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THE  
*Economy*  
OF  
*Character*



Novels, Market Culture,  
and the Business of  
Inner Meaning



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time poses two challenges: to think about how the subject is already social, rather than external to the world she enters, and to think about how market is, for better or worse, a social site. In one way, this novel's shifts between the absolutely personal and the absolutely impersonal are a bravura demonstration of the lengths to which readers will go to "identify" with a less nobody. At the same time, those shifts between anyone and everyone suggest that the reading of literary character can involve more than recovering the occluded depths of selfhood. "Character" can be a device for pursuing lines of analysis that extend from one self on to others.<sup>55</sup>

→ Austen to the rescue

## *Jane Austen and the Social Machine*

### CIRCULATION AND PERSONAL EFFECTS

In 1786 the German novelist Sophie von LaRoche kept a travel diary recording her journey to and around London. Her itinerary was determined in part by her crush on her sister novelist Frances Burney and her determination to put a face to her mind's-eye image of the genius behind *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. A female Boswell, engaged in a literary pilgrimage, Sophie von LaRoche was a missionary for the author function, the institution that has made sense of texts by privileging the meanings of the literary work that seem to pertain to the author's psychological profile. Along with literature, LaRoche's most pressing concern while in London was shopping: she was an inveterate window-shopper. From her diary's catalog of the contents of the city's show-windows and shop interiors, its reports on research into the retailing of women's shoes, lapdogs, and "liqueurs of every brand," two typical passages, which encapsulate two distinct propositions about the value of the consumer's pleasures, may be extracted. I want to use these two consumer reports to outline in a preliminary way the complex response that, two decades later, Jane Austen—another fan of Burney's—would make in assessing her contemporaries' new uses of literary character.

In the first of LaRoche's consumer reports, the discovery of an Oxford Street lamp-seller's stall excites the sightseer's Anglophilia. This entry in the diary praises a progressive nation in which commodities' travels across social space bespeak the glory of the constitution that guarantees the equality of citizens, at least on the shop floor. The Bill of Rights secures Britons the freedom to exercise their individual preferences and to choose their bill of goods. "The highest lord and humble labourer may purchase here lamps of immense beauty and price[,] or at a very reasonable figure, and both receive

equally rapid and courteous attention." The story about the circulation of goods that this diary entry recounts reiterates the sociable fictions of political economy. According to the moral philosophy of the mid-eighteenth century, the expansion of commerce creates an impersonal public sphere—one in which citizens of various income brackets are universally incorporated and which endows each of them with an identity. While arguing against the French Jacobins' plans to confiscate church lands, Edmund Burke, who loathed the Jacobins' political activity and heartily preferred moral philosophy's assurances that the market would eventually take care of questions of distributive rights all by itself, restated this argument for LaRoche and Austen's generation. A passage from his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a text in which Burke addresses a member of the French national assembly but keeps one eye on his own nation of shopkeepers, defends the contribution to the commonwealth that is proffered by lazy monks and even by "those who sing on the stage." Pursued to its logical conclusion, this vindication of the social contributions made by those who do not produce economic wealth would also ascribe value to the activities of Burke's female readers: through exchange, Burke proposed (recycling a phrase of Adam Smith's), each one helps to turn "the great wheel of circulation."<sup>1</sup>

Sophie von LaRoche does not seem to have had the great wheel of circulation on her mind, however, when, visiting Josiah Wedgwood's showroom, she did some shopping in propria persona: "I bought a seal really expressive of my present mood and past fortune; namely, a female figure leaning on a ruined pillar, looking back along the road she had come." This passage, the second of the consumer reports that interest me, makes the commodity a vehicle for a personal narrative rather than a social fiction: LaRoche suggests how a writing desk accessory can be serviceable in the interior decoration of the self. Made on a miniature scale, her knickknack is—like the diminutive thimble cases and snuffboxes and perfume flasks that are to be found in our museums' eighteenth-century galleries—a natural for inconspicuous consumption. Because, like the various collectible containers that I've just listed, it articulates a boundary and defines private space (before the mid-nineteenth-century introduction of envelopes, seals closed up the folds of letters), the souvenir LaRoche acquires can be the sort of personal effect that testifies to and intensifies the individual's secret life. "The souvenir," Susan Stewart writes, "contracts the world in order to expand the personal."<sup>2</sup>

This souvenir's provenance in one of the *public* spaces Josiah Wedgwood

designed to sell his china produces ironies we would do well to engage, however. In the history of mass production and mass marketing Wedgwood figures as a pioneer. "Common Wedgwood" was by the end of the eighteenth century in the reach of the "common people," and its use, the manufacturer boasted, was "spread over the whole Globe." Wedgwood also pioneered techniques that enhanced the imaginary singularity of any one piece of goods and encouraged the customer to develop especially intimate relations with his wares: LaRoche's reverie over her Wedgwood seal bears witness to his success. He made the client's acquisition of his stock a matter of seemingly exclusive privilege and a marker of individual distinction. Thus, while Wedgwood built canals and promoted turnpikes to improve his distribution, invented the advertising blitz, canvassed his associates for suggestions for new methods of displaying his wares, and filled his showroom with mock-ups of the dining tables of the titled aristocracy, he also, by contrast, appears to have studied the protocols of secrecy as well as the protocols of showmanship. He limited the number of articles from his popular line of jasper tea services that would be accessible to the public eye at any one time. He told King George a fib about how the ingredients necessary in the manufacture of that jasper china ware had been used up, in the hope of starting a rumor that might make the cups and saucers that he marketed seem rarer still.<sup>3</sup>

When we put them together, LaRoche's reports on her Wedgwood seal and on the crowd at the Oxford street lampseller's also confront us with ironies. Taken in tandem, they suggest a paradox of which Jane Austen was well aware, as her novels' cagey presentation of the fashionable snobberies of tourists and circulating library subscribers attests: the perturbing sociability of the act of private consumption. LaRoche pivots between personalizing her property—identifying her self in her (decommodified) things—and valorizing "the great wheel of circulation"—the mechanism of social integration that could make her personal effects any person's property. Extrapolating, we can identify in her consumer reports a fable about how, even in reading by and for oneself, one reads in a crowd. In the inside stories of the novel of manners, the romantic reader finds the means to sound the depths of her own special self and manifest her distinctive sensibility. In an age of steam-powered printing presses and circulating libraries, however, the silent reader's intimate transactions with the inner meanings of literature are public-spirited in a couple of senses: from such pursuits of individual distinction a public sphere is composed, and such pursuits of individual distinction are

haunted by the murmuring spirit of mass consumption. The treatment of Austen's characterization that this chapter offers will double as a discussion of how Austen registers novel readers' need to navigate ironies of this kind.

Appreciation of this irony, this chapter will demonstrate, underlies Jane Austen's response to her era's reorganization of reading: her insistence on articulating the individuated language of the heroine's psyche with the impersonal language of the commonplace. This chapter builds on the previous two in treating the particular uses of the literary character that developed in tandem with the expansion of the book market. In order to complicate the history of romantic reading that I've already laid out, I aim here to demonstrate how Austen's novels position interiority at a relay point that articulates the personal with the mass-produced.

Compare the mental life of an Elinor Dashwood (*Sense and Sensibility*) or an Anne Elliot (*Persuasion*) to that of Burney's Wanderer, a misunderstood loner. The comparison casts into relief one measure Austen adopts to register her insight into the embarrassing sociability of her readers' rites of introspection and to give us the wherewithal to manage that embarrassment. In contrast to Burney's protagonists, an Austen heroine is never precisely in a position to be a "female Robinson Crusoe" and have her thoughts as her sole companions. Characters who are rarely alone with their thoughts—characters who instead are perpetually anxious about keeping the lines of communication open and the wheels of conversation turning—are precisely those whom Austen chooses for her heroines. At the same time that Austen mobilizes the hallmarks of literary psychology to endow her heroine with an inner life, she also depicts her (to adopt a locution the novelist favors throughout her oeuvre) as conscientiously "mindful" of "the feelings of others." Her "mind filled," this heroine has a head supplied with emotions that belong to other people, a mental life that unfolds in what accordingly is at once an interior and a social space. In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* especially, Austen handles point of view so that listening in on the self-confirming language of depth that endows a heroine with an inner life consistently involves hearing in the background the murmurs of a crowd.

In this chapter I will, accordingly, treat not just Austen's interest in individualizing her characters and readers; I will also treat her interest in crowding. Even as Austen equips novel readers to participate in a psychological culture's rites of distinction, she also has us contemplate copying as she archly goes through the motions of writing women's fiction and as she adds more texts to an overcrowded novel market, and she makes us contemplate how

a commercial culture renders people copies of one another. In the latter vein, she offers crowd portraits of the sort that the narrator of *Persuasion* puts together as she introduces the women who are Anne Elliot's neighbors for volume 1, Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove. Thinking about these particular two young ladies prompts the narrator to think of vast numbers and so dislocate the question of individual particularity: "Henrietta and Louisa, young ladies of nineteen and twenty, . . . had brought from a school at Exeter all the usual stock of accomplishments, and were now, like thousands of other young ladies, living to be fashionable, happy, and merry."<sup>4</sup> The Misses Steele are installed within the society of *Sense and Sensibility* in similar fashion. Their kinsman promises Elinor Dashwood the acquaintance of "the sweetest girls in the world," but, his superlative notwithstanding, they are introduced as faces in the crowd: "Elinor well knew that the sweetest girls in the world were to be met with in every part of England, under every possible variation of form, face, temper, and understanding" (102). Such portraits of copycats, whose characterization is exhausted in a single sentence, indulge novel readers with the pleasure of instant legibility—the pleasure of character *types*. Another way to say this, one I will elaborate on in this chapter as I chart the developments in graphic technology that underlay this repowered notion of the "type," is that throughout her work Austen is concerned not just with the sound of the round character's inner voice, but also with noise. She concerns herself with the noise emitted by what I will call her culture's copy machines—a label I use to underline how frequently Austen confronts us with the mechanized aspects of social life (and of literature). In Austen's novels, complying with fashion and the demands of what the Dashwood sisters call "general civility"—writing bread-and-butter letters, talking about the weather—involves recycling the commonplaces that everybody uses and accommodating oneself to customs and linguistic forms that, machinelike, have an impersonal logic of their own. Thus to depict social transactions such as epistolary exchanges and polite conversations—transactions in which, as with the character type, meaningfulness is sacrificed to repetition—Austen will use language we more often associate with a machine and its clatter. In *Persuasion*, rooms filled with people are experienced by Anne Elliot as stages for unintelligible sound: the fashionable world's "nothing-saying" (178) is apprehended less often as an aggregate of distinct voices, more frequently as a "ceaseless buzz" or a hum (173). Elizabeth Bennet's traveling companion to Hunsford Parsonage, courtly Sir William Lucas, regales her with civilities that are "worn out like his information," and that, since Sir William has

“nothing to say that could be worth hearing,” are “listened to with about as much delight as the rattle of the chaise” (136). Austen’s unfinished novel *Sanditon* features a frenzy of epistolary activity in which one letter generates another, without any ever making sense. The character who sets up this “circuitous train of intelligence” (367) caps her admiring description of the clamor of this correspondence with the words “Wheel within wheel” (343)—casting herself as the engineer of a sort of white noise machine.

