen and their preservation of her, inviolate, by their presentation of her language in its immediacy, without acknowledging their framing of that language: "Rather than dissect her appeal yet again, we prefer to let her words stand for themselves" (xiii).

6. *Jane Austen Songs* is available as a *Past Times* CD. Liner notes by Jon Gillaspie, who produced the CD and who also plays fortepiano on it, indicate that the songs are "vocal works which Jane found attractive enough to purchase or, in the majority of cases, laboriously copy out for her long term enjoyment." Gillaspie's is a musical Jane Austen ("[h]er pianoforte lessons continued unusually late in life for a young lady at that period," perhaps because of the "complex" situation of Austen's "remaining unmarried"), and he has a particular sympathy for Austen in the "difficult period" when she lived unhappily in Bath: this time "was to be a musical wasteland for Jane and her collections contain no music published during the period 1801-06."

7. Susan Watkins, *Jane Austen in Style* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990). Its original title was *Jane Austen's Town and Country Style*.

8. Virginia Woolf, "Jane Austen," in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), 23.

9. Southam 1968, 126. Though, imagining that readers of Austen are the most likely readers of this essay, I make reference to Brontë's comments as they are reprinted in the Southam's edition, the comments also, of course, appear in fuller context in T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington, *The Lives, Friendships and Correspondence of the Brontë Family* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1934), 2 vols. Page references to Brontë's letters as excerpted in Southam's collection appear in the text.

10. Rosemary Ashton, *G.H. Lewes: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 66.

11. Juliet Barker reports that the books from Smith, Elder & Co. included *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*. Brontë's letter to Williams is prompted by her having finished *Emma*. See Barker's *The Brontës* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), 634-35, 948 n. 13.

12. Lewes's comments on Austen appeared in an unsigned review in the *Leader*, 22 November 1851. See Southam 1968, 130.

13. Lewes's "The Novels of Jane Austen" appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1859. See Southam 1968, 148-66, 151.

14. Lewes, "The Novels of Jane Austen" in Southam 1968, 160.

15. Brontë's 12 January 1848 letter to Lewes, in Wise and Symington, *The Lives, Friendships and Correspondence of the Brontë Family*, 178-79.

16. Lewes contributes to an understanding of what he calls "the bias of opposition," that tendency by which a critic is "exasperated into an opposition" constructed to ensure that a work's "undeniable qualities" will pale beside its "undeniable defects." This bias, as Lewes writes and as Austen would know, develops in response to the "chorus of admirers" who cry up quality without attending to defect. Lewes discusses the oppositional bias in his 1872 essay "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," reprinted in *Literary Criticism of George Henry Lewes*, ed. Alice R.

Kaminsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 94-105, 99-100. See D. A. Miller's use of Lewes's notion in *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 137, which brought the Lewes to my attention.

17. If Lewes may be understood to produce for Charlotte Brontë a relation to Jane Austen, those writings in which he compares George Eliot to Jane Austen make it possible to wonder what relation to Austen he manages for Eliot. Though praising Eliot, in "The Novels of Jane Austen," as Austen's "equal in truthfulness, dramatic ventriloquism, and humour, and greatly superior in culture, reach of mind, and depth of emotional sensibility," he also describes her in this way: as "Mr. George Eliot, a writer who seems to us inferior to Miss Austen in the art of telling a story, and generally in what we have called the 'economy of art.' . . ." See Southam 1968, 155-56. The model of friendship by which women are urged upon one another as corrective (and thus rivalrous) intimates—the Jane Fairfax problem—parallels a literary connection to Jane Austen sometimes visible in the texts of nineteenth-century women writers, whose mock-Austen moments (the first few of the "Great Temptation" chapters in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and the early London scenes in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* are two such) answer a demand for the Austenian by demonstrating that what a woman writer *might* do, she *would* not.

18. Singing Porter's anthem to friendship-as-blendship ("ours will still be hot") in an *I Love Lucy* episode, Lucy and Ethel discover that they are performing in the same dress. In a fit of anxiety about this sartorial indifference, they rip the dresses off one another, performing and reestablishing themselves as *together* by displaying their angry joy in separation.

19. Thomas R. Edwards, "Embarrassed by Jane Austen," *Raritan* 7, no. 1 (summer 1987): 62-80. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

20. Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: A Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 434. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

21. Booth's description of Austen as "glorious human being" comes at the conclusion of his discussion of ideological complaints about Austen's *Emma*—that it insists upon marriage, that Emma must learn to see the world "as *Knighley sees it*" (427; italics Booth's), that the novel reinforces "those deep-seated sexist beliefs that are taught by most Western fiction until our century" (428-29). Booth takes these complaints seriously and concedes them, in some way, until he works his concessions into an account of the novel by which it is seen to "contain[] within itself the antidotes to its own potential poisons" (432). These antidotes are to be found in the discovery that, though characters are imperfect, a standard of perfection in the novel derives from "that great woman, the implied Jane Austen" (433) who is "quite real on the page" (434).