Noise in Austen registers the ubiquity of the social.<sup>5</sup> By directing attention to it, Austen reveals the mechanisms of transmission that compose a society and the networks for mechanical repetition that sustain mass communications. She directs attention to the circuits of exchange that underwrite the inside stories of romantic fiction—that give that fiction’s deep meanings their currency in the book market. Paying attention to the busy, prosy hum of her crowds dislocates our sense of what Austen’s priorities are. Customarily, Austen’s position within histories of the novel is pinpointed by relating her to a concept of “romantic individualism.” Either she is against it, as we are told by the scholarship associating her with an anti-Jacobin recoil from the cult of sensibility and the moral claims of individual feeling,<sup>6</sup> or she finds in her novels the means—specifically, her use of free indirect discourse—of bringing about an ideal blend of the individual and the social, rehabilitating sensibility for the nineteenth-century novel’s sociocentric world. As *The Rise of the Novel* put it in a now somewhat notoriously androcentric statement, Austen combines into “a harmonious unity” the subjective narrative mode cultivated by the domestic Samuel Richardson and the objective mode cultivated by the public man Henry Fielding and thereby makes Henry James possible.<sup>7</sup> These ways of relating Austen to literary history converge insofar as each preempts consideration of how a self-society opposition is constructed and how it is naturalized. They preempt consideration of how Austen’s novels, in bringing impersonal discourses into dynamic exchange with the feeling-filled language of inside views, help to establish the staging and management of that opposition as the special social office of “the” novel, an office that endows the genre with its authority among the disciplines.<sup>8</sup> As I analyze crowd noise and interior feeling in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Persuasion*, and *Sanditon*, I will show how Austen stages and manages that exchange between the impersonal and the personal in ways that recast the emergent romantic protocols for reading: she supplements the opportunities her readers have for practice in sympathetic feeling by inviting them to partake in lighthearted games of stereotype-recognition and cliché-busting. I also will suggest that for Aus-

ten self-expression and the rites of self-culture prosper truly only when sheltered by the whirl and hum of the run-of-the mill.

### READING AND REPEATING

Earlier, in the remarks on *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* included in my third chapter, I suggested how Austen’s ways of writing character furthered the reorganization of romantic-period reading and how her novels contributed to positioning audiences and defining literature in new ways, so that “good” books were no longer those proclaiming standards of conduct but instead those supplying readers with practice in feeling.<sup>9</sup> It is easy to see how in characterizing Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot, the two heroines I focus on here, Austen recapitulates in some measure the techniques for producing psychological depth—the use of free indirect discourse, for instance—that were developed by Burney and Burney’s “school.” After all, as we read in the blurb that the Oxford University Press uses for its edition of Austen’s early work *The Watsons*, the novelist’s preferred story line features a “heroine . . . outstanding for her sense and goodness, virtues notably lacking in the other characters.” Arranging for this heroine’s isolation in her moral and cognitive individuality—arranging it so that no other character in the novel feels or sees as she does—Austen is making sure that her readership knows this protagonist in a way that the heroine’s world cannot. Austen’s distinction lies with the way that, reiterating the psychological story line that the novelists of her youth had begun to make familiar, she is especially self-aware about what is at stake in its reading, to the point that in *Persuasion* particularly—a novel that deemphasizes plot, concentrates on inward feeling, and reads like a transcript of Anne’s inner consciousness—this language of self-expression is presented as a reader’s language. To engage with the way Austen treats reading, I begin by addressing the manner in which, like Burney and her contemporaries, Austen moves the meaning of character into the inward territories of the unavowed.

This is where the meaning is in Austen’s characterization of Elinor Dashwood. For the entirety of volume two of *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor does not impart to her mother or her sister the knowledge that the reader shares with her in private, that Edward Ferrars has engaged his self if not his affections elsewhere. “She was stronger alone” (121). Neither Elinor’s speech nor her conduct indicates that she has a strong claim—indeed, one equal to her sister Marianne’s—on the role of abandoned woman and on a story line of romantic disaster. Marianne, by contrast, stakes her claim to the position of

sentimental heroine through a by-the-book adherence to a program of debility, letter writing, and tears. While she pursues her program, following Willoughby's departure from Devonshire, she makes no secret of her belief that feeling separates her from her sister and that she must suffer alone. Marianne assumes that Elinor is "happy" in Edward's love (160), hence unable to feel with her in her agony. The tension that drives *Sense and Sensibility* is rooted in the fact that Marianne's assumption is mistaken: grief and abandonment constitute the sisters' common ground. At the same time, however, that Austen arranges for there to be a real "resemblance in their situations" (227), she is also staging the conflict between Elinor's and Marianne's ways of seeing. She establishes Elinor's isolation so as to establish her inwardness, and *Sense and Sensibility* is in the final analysis very precise about how the two sisters are divided—which is in another manner than Marianne thinks. In conformity with the codes of inner meaning, it is through not displaying that she is a heroine that Elinor qualifies as one. Through free indirect discourse Elinor's inner life is delivered into the safekeeping of an impersonal narrator, who takes up the burden of that language of sentiment and self-expression which, with near-fatal results, Marianne has clamorously made her own.<sup>10</sup>

"Marianne restored to life, health, friends, and to her doating mother, was an idea to fill [Elinor's] heart with sensations of exquisite comfort, and expand it in fervent gratitude;—but it led to no outward demonstrations of joy, no words, no smiles. All within Elinor's breast was satisfaction, silent and strong" (275). *Sense and Sensibility* in its own way follows a policy of eschewing outward demonstrations. By this means, it frames its real story—this narrative of Elinor's interior experience—as arcane knowledge, imparted in confidence.

In *Persuasion*, the "little history of sorrowful interest" (31) that relates how in 1806 Anne Elliot was persuaded out of her engagement with Captain Wentworth is framed in similar ways: the framing renders it the basis for a similar reading situation, in which readers can measure their sympathies against the characters' and in which the true story, played against a publicly apprehended story, seems more possessible because it seems possessed exclusively. When in *Persuasion* the action of the novel proper begins, as peace turns the navy ashore and Anne and Wentworth find themselves reunited by chance eight years after their first separation, no one but the reader is aware of this prior narrative. This "little history of sorrowful interest" is, in effect, off the record. At this point, Anne, at Uppercross with her younger sister Mary, is separated from Lady Russell, Sir Walter Elliot, and her elder

sister Elizabeth, who are the "only three of her own friends in the secret of the past" and who have buried the episode in "oblivion" (33–34). Her consciousness of the past isolates her. Free indirect discourse reveals to readers how Anne copes alone with the shock of this reunion with Wentworth. Repeatedly following Anne as she retreats into the spaces of privacy that offer her intervals for reflection, it suggests that she savors this revival of bygone pains and pleasures, in the way that one savors a secret indulgence. Reading *Persuasion* is an experience of reading a narrative that, focusing on second chances even more than the other Austen novels do, frames itself as "a second novel"—a successor narrative to that first novel that is off the record.<sup>11</sup> What enhances readers' intimacy with Anne is that the experience of living *Persuasion* feels like that too. Adela Pinch remarks that "Anne's early experience is like a text which she is repeating with renewed feeling." It is not just that Anne is a bookish heroine, whose expressions of desolation take the form of repeating "to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn" (82), whose mind is occupied with recollections of Wentworth and remembered quotations. It is also, as Pinch observes, that "there is something literary in the temporal structure of *Persuasion*" itself, which "produces an isomorphism between the doubling of the first courtship and the second courtship, and the doubling of Anne's experience and a reader's experience."<sup>12</sup>

Participating in Anne's point of view means being privy to another, secret story in a way that generates a constant awareness of the lacunae in what is being narrated. In such a context, innocuous-sounding statements—"We are expecting a brother of Mrs. Croft's here soon; I dare say you know him by name" (51)—are laced with ironies for the initiated reader; polite conversation has unsuspected depths. Anne's absorption in her memories of how she formerly stood with Wentworth, her engagement with the story inside her head, has the effect of making her both thought-full and wordless. She and Wentworth share the past but share it separately. As a participant in the public life of the nation, Wentworth can revert to the year of their engagement: "His profession qualified him, his disposition led him, to talk; and 'That was in the year six;' 'That happened before I went to sea in the year six,' occurred in the course of the first evening they spent together" (63). By contrast, remembrance of the past—which for her is wholly defined in terms of a private life spent either with or without Wentworth—seems to bar Anne from speaking. Thus the interior animation that makes *Persuasion* into the record of the "dialogue of Anne's mind with itself" is also manifested as a

form of privation, as if interiority had as its necessary consequence an impassive, incommunicative exterior.<sup>13</sup> *Persuasion* makes this dissociation between inner and outer worlds into a principle of characterization. Describing the reactions that Wentworth elicits from his female listeners as he recounts his somewhat macho stories of disasters at sea, the narrator separates Anne from the others: "Anne's shudderings were to herself alone: but the Miss Musgroves could be as open as they were sincere, in their exclamations of pity and horror" (66). The negative distinction here ascribed to Anne registers how Austen accommodates her psychological culture's protocols for characterization. She is enabling readers to practice feeling along with Anne, with a sympathy that feels more authentic, like a more immaculately personal effect, because nobody within the novel, with the eventual exception of Wentworth, is conscious of her story. With their exclamations, the Misses Musgrove make too much noise for any one to notice it.

As is suggested by the echo of the language of Aristotle's *Poetics* that we hear in that mention of the Misses Musgroves' "pity and horror," Austen casts the women in this novel as Wentworth's readers. Soon after his arrival at Uppercross, Louisa and Henrietta acquire their own copy of the navy list and sit down together "to pore over it, with the professed view of finding out the ships which Captain Wentworth had commanded" (64): at the start of the novel Anne's ability to identify the rank and squadron of the Admiral Croft who wishes to rent her father's house indicates that she too possesses a navy list to pore over. Austen uses these examples to propose that to occupy one's mind with Wentworth means occupying one's eye with a book.<sup>14</sup> This analogy, and the passages that depict Anne withdrawing from company and casting a retrospective glance over events as if she were retiring with a book, suggest in their turn how the treatment of social matters and treatment of reading matter coincide in *Persuasion*. This is the case in the novels generally: as I shall demonstrate in the next section, Austen's commentaries in *Sense and Sensibility* on what Marianne Dashwood does with her reading matter are anything but a gratuitous addition to the courtship narrative. As a whole Austen's writing is about social relations—the relationship between, say, domestic life and public life—and about reading relations—about the textual conventions by which audiences are formed and distinguished. Her narratives weave together the processes of romantic choice and cultural discrimination.

Hence *Persuasion*'s mobilizing of the question of taste. Austen's characters adopt a language of judgment and appraisal to talk about courting: as charac-

terized by Lady Russell, Wentworth is someone who "at twenty-three had seemed to understand somewhat of the value of an Anne Elliot" (119). As we gather, at thirty he is someone who will understand that value again. But Wentworth's and Anne's second chance at happiness is postponed until Wentworth in his turn discovers how better to read other people. Anne and Wentworth's separation appears irrevocable and Wentworth remains angry over the events of 1806 so long as he thinks that those events brought to light a fatal flaw in Anne's character, so long as he thinks that "character" is something that can be deemed decided or proved once and for all. Austen suggests the trouble with Wentworth's theory of character by delineating his attitude to Anne in words that hearken back, anachronistically, to early-eighteenth-century ways of relating character and writing. His conviction that Anne is unworthy because she has been and, as he supposes, continues to be susceptible to persuasion is described as an "indelible, immoveable impression" (230). Similar terms occur when, conversing with Louisa Musgrove on the path to Winthrop, Wentworth suggests that such persuadability is to be deplored because it represents a falling away from an ideal of legibility and indelibility:

It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.—You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm.—Here is a nut . . . To exemplify,—a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where.—This nut . . . , while so many of its brethren have fallen and been trodden under foot, is still in possession of all the happiness that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of. (86)

The underlying metaphor of Wentworth's speech to Louisa recalls Alexander Pope's "Epistle on the Characters of Women"; it depicts Anne, whom Wentworth is here faulting for inconstancy, as "matter too soft a lasting mark to bear."<sup>15</sup> In place of this faith in the value of the mind that is made up, or, this faith in the character that is stabilized because it will take no more than a single mark (preferably Wentworth's own), what Wentworth must discover is something like romantic reading practices. He must learn to read in the manner in which, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet learns to read. As I suggested two chapters ago, Austen's account of how Elizabeth comes to realize the inadequacy of "first impressions" not only bespeaks the value

Austen places on human complexity and capacity for change through time<sup>16</sup> but also incorporates lessons in literary experience. With the happy ending that rewards Elizabeth for her re-perusals of letters and second looks at Darcy's portrait—rewards her for rereadings that uncover inner meanings and acknowledge that “character” is something that can never be definitively deciphered—Austen reinforces her proposals to her readers about what it means to *really* read. The Austen novel often associates love with the processes of interpreting a text, processes that are (to quote a pertinent passage in *Persuasion*) “ceaseless in interest” (227). This association underlies Austen's characteristic conclusion: the Austen novel's penultimate chapter often features a vaguely giggly conversation between the newly engaged couple in which, in the manner of Sophie von LaRoche's description of her Wedgwood seal, they “look back over the road they have come,” reading their own story and repeating passages from it in the way Anne Elliot “repeats” elegiac verse. Thus the penultimate chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* begins: “Elizabeth's spirits soon rising to playfulness again, she wanted Mr. Darcy to account for his having ever fallen in love with her” (262).<sup>17</sup> With her customary tact, Austen frequently keeps her readers at a distance from these exercises in reminiscence, but, we might infer, the conversation must be not only about laying the groundwork for an interpretive partnership devoted to the appreciation of “our love-story,” but also about finding out the latent significance in events that formerly seemed known. In these chapters, the lovers' activity and the readers' are aligned—which is also to say that these endings align the processes of remembering a lived experience and reassessing a text we have read. Austen might there be saying of the experience of being in love what romantic aesthetics said in making “the classic” into the prop for exercises in which individuals prolonged the act of interpretation and thereby probed their sensibilities: that the classic must be “never entirely comprehensible. But those who are cultivated and who cultivate themselves must always seem to learn more from it.”<sup>18</sup> In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars model this aesthetic attitude as they talk about their story: “[T]hough a very few hours spent in the hard labour of incessant talking will dispatch more subjects than can really be in common between any two rational creatures, yet with lovers it is different. Between *them* no subject is finished, no communication is even made, till it has been made at least twenty times over” (319).

When *Persuasion* concludes with the conversation that absorbs a newly engaged Anne and Wentworth, it makes a similar claim: “They could indulge in those retrospections and acknowledgments, and especially in those expla-

nations of what had directly preceded the present moment, which were so poignant and so ceaseless in interest. All the little variations of the last week were gone through; and of yesterday and to-day there could scarcely be an end” (227). Wentworth at last arrives at an understanding of Anne that is readerly in the approved manner this passage from chapter 23 commemorates. Clearly, it is Anne's attempts to understand Wentworth once again—“Now, how were his sentiments to be read?” (61)—that supply the chief episodes in the novel's drama of reading. But that drama also pivots on the particular, reader-centered manner in which *Persuasion* rewrites the Cinderella narrative, as it shifts the fairy tale's emphasis from the heroine's transformation into a beauty to the prince's second look at her face. This second look magically undoes the effects of the seven years whose passing faded Anne's complexion, robbed her of her bloom, and left her “wretchedly altered” (62).

The interest in interpretation that this rewriting of the Cinderella narrative indexes—an emphasis on revising and repeating, on spinning out the act of interpretation—also in 1818 represents an interest in conduct that garners cultural capital. It is time to remind ourselves that Austen's concern throughout her work with readers' relations to texts is a response to historically new uses of reading matter in which, as I have noted, literary response could serve as a mode of distinction and in which the pleasures of the imagination and the pleasures of social calculation were mutually enhancing. The second sort of pleasures are certainly on display in *Persuasion*'s description of the romantic environs of the seaside resort in which Anne Elliot's fortunes first take their turn for the better. “[T]hese places,” the narrator comments, “must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood” (94). Austen published in an era when the tourist trade was heating up on England's south coast and when, as a character in her own *Sanditon* points out, “Every five years, one hears of some new place or other starting up by the Sea, and growing the fashion.—How they can half of them be filled, is the wonder! . . . our Coast is too full of them altogether” (325). *Sanditon* proposes a less-than-romantic reading of *Persuasion*'s paean to Lyme: it makes it look as though *Persuasion*'s narrator is impersonating someone who (in a buyer's market) attempts to solicit the custom of the discriminating traveler. (“[T]hese places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood”: What tourist in quest of the picturesque would not like to be addressed as somebody who prefers the less showy sightseeing available off the beaten track?) Recast along those lines, this statement suggesting that

Lyme's unostentatious attractions "blush unseen" operates as a useful reminder of the context of social classification and contest in which Austen makes Elinor's and Anne's narratives into inside stories and exclusive property.

Perhaps it could also provide a reminder of the pedagogic context in which the cultural dispositions equipping readers to take pleasure in those secret, inside stories are formed. Like the attractions of Lyme, round characters "must be visited and visited again" for their worth to be understood. That effort of understanding transpires in the literature classroom especially, where we conscientiously re-peruse texts and year after year debate questions such as "Emma Woodhouse—a Heroine no one can like?" or "How sensible is Elinor Dashwood?" Austen's round characters are visited again: she herself supplied the terms in which those debates about her characters, a staple of literary pedagogy and a basic mechanism of literary depth, are managed. The very title *Sense and Sensibility* invites us to remind ourselves that the personalities of real characters exceed moral abstractions. It commends a program of author-ized character reading. So does Austen's prediction in correspondence that no one could like Emma but herself. This prescience on Austen's part about how to keep readers talking is not surprising: as I have suggested, while they meditate on what it means to repeat an experience or a story with renewed feeling, her novels vividly annotate the practices of romantic readers.

#### "WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL": READING AND WRITING MACHINES

On the evidence of that annotating, Austen should be seen as a self-aware contributor to the practices and protocols of aesthetic self-cultivation. She knows exactly what she is doing when she writes in support of the romantic premise that the interiority of the literary character represents for the reader a repository of significance not exhausted by commentary and of intellectual wealth not exhausted by consumption. At the same time she gives every evidence of intending to manage her characterization in ways that will put interiority in its place. She deliberately locates the reading of character at the edge of the polemical field in which her romantic contemporaries negotiated the relationship between literariness and literacy and pitted literary meaning against the bestselling meaninglessness of the stereotype and the cliché. What relation can there be between the "new editions," the repetitions of old impulses to which Freud alluded in assembling his romantic portrait of the

intricacies of individuality, and the new editions that worried many romantics because—in a period when a ten-thousand-copy edition of a Waverley novel could be bought up in three weeks—all those books made novel reading the activity of a crowd? The repetitions that are a component of romantic reading practices coexist uneasily with the repetitions of mass communications, which were stepped up in Austen's lifetime as presses began to be driven by steam engines and as printers began to employ the molds called "stereotypes" (invented in 1798) and "clichés" (introduced in France in 1809).<sup>19</sup> They coexist just as uneasily with the repetitions that define the economic cycles of a commercial society, uneasiness compounded in that when romantic commentators think about money as "a financial instrument that can reproduce itself through interest without reference to any actual exchange," they often seem, by an association of ideas, to think about how the production of literary works can proceed through "the purely technical manipulation of conventional forms and images."<sup>20</sup> This uneasy coexistence is precisely Austen's subject.

Round characters, who disavow outward demonstrations, are accomplices of discourse. They keep us talking, much as the complexities that lovers can discover in each other and in each other's stories keep Austen's couples talking. By contrast, a revoking of self-expression seems incorporated into our notion of flat characters. The fact that *cliché* and *stereotype*, the terms we use in designating substandard characterization, have their provenance in the history of printing registers a fear of repeating and copying the word that intersects, paradoxically, with a fear of wordlessness. The antiprint romanticism that wields those terms reacts to the frightening prospect that, in an age of mass communications, the signs producing personal effects—the depth effects that we identify with personality—can belong to everybody. Books might become "every person's property"—and for this very reason these signs might as well belong to nobody in particular.