Booth resolves for himself the ideological problems of the novel by formalizing them: Austen "work[s] to incorporate her vision into a successful realization of a conventional form" (430); the novel has to end a certain way. Booth's own conclusion is readable as ideological (what isn't?), but it is more interestingly readable as formal, when formalism is understood to mean his argument has to end a certain

way. Because he has learned from his Jane Austen to desire the whole and complete, the ordered and the clean—and because he loves Jane Austen—his argument about *Emma* is from the start determined to end in a vision and restoration of the author-mother-perfect-friend and must take whatever steps will lead to that restoration.

22. Fanny has earlier been more generous in bestowing the signs of her friendship. "[W]ithout loving her, without ever thinking like her, without any sense of obligation for being sought after now when nobody else was to be had; and deriving no higher pleasure from her conversation than occasional amusement, and *that* often at the expense of her judgment," Fanny "went to her every two or three days" (208). Untouched by Mary and unmoved by her in the discussion of Miss Owens, Fanny acts out an indifference acquired for purposes of display: "You know nothing and you care less, as people say," Mary notes. "Never did tone express indifference plainer" (288). But Fanny's well-spoken indifference (payback, perhaps, for the companion who had earlier remained "untouched and inattentive" in the face of "some tender ejaculation of Fanny's" about human and vegetative nature [208–9]) is the studied resolution of an irresistible restlessness: Fanny's visits to Mary and "the sort of intimacy which took place between them" are the product of "a kind of fascination" on Fanny's part (207–8). The hesitations and reluctances of Austen's language (a kind of / sort of relation between women) may name an erotic connection contained and dulled by the interposing figure of Edmund Bertram. For further discussion of Mary and Fanny, see Misty G. Anderson's "'The Different Sorts of Friendship': Desire in *Mansfield Park*," in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 167–83. Janet Todd allows her discussion of the "strangely threatening" nature of some friendships in Austen to trouble her notion that "social friendship" (which she finds most clearly exemplified in Austen's novels) "is a nurturing tie." See *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 4–5, 246–301.

23. "Homage" in "Talk of the Town," *New Yorker*, 5 November 1979, 41–42. I thank Deidre Lynch for suggesting that I look at this passage, and I thank audiences at the University of Utah and the University of Colorado at Boulder, as well as participants in D. A. Miller's graduate seminar at Columbia University, for their stimulating responses to this essay.

3

Sensibility by the Numbers: Austen's Work as Regency Popular Fiction

BARBARA M. BENEDICT

Introduction

Charlotte Brontë's sneer at Jane Austen still resonates. "And what did I find [in *Pride and Prejudice*]? she demanded in 1848. "An accurate daguerrotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden." Brontë's contempt for Austen crystallizes the Romantic opposition to Regency fiction thirty years after the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Compared to Scott's "big boom" and Brontë's sexual passion, Jane Austen's works were considered by Romantic advocates safely "delicate."¹ These judgments have swayed generations of critics into maintaining that Austen wrote refined novels that pleased conservative readers by steering clear of sentimentalism or rebellion. This pigeonholing of Austen as an author of high literature remains in effect.² Yet Austen wrote love stories at a time when novels that portrayed female emotion and the struggle of independent heroines against social convention were the popular rage. Moreover, the Romantic ideal of authorship as a sign of laudable originality was, in fact, only newly emerging, and doing so among a literary elite to which Austen did not belong. Poised between two aesthetics, Austen faced an audience that Brontë did not acknowledge. How did these original readers encounter Austen's work—as "literature" or as "fiction"? Since her novels plumb a popular tradition of love fiction, why did critics categorize her work as highbrow? What, indeed, is the relationship of this highbrow classification to Romantic ideals of authorship?

Scholars have noted Austen's close attention to the eddies of literary fashion in *Northanger Abbey*. But all her novels allude to popular texts. *Pride and Prejudice* condemns Mr. Collins for refusing to read novels. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* mock would-be Romantics' enthusiasm for fashionable literature; *Emma* refers to Mr. Martin's reading of Knox's *Elegant Extracts* and plunders John Almon's *New Foundling Hospital for Wit*, *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* both center on the