Austen's reading would have made her acquainted with the rhetoric that conduct literature and critical reviews such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Edinburgh*, and the *Quarterly* mobilized to defend the aesthetic and defend the self against this dispossession. Her contemporaries' efforts to preserve literariness as an exclusive property resonate throughout her work. The hallmarks of their antiprint rhetoric were an emphasis on excess and an emphasis on the mechanical. The diatribes against popular literature are troubled by its apparent proliferation: in this context, presses are with regularity "inundated," "deluged," or "groaning" under the weight of too many novels that

are too much alike. In Austen's *Sanditon* Sir Edward Denham complains about the "mere trash" of the "'common circulating library'" but also borrows books from the Sanditon library by the armful (357), an episode suggesting how Austen has both picked up on the reviewers' implicit contention that bad books are those that come in bulk and recognized the self-aggrandizing ends to which the reviewers' ultra-repeatable rhetoric can be turned.

Conduct book writers and critics are also wont to imply—if only through their fondness for borrowing technical terms from printers—that it is now machines that are doing the writing and the reading. Hence Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1816): "Now, partly by the labours of successive poets and in part by the more artificial state of society and social intercourse, language, mechanized as it were into a barrel-organ, supplies at once instrument and tune."<sup>21</sup> Confronting what was apparently a bad epic poem commemorating the English victory at Waterloo, a critic for the *Quarterly Review* chose to assess the text as if it were a specimen of the mechanical genius of one M. Didot, a French printer, who was, "if not the inventor, at least the introducer of that mode of printing called *Stereotype*," and who was also most recently, according to the reviewer, the designer of a "verse engine": "It was not, indeed, to be expected that the machine, however ingenious, could always place the words in intelligible order or work out anything like sense or meaning, but . . . the lines of the pamphlet look as like real bona fide verses, as if they had been written by the hand of man, and printed by the ordinary process of the press."<sup>22</sup> The hackneyed novel is likewise presented in the reviews as a product stamped out by a press rather than created by an author. As the *Edinburgh* suggested in 1803 in an indignant review of Germaine de Staël's *Delphine*, the hackneyed novel's heroine is a creature of prefabricated language: she is made not of sugar and spice, but of "customary phrases, *union of souls* . . . &c. &c. &c., the types of which Mr. Lane of the Minerva Press very prudently keeps ready composed, in order to facilitate the printing of the Adventures of Captain C— and Miss F—, and other interesting stories." The anxiety informing this Luddite mode of literary criticism is that books' (and characters') roles in the rites of privacy and private ownership are mitigated by the iterability and predictability that associate them with machines. This is because, for a start, the machine's promiscuous availability to all users suspends the individuality of any one user. (The *Edinburgh* reviewer in fact goes on to equate that availability with a sexual threat. To demonstrate that the "vulgarity" of the ready-made language of *Delphine* ought to "dimin-

ish [the novel's] value," he cites the latest statistical study on the surplus of prostitutes in the London streets: "Mr. Colquhoun . . . reckons up above 40,000 heroines of this species, most of whom . . . have at one time or another reasoned like the sentimental Delphine."<sup>23</sup>

In some measure the role circulating libraries played in facilitating new readers' reading accounts for the frequency with which they appear in the negative descriptions of modern mass communications. But arguably the commentators' tendency to dwell on what was "circulating" about these institutions derives from the ways in which, to early-nineteenth-century observers, books resembled money, not necessarily by partaking of money's desirability but rather by mimicking its ubiquity and characterlessness. Books from circulating libraries are represented in the reviews as a form of circulating specie. They move with rapidity from hand to hand: one book resembles another as one penny resembles another penny. Thomas Carlyle thus referred to "the legal coins of the Minerva Press" in an 1820 review that delineated a kind of literary Gresham's law as Carlyle complained that the "critical Assaying-house" had allowed Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, "a German *Friedrich d'or*," to slip unnoticed among "new and brilliant British brass Farthings." There may be a second reason, however, why commentators dwelt on the circulating. It is worth acknowledging that to modern ears the phrase *circulating library* (used where we would expect to hear of a lending library) doesn't necessarily describe exchanges of books so much as it suggests a building that is in motion. That is, the phrase itself suggests some sort of a machine, a bibliopolic form of Burke's "great wheel of circulation" or Coleridge's "barrel organ." Certainly, commentators deployed images of the mechanical in ways that suggested "circulating" as a possible description of the condition of the library's users. Reading on automatic pilot, bad readers can look like giddy cogs in a whirling machine. Impelled by the "demand for the same adventures, the same language, and the same sentiments," the novel addict portrayed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the like, who moves back and forth and back and forth from sofa to circulating library, is herself engaging in a kind of mechanical circulation.<sup>24</sup> In the dystopias of antiprint romanticism, female reading, "for all its self-indulgence, . . . is oddly impersonal."<sup>25</sup>

Together with *Northanger Abbey*, *Sanditon*, the novel Austen was writing at the time of her death, represents an exploration of what Coleridge's "barrel-organ" might sound like: each is an experiment in mobilizing the authorless, impersonal hum of a ready-made language. *Northanger Abbey* is a tour de force demonstration of the repeatability of the codes of novel writing. Catherine

Morland's excursions to Bath and Northamptonshire take her down a generic beaten track. Like a Burney heroine, Evelina having her hair frizzed or Camilla catching up with fashion, Catherine finds that a "heroine's entrée into life could not take place till after three or four days had been spent in learning what was mostly worn" (7); she is even abducted as Radcliffe's Adeline and Emily are, although the villain in the case is merely a boorish John Thorpe intent on bullying Catherine into carriage-rides at unsuitable moments.<sup>26</sup> All that is out of the ordinary, finally, about Catherine's adventures is that Austen has transposed them to the register of the commonplace: "Every thing indeed . . . was done, on the part of the Morlands, with a degree of moderation and composure, which seemed rather consistent with the common feelings of common life, than with the refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions which . . . [a heroine's story] ought always to excite" (6).

Critical consensus has it that *Northanger*, published posthumously in 1818, was written in the 1790s and revised for the last time in 1803. However, a later date suggests itself once we note how neatly its concerns lead into *Sanditon*'s.<sup>27</sup> Allusions to Burney, Richardson, and Scott make *Sanditon* read, as *Northanger* does, as if Austen's fun in writing it consisted partly in going archly through the motions of writing a novel. Not only novel reading but also advertising, the fashion trade, quack medicine, and picturesque tourism are at issue here: in the town of Sanditon—at its circulating library especially—these practices flourish in their most conventionalized, inane, and excessive forms. It is the desire to copy strategies for seduction from novels and to learn to talk "a good deal by rote" (353) that takes Sir Edward Denham to Mrs. Whitby's circulating library. Charlotte Heywood visits it to examine its stock of fashionable accessories: "new Parasols, new Gloves, and new Broches" (331), "all the useless things in the World that could not be done without" (345). When he wishes to investigate Sanditon's financial fortunes, Mr. Parker visits the library and inspects the library's subscription list, which to his disappointment proves "but commonplace" (344). It is fitting that all roads in the town Mr. Parker has "planned and built, and praised and puffed" (328) seem to lead to the circulating library, because Sanditonians like Parker, who has built on sand, seem immensely willing to invest in empty convention—in signs in the place of substance. The healthy people at the watering place invest in the signs of rakishness, which is here precisely a kind of speaking rather than doing, or they invest in the signs of fashion. The invalids advertise their genteel refinement through the signs of sickness and also, as consumers of "Tonic Pills" in which their friends have a financial

interest (374), purchase the signs of health. The Minerva novels with which William Lane stocked his network of circulating libraries were notorious for repeating one another: more precisely, rumor had it that often one Minerva novel was a replica of another and that, in the effort to augment his inventory, Lane merely simulated the differences between them. He shuffled chapters, played "tricks . . . with title-pages," and so escalated the fictionality of his fictions by cavalierly marketing the trappings and not the substance of novelty and by making pretense an element of his retail practice.<sup>28</sup> Fiction plays a parallel role in Sanditon's speculative economy.

In a fitting exemplification of the circularity that fascinates Austen in this novel, *Sanditon*—which was never finished and never gets around to launching a courtship plot—ends up being about the puffing of Sanditon. The twelve chapters we have are largely devoted to the efforts that Mr. Parker, his sister, and his partner-in-speculation, Lady Denham, make to add names with élan to the library's undistinguished subscription list and to fill up the resort's lodgings with invalids who require salubrious sea breezes. For Diana Parker, the novel's hypochondriac, selling Sanditon is a matter of selling sickness or imaginary complaints in order to sell health or imaginary cures.<sup>29</sup> Putting his faith in mimetic desire, Mr. Parker, for his part, is confident that fashion will attract fashion to Sanditon—will attract, in the impersonal, generic terms that passages from Parker's point of view regularly adopt, more harps heard through "upper casements" and more "Females in elegant white . . . to be seen with [the] books and [the] campstools" that mark them as chic devotees of the picturesque (338). *Sanditon*'s account of puffery reveals the picturesque tourist, the female in elegant white, the novel reader, and the hypochondriac to be copy machines. While it does so, the reading machines and writing machines of Austen's lifetime seem to be humming in the background.

But there are additional ways in which this novel can seem an examination of the mechanized aspects of social life. The codes that shape the Sanditonians' speech and action seem impersonal, not only because they are codes—and as such inherently transferable—but also because they operate according to a logic that bypasses or mutates human intentions. Puffery in the form of inflation works like this as it demonstrates that economic indicators (for example, the increases in the cost of meat that so exasperate Lady Denham) are dissociated utterly from real values and needs. Dependent on the letter-writing of acquaintances of acquaintances, the intricate epistolary machine ("Wheel within wheel") that Diana Parker mobilizes to drum up business for

Sanditon likewise takes on a life of its own. It giddily spins out of Diana's control, "vaporis[ing] reality and generat[ing] purely verbal 'facts.'"<sup>30</sup> Under its influence she thinks she has persuaded two large families to take lodgings in Sanditon, but "the subject had supplied Letters and Extracts and Messages enough to make everything appear what it was not" (372), and only one family (a *little* family of four) arrives.

In general, writing is immensely productive of absurdity here, print especially so. *Sanditon* begins when two newspaper clippings—advertisements in the *Morning Post* and the *Kentish Gazette* (323)—send Mr. Parker off on a wild goose chase for a surgeon who will let himself be lured from Willingden to Sanditon. That there are two advertisements in Parker's pocket seems to speak to the inherent excessiveness of print. There are also two places called Willingden (and Parker goes to the wrong one), just as there are two Sanditons, old Sanditon and the new town Mr. Parker has developed. Parker has left his old house vacant and built a second one, which, unable to resist a cliché, he has named Trafalgar Place, replicating other Trafalgar Places popping up like mushrooms across England.

No doubt, one stake of the recurring celebrations of the "economical" nature of Austen's prose is the consolatory service these celebrations do in a climate in which, like the one she satirizes in *Sanditon*, mechanical reproduction is perceived to be operating overtime and running amok. In this climate, interpretation—readers' intimate transactions with psychological inside stories and their experiments in repeating and revising their readings with renewed feeling—operates as another, equivalent sort of defense mechanism. The exercises in interpreting that Austen writes into her characterization offer readers a way to salvage what is personal and personalizing, rather than mechanical, about their reading. But it is characteristic of Austen's evenhandedness that she also invites readers to analyze the social machinery of distinction, the maneuvering that occurs when we claim, while we interpret, to be *in* a print culture's crowd of readers but not *of* it.

Even Mr. Parker, a creature of replication, is capable of making the moves that support a claim to distinction. When Mr. Heywood reminds him that the south coast is overcrowded with fashionable bathing-places, Parker agrees that "those good people who are trying to add to the number, are . . . excessively absurd, and must soon find themselves the Dupes of their own fallacious Calculations"; yet somehow, for Mr. Parker Sanditon does not add to the number, though the recent "'attempts of two or three speculating People about Brinshore'" do (326). Austen's interest in such crowd-repelling

strategies also lies behind the irony we hear in the third chapter of *Northanger Abbey* when the narrator describes how Catherine Morland and her friends visit the pump-room at Bath. They stayed "long enough . . . to discover that the crowd was insupportable, and that there was not a genteel face to be seen, which every body discovers every Sunday throughout the season" (19). With the words that underscore the commonplace nature of their discovery (it is everybody's discovery on every Sunday), Austen underscores how her characters are contributing to the crowdedness of the crowd, even as they lament it and establish their own distinctive gentility through that lament. Their pursuit of personal distinction is what makes the figures in this crowd portrait into run-of-the-mill types. Every one goes through these motions. The process that this passage in *Northanger Abbey* describes is like the one we replay whenever we drive onto the freeway, are brought to a halt by bumper-to-bumper traffic, and proceed to marvel over the number of cars and marvel over why "people" simply cannot stay home. The sequel of the chapter, which ushers in *Northanger Abbey's* famous vindication of novel writing and reading, makes it clear that the process the passage describes is likewise akin to the one Austen's fellow novelists replay whenever they degrade "by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding." Mindful of the cramped conditions in their shared generic territory, the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* draws a moral for fellow novelists. They have responded to the crowding by "scarcely ever permitting [such works] to be read by their own heroine[s], who, if [they] accidentally take up a novel, [are] sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust." The advice of Austen's narrator is: "Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans" (21).

There is no gainsaying the pleasures Austen supplies when her characterization enables us to watch the characters turn into types. One astute definition has it that the stereotype is an already-read text.<sup>31</sup> This description suggests the affinities that link the pleasure that we feel when we begin to think that we've really got Mr. Parker's number to the pleasure that we reap from Austen's intertextuality. We can see the first of these pleasures as a variant on the parlor game of allusion-spotting that Austen initiates whenever, flirting with conventionality, she regales us with "novel slang" or rewrites quotations from Pope. This game, in catering to the comfortable pleasures of recognition (the pleasures of seeing again a figure that "Adam saw in the first novel he opened"), is not so different from the game that the characters of *Emma* play

with the little Knightleys' box of letters.<sup>32</sup> The enjoyment afforded by the already-read text of the stereotype is also like one form of the enjoyment afforded by gossip, an activity Austen's readers have frequently alluded to when they have defined the nature of her comedy. Rumor mills too—as, with its suggestions of mechanical reproduction, the very term *mill* implies—thrive off the reiterative pleasures of the code, and the interest that the hackneyed narratives of gossip arouse depends partly on “the very familiarity of [their] form.”<sup>33</sup>

#### THE PERSONAL AND THE PRO FORMA

Austen's comfort with the paradoxes that attend the mechanical reproducibility of personal effects shapes not only her novels' comedy but also their concern with the cultivation of feeling. To get a sense of that comfort, one might start by recognizing how the Dashwood sisters' enthusiastic participation in commercialized print culture contributes toward *Sense and Sensibility's* creation of “a new arena for personal feeling in the novel.”<sup>34</sup> Margaret, the youngest Dashwood, engages her elders in a game of speculation when, “striking out a novel thought,” she wonders aloud what they would do “if somebody [gave them] all a large fortune apiece.” In response Edward Ferrars predicts that the Dashwoods would shop: “What magnificent orders would travel from this family to London . . . in such an event! What a happy day for booksellers, music-sellers and print-shops!” (79). Edward's suggestion that the sisters' shopping spree would encompass the sister arts—literature, music, and graphic art—indexes the degree to which Austen identifies both Marianne and Elinor with the project of “taste.” Both are committed to developing their aesthetic sensibilities. When he continues, however, Edward lingers on the mixed motives that would inform Marianne's particular share in this shopping: “Thomson, Cowper, Scott—[Marianne] would buy them all over and over again; she would buy up every copy, I believe, to prevent their falling into unworthy hands” (79). Marianne, Edward suggests, would not only buy for pleasure, but would also buy to make poetry into a controlled substance, property reserved for those few who could consume it appropriately. The desire Edward attributes to Marianne—for a property of a rigorously personalized kind—seems to motivate the dissatisfaction she expresses later with the codes of picturesque description: “It is very true . . . that admiration of landscape scenery is become a mere jargon. Every body pretends to feel and tries to describe with the taste and elegance of him who first defined what picturesque beauty was. I detest jargon of every kind, and some-

times I have kept my feelings to myself, because I could find no language to describe them in but what was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning” (83). Unlike Anne Elliot, who, as I have noted, is a quoting heroine and who in this capacity *does* repeat what others have uttered, Marianne, uncomfortable with being numbered among “every body” and being a face in the crowd, wants language to herself. “I abhor every common-place phrase” (38). The fact that language circulates, and the possibility that words—like coins traveling from hand to hand—may be “worn” in their passage from mouth to mouth, bother her.<sup>35</sup> Marianne takes pride in how her self-fashioned ethical program gives preference to the authentic over the imitative, real feelings over pretended feelings, and self-expression over conformity to “‘common-place notions’” (45). But here this scheme leads Marianne into a logical quandary. To describe her rapturous feelings about the countryside around Barton Cottage involves, simultaneously, expressing herself *and* immersing herself in the conventional and commonplace: Marianne is almost tempted therefore to conform to what she identifies as Elinor's over-cautious self-restraint and so fall silent.

Despite her best intentions, Marianne copies. In this instance, she is almost tempted to copy her sister's silence. Austen arranges for repetition and for convention to prove crucial to Marianne's fate. For instance, that complaint about the hackneyed jargon of the picturesque echoes any number of literary reviews that, in equally programmatic ways, lamented the repetitive propensities of the travelers who published accounts of their journeys in quest of the picturesque. “Next to novels,” the most “fashionable kind of reading,” according to one rather jaded reviewer, the descriptive tour, another reviewer observed, soon makes us “sensible of that disgust, which attends the frequent repetition of the same remarks.” These tours, it was said, could place the reader “in an unvaried reverie, like that produced by the constant and uniform repetition of any heavy sound.”<sup>36</sup> Willoughby, who at the start of the novel devotedly copies out pieces of piano music for Marianne (72), goes on to betray her with copying in the novel's second volume. The insulting letter he sends to her in London turns out in some sense not to be his own: “[he] had only the credit of servilely copying” what his fiancée dictated to him (288). Noting the resemblances that affiliate Marianne with Colonel Brandon's two Elizas, other readers have speculated that, in creating Marianne, Austen gave herself a means of examining her genre's sentimental investment in repeating the stereotypes of female suffering.<sup>37</sup> Marianne is a new edition of a half-century's worth of betrayed heroines. The fact that

she's taken a page (or more) from sentimental fiction's book alters how we assess her claim to possess an inner uniqueness that would be compromised by association with other people's commonplaces. In her cultivation of individuality (*because* of her cultivation of individuality), Marianne may be recognized as a type—a victim of convention in more than one sense.

If Austen slyly arranges for Marianne, the sister with sensibility, to be read like a book, it does not follow that she wants the inner life of the sister with sense to be identified in any simple way with notions of deep meanings too personal to be articulated. When Elinor Dashwood describes personal responses—even so personal a response as her attraction to Edward Ferrars—her language is at once impersonal *and* self-betraying. This is the language that Elinor uses to Marianne at the moment when she does not “attempt to deny . . . that [she thinks] very highly of [Edward]—that [she] greatly esteem[s], that [she] like[s] him” (17):

Of his sense and his goodness, . . . no one can, I think, be in doubt, who has seen him often enough to engage him in unreserved conversation. . . . upon the whole, I venture to pronounce that his mind is well-informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure. His abilities in every respect improve as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person. At first sight, his address is certainly not striking; and his person can hardly be called handsome, till the expression of his eyes, which are uncommonly good, and the general sweetness of his countenance, is perceived. (16–17)

Barbara M. Benedict has called attention to the “mannered parallelisms, abstract diction and passive phrasing” that make this little speech curiously evocative of the moral essays that Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* parrots and copies into her commonplace book. Benedict proposes that what we are hearing from Elinor is a version of the dispassionate language of a third-person narrator, a version of novels' language of communal judgment and social authority. Indeed, the description of Edward that Elinor offers could be one that such a narrator would use to introduce a heroine, a character whose worth, in conformity to the program of the period, could not be judged at “first sight.” Oddly, the phrasing that allies Elinor with the faceless narrator of *Sense and Sensibility* also characterizes and personalizes her. For all its stilted formality and impersonality, this passage of description tells us more about Elinor's caution than it does about Edward's worth. It suggests Elinor's

curiously distanced relation to her own feelings: how Elinor's resolve is not so much *to* judge objectively as it is *not to* let desire sway her.<sup>38</sup>

That the passage points in two directions invites us to think further about how, with Elinor, the language of private feeling, which gives readers an inside view, is articulated with the language of commonplaces and crowd portraits. Austen's handling of point of view and use of free indirect discourse, I have suggested, render the real story of *Sense and Sensibility* the story of Elinor's inner experience. Yet Austen makes us work if we want straightforwardly to correlate psychological effects with individuality or to correlate what is most private with what is most personal. In talking of her love, Elinor places herself in a crowd and re-cites what everyone says and feels. (“‘No one’ can doubt Edward's abilities; the sweetness of his face “is perceived,” perhaps by all the world, certainly not by Elinor in particular.) In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax (at least when she is seen in company in Highbury) adopts a similar habit of speech. The transcript of Emma's attempts to pump Jane for information about Frank Churchill, with whom Jane was ostensibly “a little acquainted” at Weymouth, reads like this: “‘Was he handsome?’—‘She believed he was reckoned a very fine young man.’ . . . ‘Did he appear a sensible young man; a young man of information?’—‘At a watering-place, or in a common London acquaintance, it was difficult to decide on such points. Manners were all that could be safely judged of. . . . She believed every body found his manners pleasing’” (151). The conversations that engage Highbury socialites (like the shopping excursions in *Camilla*) seem to have encouraged recent readers, whenever they talk about character, to mobilize an opposition between self and society and an opposition between what separates individuals and what connects them. Civility for Austen, accounts of her “conservatism” have proposed, exacts a heavy but necessary toll from the self because it demands a perfect conformity between personal and public opinion: the conventions of drawing-room culture have the power to make Austen's most adamant individualists fall into line.<sup>39</sup> This seems a simplification. Manipulating such demands that the personal be aligned with the public, Jane Fairfax echoes what “every body” thinks of Frank's looks and manners in ways that safeguard her personal opinions and her private life (including her private life as the woman to whom Frank is secretly engaged). If we were to draw our conclusions from her responses to Emma, it would appear that for Jane the voice of the world is protective of feeling—affording a kind of camouflage—as much as it is restrictive.

This may also be true for Elinor Dashwood: Elinor's distinction from Mar-

ianne, and from the heroines of the Burney school of novelists, lies with the fact that she never occupies a victim position vis-à-vis a censorious, gossiping world. After Willoughby rejects her, Marianne's feelings are exposed as material for the world's rumor mill, a consequence of the value she placed on sincerity and openness from the very start of her acquaintance with him. That exposure compounds her wretchedness. Elinor's situation is different. As early as the first volume of *Sense and Sensibility* Elinor's vexation when Sir John and Mrs. Jennings tease her about the beau she must have left behind her in Sussex is not so acute that Marianne, who "felt for her most sincerely," cannot augment it, doing "more harm than good to the cause, by speaking . . . in an angry manner" (53); "Elinor was much more hurt by Marianne's warmth than she had been by what produced it" (206). Here it is not the collective consciousness of the world (that abstract entity that recognizable vulgarities such as Sir John and Mrs. Jennings incarnate) that poses a problem for the self but instead one's intimates, not public exposure but what transpires in the apparently safe zone of semiprivacy. Daniel Cottom's nod toward Marianne as he examines love's "commonness" in the Austen novel suggests one way to assess what Austen might value about Elinor's—or for that matter her readers'—relation to the impersonal: "[T]he only persons liable to be ruined by love are those who are ashamed of how essentially impersonal and insignificant it is and who therefore try to exaggerate it into some realm of sublime transcendence."<sup>40</sup>

Extrapolating from Barbara Benedict's account of Elinor's language, one could conjecture that by virtue of her alliance with the narrator of *Sense and Sensibility* Elinor avoids being the lead character in a novel about being ruined by love. One way Austen makes her characters deep is by reworking what her contemporaries did in juxtaposing a self-effacing heroine with her overdressed foil. In Austen's novels, relations between women—the relations between Marianne and Elinor; between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet; between Fanny Price and Mary Crawford; between Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith, on the one hand, and Emma Woodhouse, on the other; or even between the Misses Musgrove and Anne Elliot—also involve two sorts of characters. These relations involve secondary characters who lead their romantic lives in public—who are "out," who "can act," who, like Jane Bennet, "are the only handsome girl[s] in the room" (9), or whose appearance, like Harriet Smith's in *Emma* or Clara Brereton's in *Sanditon*, which I quote, suggests "the most perfect representation of [a] Heroine" (346)—and they involve heroines to whom these statements will scarcely apply.<sup>41</sup> "No one who had ever seen

Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (1), the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* declares as she bemoans her fate in being saddled with such unpropitious material. Within the Austen canon, Catherine has a lot of company. Austen does more, however, than comply with the fictional convention that locates authentic subjectivity with the woman who is *not* favored by the public voice; she also casts her protagonists as the silent and sympathetic observers of other people's stories and the repositories of their secrets.

Their participation in situations of spectatorship and secret-sharing endows Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood, in particular, with the qualities that novel readers in Austen's lifetime were learning to associate with third-person narrators; likewise the capacity that each has for a self-possession that seems to numb her sense of self-interest. Anne and Elinor each partake of something like a narrator's invisibility, omniscience, and capacity to enter into others' feelings and coordinate and harmonize others' perspectives.<sup>42</sup> Believing herself to have outlived the age for dancing and blushing, Anne takes almost too easily to a role requiring her to sympathize with Captain Benwick one moment and Henrietta Musgrove the next, and to be "as ready to do good by entering into the feelings of a young lady as of a young man" (100). At Uppercross and Lyme she is everyone's confidante (even Wentworth's for the brief interval that succeeds Louisa Musgrove's accident), and she is "privy" accordingly to the "general inclination" of this community (116). Anne has access to the vantage point—which is also that of the narrator of *Persuasion*—from which discrepant individual interests will appear as the same social interest. If Anne's services as a mediator, laboring for and producing a common good, ally her with the narrator, in *Sense and Sensibility* this alliance takes shape while Elinor (whom I wish to linger over a bit longer) acts as a clearinghouse for information, handing over letters, forwarding Colonel Brandon's offer of the living to Edward, and transmitting Brandon's story of the Elizas and Willoughby's story of copying to Marianne. It is in Elinor's consciousness that the subplots of *Sense and Sensibility* come together.

The suspension of individuality that Elinor's performance of this quasi-institutional office entails is also a requisite part of being a sister to Marianne: it is part of acting as Marianne's stand-in in conversations with Colonel Brandon (who in volume 2 comes almost daily to Mrs. Jennings's "to look at Marianne and talk to Elinor" [145]) and with Willoughby and, in the episode in which she tells Marianne about Edward's engagement to Lucy, part of acting as "the comforter of others in her own distresses, no less than in theirs"

(227). Arguments for recognizing *Sense and Sensibility's* centrality in the history of the novel often proceed by applauding Austen's use of free indirect discourse and her reworking of the form of the epistolary novel and by suggesting that the language of inward experience these innovations produce is capable of conveying what is most authentically individual about the individual. These ways of valuing the characterization of Elinor, I would suggest, need to be qualified along the lines of the formulation that Eve Sedgwick offers when, adopting the language of codependency that is mobilized in late-twentieth-century family analysis, she highlights Elinor's self-forgetting attentiveness to her oblivious sister: "As far as this novel is concerned, the co-dependent subjectivity simply *is subjectivity*."<sup>43</sup>

The content of the rich inner life Austen grants to Elinor is a mindfulness of others. The strategy Barbara Benedict pursues to demonstrate the distinction between the impersonal language that Elinor adopts in speaking of her own feelings—the language of a narrator's general moral lessons—and the internal language that presents Elinor as a "heroine" is illuminating in this regard. To supply a contrast to the passage in which Elinor gives her opinion of Edward Ferrars by giving everybody's opinion, Benedict chooses a passage from the third volume of *Sense and Sensibility* in which the narrative "employs the punctuation and syntax of sentimental impressionism: exclamation points, fragmented sentences, italicized words."<sup>44</sup> The passage of free indirect discourse that Benedict describes unfolds as Elinor awaits the arrival of her mother, who, with Colonel Brandon, is rushing the eighty miles from Barton Cottage to Cleveland in order to be, as she thinks, beside Marianne's deathbed. (Mrs. Dashwood does not yet know that Marianne's sickness has suddenly abated.)

Never in her life had Elinor found it so difficult to be calm, as at that moment. The knowledge of what her mother must be feeling as the carriage stopt at the door,—of her doubt—her dread—perhaps her despair!—and of what *she* had to tell!—with such knowledge it was impossible to be calm. All that remained to be done, was to be speedy; and therefore staying only till she could leave Mrs. Jennings's maid with her sister, she hurried down stairs.

The bustle in the vestibule, as she passed along an inner lobby, assured her that they were already in the house. She rushed forwards towards the drawing-room,—she entered it,—and saw only Willoughby. (277)

The energies of this passage derive from Elinor's capacity for sympathy—for feeling in another's place. And, tellingly, it is succeeded immediately by a conversation between Elinor and Willoughby that offers the sole example in the novel of an intimate tête-à-tête between a woman and a man, in which Willoughby "open[s] [his] whole heart" (279) and in which, accordingly, Elinor again plays the role of confidante.<sup>45</sup> As the passage and its sequel suggest, what transpires in the interior space that the text hollows out for Elinor is the vicarious experience of another's feelings.

What transpires in that space is also, however, the unceasing mental activity involved in acting as Marianne's minister of the exterior, smoothing her run-of-the-mill transactions with the outside world. The exercise of covering up Marianne's failures to "tell lies when politeness required it" (105) and of giving social countenance to Marianne's wool-gathering and her gift for becoming "insensible" of others' presence make Elinor a mistress of the pro forma. Devoted to making the "usual inquiries" about other people's health or the usual compliments to one's host, and so reiterating the customary phrases that pass from mouth to mouth in polite circles, Elinor's language is often language on automatic pilot. On a visit to Barton Park, she reiterates (in only a slightly different key) the politely fatuous exclamations of the Misses Steele over Sir John, Lady Middleton, and the little Middletons' "charm" (105). On arriving in London, Elinor writes the letters home that are the currency of filial duty and, as such, contentless—we know without getting the chance to read them the little they will say. (As if to point the contrast, Marianne, for her part, writes at the same time her sister does, but those letters to Willoughby are feeling-filled *cris de coeur*.)<sup>46</sup> The language of inward experience that makes Elinor a mind-full heroine is articulated with language that, "worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning," brings to view an Elinor mindful of maintaining the forms of common courtesy. By such means, the heroine's interior monologues are set off by the noise of automated communications.

*Persuasion* is distinguished by similar conjunctions. In one of the many scenes that Austen sets in a crowded public place, Anne, who finds herself in Molland's, a confectioner's establishment in Bath, catches sight through the shop window of Captain Wentworth. While others consume, chatter, and gossip (about the Elliots eventually), Anne both battles her inclination to observe Wentworth as he passes down the street and battles her inclination to second-guess the motive that impels her toward the shop door: "She now

felt a great inclination to go to the outer door; she wanted to see if it rained. Why was she to suspect herself of another motive? Captain Wentworth must be out of sight. She left her seat, she would go, one half of her should not be always so much wiser than the other half, or always suspecting the other of being worse than it was. She would see if it rained" (165–66). In this passage of free indirect discourse, in which Austen deliberately takes as her subject the interior conflicts that individuate the psychological subject, talk about the weather also has a part to play. That most hackneyed, because the safest, of topics (one notoriously capable of generating idle chatter) gives Anne the means of diverting her consciousness into channels other than that of the language of her heart's desire.

If, in delineating such moments, we confine ourselves either to commenting on how the socializing effects of "propriety" repress a heroine's self-expression or to equating a heroine's civility with the appeasement of male power, we tell half the story. As I suggested earlier, the heroine's adherence to the codes of manners—her association with safe topics and the usual inquiries—can as easily be viewed as a manipulation that makes manners into a cover for privacy. Frequently, it is at the junctures when the presence of company requires Elinor to conform to a "plan of general civility" (81) that the novel reminds us that she has an interior life that can be engaged "elsewhere" (90). Elinor and Anne, as well as Fanny Price and even (given the pleasure she at least *thinks* she takes in putting her own life on hold and in supervising the lives of others) Emma Woodhouse exemplify in various ways a logic according to which self-effacement secures self-possession. The tensions between social forms and self-expression not only constrain, but also create, novel readers' sense that the depths of character exceed what is sayable (and in this sense that tension is *self-enhancing*). And it is by administrating those tensions that novelists of manners define and legitimate their narrative authority and social office.<sup>47</sup>

After all, Austen too is a mistress of the pro forma. Her forte is in part her ability to play with the compulsoriness of forms: her capacity to take the overcoded, or overcrowded, conditions of modern novel writing in her stride. Take, for instance, her ways of winding up her novels' marriage plots. Austen's endings tend to call attention to the tension between the forms for expression and the creative imagination that uses those forms. When Edward Ferrars, providentially jilted by Lucy Steele, can at last honorably declare himself to Elinor, the narrator of *Sense and Sensibility* deals with his declaration by resorting to the impersonal language of the crowd portrait: "[In] what

manner he expressed himself, and how he was received, need not be particularly told. This only need be said;—that when they all sat down to table at four o' clock, about three hours after his arrival, he had secured his lady, engaged her mother's consent, and was not only in the rapturous profession of the lover, but in the reality of reason and truth, one of the happiest of men" (317). Austen can be delightfully perfunctory when she gestures in this manner toward satisfying run-of-the-mill demands for closure—when, as here, she echoes what other novels in the circulating-library swarm talk about ("the happiest of men"), and when she arranges for her characters to be subjected to the common fate and lost in the crowd. (Thus this passage with its generic terms reveals Elinor as a lover's "lady," much as in the proposal scene of *Emma* "all that need be said" about the dawning of our heroine's nuptial bliss is that, in her response to Knightley's proposal, "[Emma] spoke, on being so entreated.—What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does" [391].) When in this knowing manner Austen hints that her pen is hardwired with the novel-writing engines that obsessed romantic reviewers, she is both catering to our pleasure as convention-spotters in being *knowing* ourselves, and encouraging us to apprehend this recourse to the pro forma as the very sign of a meaningfulness that resists formalization.<sup>48</sup>

Something else besides the revelation or even production of psychological meaning is going on here. Austen takes the mechanical part of novel writing, as well as the mechanical aspects of social life, as a conscious object of study. For this reason she is as interested in the banalizing of meaning that accompanies the reiteration of novel slang and the empty formalities of common civility as she is in the intensification of meaning that produces the inner lives of characters. Whereas Austen's modern readers have emphasized the free indirect discourse she uses (1) to supply the illusion of entry into a character's consciousness and (2) to suggest a zone of meaning too deep to sustain direct utterance, they have not often remarked on how her style in fact orchestrates *two* modes of reported speech. Austen's style coordinates free indirect discourse of the sort I have been discussing hitherto—the narrator's rearticulation of an individual character's point of view—with the narrator's rearticulation of everyone's thoughts on the matter. Here I have in mind the commonplace-seeming locutions that sound as if we should be able to render them as direct quotations but are neither attributed nor enclosed in quotation marks: whenever she announces something like "Every neighbourhood must have a great Lady" (the opening to the fifth chapter of *Sanditon*) or, most famously, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in posses-

sion of a good fortune must be in want of a wife," the narrator seems to hand over her text to the voice of the cultural context. The narrator moves over to make room not only for a rendering of subjective consciousness in its own idiom, but also for a rendering of the secondhand idiom of a vox populi—the murmuring that issue from the impersonal and insipid semantic domain of "received ideas" or "what everybody says." That Elinor's mind is full of other people's feelings and the usual civilities suggests how Austen renders interiority as a social space. By extension, the centrality of a second sort of reported speech to Austen's style suggests the sociability of the text. It suggests how in their assembly Austen novels exemplify the belief that "narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay."<sup>49</sup>

The punctuation of dialogue within novels represents one way that the otherwise slippery or arbitrary distinctions between the personal and impersonal, the individual and collective, are established and naturalized. In much the same way, the fact that I've just used quotation marks to cordon off a passage of Deleuze and Guattari's helps me (as do the pages of notes at the end of this book) to preserve the mandatory distinctions between the *meum* and the *uum*. Yet before these familiar uses of quotation marks were standardized, which was only in Austen's lifetime, this type of punctuation was used to flag an authoritative saying "like a proverb, commonplace, or statement of consensual truth." Quotation marks made it easy for Renaissance Mary Bennets to spot *sententiae* and copy them into the customized commonplace books that were the media of their self-fashioning. They called attention to a discursive zone that was every person's property and was ripe for reproduction.<sup>50</sup> This early usage was governed by an intimate relation between reading and transcription and collection and by the exigencies of a rhetorical culture—exigencies that, even in the first half of the eighteenth century, could prompt Jane Barker to cast one Mr. Dyke's book of proverbs as a prototype for Galesia's patch-work-cum-"novel" or could prompt an elderly Samuel Richardson, along with Solomon Lowe, to assemble a collection of "sentiments" from *Clarissa* (subsequently a rich source of the quotations that were recopied into Johnson's *Dictionary*).<sup>51</sup> The later-eighteenth-century transformation in the use of quotation marks registers the new uses of texts and new technologies of the self that emerged at a moment when language was reconceptualized as appropriable property and when readers pledged their belief in characters' lives of their own. In an oblique way, Austen's orchestration of the varieties of hearsay recalls the ironic prehistory of the punctuation

marks that now signal that words belong to and express individuals. For in her novels, as Daniel Cottom notes, a rigid distinction between "empty formalities and meaningful signs" is unsupportable: it is hard to say where self-expression leaves off and repetition begins.<sup>52</sup>

"THERE IS A SORT OF DOMESTIC ENJOYMENT TO BE  
KNOWN EVEN IN A CROWD"

After all, the routine running of the social machine that the novels portray depends on recycling polite phrases, not on interpreting them. Austen is interested in the nonsignificative aspects of language because she understands the business of common life in the same terms that Lionel Trilling does when, attempting to define *manners* in the broad sense of the term, he uses words such as *hum* and *buzz* and refers to "the voice of multifarious intention and activity . . . all the buzz of implication which always surrounds us."<sup>53</sup> Austen understands social life, as Trilling, her reader, does, in terms of noise. She often positions her heroines so that they are excluded from others' colloquies but unable to avoid overhearing information of unexpected interest to themselves. This measure makes readers conscious of the auditory contingencies that impinge on communications. *Persuasion* particularly, a novel notable for its poignant depiction of impasses in communications, is also a novel of noise. Like the works that precede it, it deals with chatter and records how people trade fatuities and re-urge "admitted truths" (218), but it is also a book, as Adela Pinch notes, in which doors slam (173) and fires roar, "determined to be heard" (127), in which the "bawling . . . newsmen, muffin-men, and milkmen" (128) of the Bath marketplace contribute to the cacophony, and in which individual characters are liable to be distinguished by their "taste in noise" (128).<sup>54</sup> When she stages scenes of overhearing, Austen makes us conscious both of the ambient noise that frustrates the listener's efforts to hear and of the idle chatter that delays her receipt of a crucial piece of intelligence.

Thus *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* present the language of real feeling as a language of undertone, uttered under a blanket of noise. The sessions in which Elinor serves as someone's secret-sharer have for their accompaniment the drone of Marianne's piano playing: Lucy's romantic difficulties can be communicated because "Marianne was then giving them the powerful protection of a very magnificent concerto" (128); the pianoforte again proves of use when Colonel Brandon, meaning to show his delicacy, but blundering dreadfully, asks Elinor to help him facilitate Edward's marriage to Lucy (245). We do not learn whose compositions Marianne plays, only that at some mo-

ments the music is louder than at others: it seems reasonable to view Marianne's piano as a kind of white noise machine. Indeed, given Marianne's association with a commercialized print culture (remember the orders that will go to London music sellers once she gets her thousand pounds), and given the seeming narrowness of her repertoire (for part of the novel, she will play only the songs that she formerly played to Willoughby [72]), her music might be said to possess some of the automated qualities of Coleridge's barrel-organ.

In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot's place is likewise on the piano bench, and, in this novel too, mental activity has a pianoforte accompaniment. "Her fingers . . . mechanically at work, proceeding for half an hour together, equally without error, and without consciousness" (71), Anne seems to find in her performances—in going through the motions of performances—a means of at once being alone with her thoughts and fulfilling her public duties. Evidence of how, with their "modern minds and manners [and] . . . usual stock of accomplishments," the daughters of the house cannot resist a trend, the piano at Uppercross Hall contributes to the crowdedness of an overfilled parlor (42), but Austen shows how these noise machines give their female operators and auditors the space for private life.

Women's music had its social utility too, of course. The piano in the Musgroves' old-fashioned parlor is a marker of the family's social aspirations. The first manifestation of Anne's efforts as the obliging mediator or social worker of volume 1 of *Persuasion* are her performances on the piano: she will play country dances all night long at Uppercross and so permit Louisa and Henrietta and other younger women to be courted on the dance floor. And yet at the same time, as I have suggested, the musical powers that make Anne and other women socially useful also supply Anne with the means for self-possession. Her piano playing registers the demands of Anne's society and it supplies her with the means of parrying the incursions society would make on her autonomy of mind. Austen arranges for Anne's reading to confront us with a comparable paradox, and as I conclude this chapter I want to return to the ways in which Austen annotates the practices of romantic reading and consider how *Persuasion*—in its concluding proposal scene most interestingly—specifies those practices' social place. Mary Musgrove's complaint about the bookishness of a certain Captain Benwick conveniently outlines the divisions between social obligation and self-possession, silent reading and noisy social life, that *Persuasion* seems set up to interrogate. Building on her husband's description of how Benwick would willingly "read all day

long,'” Mary exclaims “tauntingly”: “[T]hat he will! . . . He will sit poring over his book and not know when a person speaks to him, or when one drops one's scissors, or any thing that happens” (125–26). Captain Benwick's absorption in a book is presented here as an imperviousness to the outside world's demands and noises. (Mary, who whines, may be taken as representative of both of those.)

But Mary's description of Benwick also speaks to the semipublic (and noisy) nature of the scene of reading in this era. The rites of gentry sociability had readers reading in company, in common sitting rooms in which other people were playing at cards or playing the piano or doing needlework and dropping their scissors, and thereby producing, to borrow a much-used locution from *Persuasion*, a buzz of sound. Female reading was particularly likely to have this aural accompaniment. Ladies' transactions with literature had social sanction insofar as they made ladies better company: in the words of Anna Laetitia Barbauld's essay “On Female Studies” (1826), the genteel young woman should read only as many books as would enable her to “give spirit and variety to conversation.”<sup>55</sup> For all their pessimism about the female character, the period's depersonalized depictions of circulating library subscribers as so many cogs in a rotatory machine supply a not dissimilar image of women's reading: as an experience that leaves the individual governed by the dynamic of the group.

For *Persuasion*, which responds to these commentaries on women and books,<sup>56</sup> literary experience both manifests the influence of the crowd and supplies crowd-repelling strategies. In this doubleness literary experience is like noise. Much as the sounds of the Uppercross piano shelter mental activity, during the walk to Winthrop Anne's recollection of poets' descriptions of autumn functions as a kind of buffer: her “fall into . . . quotation” (83) bolsters her capacity to screen out the world and occupy herself with her thoughts. Indeed, if we often see Anne (as we see Elinor Dashwood) giving “herself up to the demands of the party, to the needful civilities of the moment” (174), we just as frequently see her so thought-full as to resemble Captain Benwick when he has his nose in a book. In the chapter from which I have just quoted, in which the Elliots attend an evening concert at Bath, and in which Anne has a conversation with Wentworth that encourages her to hope that he loves her once again, the narrator is very exact in the way she places her heroine's emotion of joy. “Anne saw nothing, thought nothing of the brilliancy of the room. Her happiness was from within” (175). At such moments, what Austen has us hear with Anne is a buzz of voices. Adopting

Anne's point of view means experiencing what the people in this assembly room are saying not as a number of distinct utterances issuing from particular agents, but as a wash of noise. Here, for instance, is how, linking inwardness and noise, Austen records Anne's reception of the words Wentworth uses when he seems to be on the brink of renewing his former feelings. "[I]n spite of the agitated voice in which [his remarks] had been uttered, and in spite of all the various noises of the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door, and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through, [Anne] had distinguished every word, was struck, gratified, confused, and beginning to breathe very quick, and feel an hundred things in a moment" (173). The process delineated in this passage, as Adela Pinch has argued, is one in which subjectivity has "dominion over the outside world": "the narrator impresses these noises upon us in order to assert that Anne can subordinate them . . . [and in order to affirm] the capacity of the mind, even as it has been traumatized by the rushing in of sensations, to reduce the external world to a blur."<sup>57</sup>

But the dilemma *Persuasion* confronts is that these internal resources—the capacities for thinking, feeling, and listening that enable her to close out the noise of social contingency and hear only words of love—are not enough for Anne. Anne can do things with her books, but Anne's "word ha[s] no weight" (12): her ability to abstract herself from her social environment compels the reader's admiration, but it is easy to see that she could abstract herself into nothingness. *Persuasion* in its second half is preoccupied with the sort of repetitive rounds of polite "nothing-saying" we witness when Anne and Wentworth talk "of the weather and Bath and the concert" (171) largely because it is addressing the question of whether something-saying is possible and whether Anne can say what she means.<sup>58</sup> If Wentworth indeed has a heart returning to Anne, how is the truth about her feelings to reach him? "How . . . would he ever learn her real sentiments?" (180).

In this chapter I have stressed Austen's comfort when she thinks about the social content of interior life—when she contemplates the idea that whatever is most personal about characters and readers is also that which is most by the book. Generally, she finds little cause for pessimism when she considers how the readings with which we repeat one another are also the means by which we each fashion an individualized interiority. But *Persuasion*, more than her other novels, does register a certain resistance to women's association with the new technologies of introspection purveyed by the book market and their association with the inner spaces of feeling. The proposal scene of the novel is famous for two statements Anne makes as she vindicates her sex's

constancy to Captain Harville (and to Captain Wentworth, who overhears her words). When Captain Harville proposes that books are filled with examples of female fickleness, she reminds him that literature is not a representation of truth, but a type of rhetoric, a matter of reiterated codes rather than of mimesis: "'[I]f you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing'" (221). With this statement Anne also reminds us that she is a reader. (Austen's allusiveness, in the meantime, reminds us of what we have read before: overtly "literary," the debate about constancy that occupies Harville and Anne replays a debate Richard Steele's *Spectator* recorded between a lady and a "Common-Place Talker" a century before.)<sup>59</sup> And when Anne refers to social circumstances to explicate the powers of feeling she claims for her sex, her words resonate with statements that Austen's contemporaries made about the introspection of the reader. "'We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us'" (219). As Adela Pinch notes, commenting on Anne and Harville's debate, "the notion that 'the pen has always been in their hands,' that the true nature of women's feeling falls outside of literature, can only be one moment in what this book has to say on this subject: Austen's ambivalence may have to do as well with its opposite—with a sense that literature has been too much with women."<sup>60</sup> Literature in Austen's period was geared increasingly to facilitating the reader's exploration of her inner sensibilities. And this could only be a mixed blessing for women, who, as Anne reminds Harville, live at home, who are connected only indirectly to the world in which men have "'continual occupation'" (219), and who, accordingly, know the spaces of interior feeling only too well. Does the secret self that a woman forms through her reading—through the sort of secret indulgence in "the sweets of poetical despondence" that occupies Anne on the walk to Winthrop (83)—merely manifest her acquiescence to the social pressures of gender? "'Our feelings prey upon us.'"

Of course, these hints of ambivalence about books' role in readers' affective lives do not seem particularly weighty once they are measured against the overwhelming affective power of the messages that pass between Wentworth and Anne under the surface of this conversation. This is, after all, a chapter that makes Austen's readers feel. Indeed, its intoxicating pleasures are in large measure a function of how, despite those reservations about liter-

ature's consolatory powers, Austen fulfills readers' desire for a literature that would take into account what is most individual in our individualities, that would be addressed to no one but ourselves. The vehicle with which she does this is Wentworth's love letter, the other much-celebrated feature of *Persuasion's* penultimate chapter. While Anne and Captain Harville disagree over what literature can prove about men's and women's constancy, Captain Wentworth, like them a visitor to the rooms that the Musgroves have taken at the White Hart Inn at Bath, sits in another corner of the common sitting room and writes a letter. Anne and Harville talk about books and feelings, and Wentworth writes what is apparently a letter of business, reporting on a consumer transaction. (He has been commissioned by Captain Benwick to purchase a new frame for a portrait: this portrait of Benwick, painted for his first love, is now intended as a wedding present for Louisa Musgrove.) Yet Wentworth proves merely to be going through the motions of fulfilling his epistolary duty: the letter to Benwick is a cover. An instant after he leaves the room with Harville, he reenters it and draws "out a letter from under the scattered paper" (223)—an epistle that at a single stroke remedies the characters' inability to move out of the round of nothing-saying and jolts them and us into another time and space.

When Anne sees on the folded paper the direction "Miss A. E.," the narrator supplies these words to document her thoughts: "While supposed to be writing only to Captain Benwick, he had been also addressing her!" The reader shares Anne's shock and elation on finding herself Wentworth's addressee. I intend the ambiguity my use of the pronoun "herself" introduces here: the moment of the letter's delivery and the rupture in the narrative texture that it leads to also startle us—also startle me. From this moment, the particular intimacy that the epistolary form makes possible ensures that readers read with Anne. Then too, although this letter changes everything, it is never subjected to the public rereadings (in Nicola Watson's words, "the verdict of public circulation") that correspondence usually seems to call for in Austen's novels.<sup>61</sup> Invisible to others—Mrs. Musgrove is in the room but occupied by "little arrangements of her own at her own table"—the letter exists only for Anne, Wentworth, and us. The magic of the proposal scene that Anne and Harville's debate about books turns into is partly a product of this privacy.

The scene is magical too in being arranged so as to defuse the doubts that the debate raises about reading's consolatory powers. The scene records a "revolution": "any thing [is] possible" (223). Anne's words have weight here,

and the effect is to dissolve the distinctions that separate reading and feeling, on the one hand, from speaking and acting, on the other.

I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan.—Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes?—I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others.—Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating in

F.W.

This is the text (223–24) that Anne reads, but as his phrase "read your feelings" suggests, Wentworth is annotating Anne's text in his turn. The stops and starts in his prose testify to how closely structured on Anne's conversation with Harville his composition is: her statement that "we certainly do not forget you so soon as you forget us" gives him his entry point ("Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman"); her statement that "I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by women" compels his reply, "You do us justice indeed." His letter is incomplete without Anne's words. Because the lovers complete each other's meaning, enunciation and reception are thoroughly mingled here.<sup>62</sup> Austen tells us that while Anne reads, she occupies "the chair which [Wentworth] had occupied, . . . the very spot where he had leaned and written" (223).

We cannot but remember too, that while Anne was speaking to Captain Harville, "a slight noise [had] called their attention to Captain Wentworth's hitherto perfectly quiet division of the room. It was nothing more than that his pen had fallen down" (220). Wentworth cannot monopolize the pen, and when he expresses himself in writing, it is, fittingly, in the sort of language

of ravishment Austen's contemporaries would deploy to describe the female reader's transport by the text.

Austen uses the noise Wentworth's pen makes when it falls to two different ends. She underlines Anne's complaint about what it means to be a female reader: "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story . . . the pen has been in their hands.'" The mention of the noise that momentarily breaks in on their conversation also reminds us that Anne and Harville speak in a semipublic space: they are to one side of a room that also holds Captain Wentworth at his writing desk, as well as Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft, who gossip together throughout the chapter. The dialogues of the scene are dialogue by courtesy only; the language of love takes shape against "the buzz of words" (218) that Mrs. Musgrove's and Mrs. Croft's conversation represents for Anne. The resulting noise adds to the contrast between our experience in this scene and our experience, two chapters before, of the letter that advances Anne's knowledge of William Elliot's character. The latter episode, in which Mrs. Smith produces the letter that illumines Mr. Elliot's villainy, is curiously irrelevant to the novel as a whole: there is never much possibility that Anne will look favorably on her cousin's attentions. This irrelevance testifies to how Austen rejects the mode of apprehending another's "real character" (187) that this somewhat melodramatic scene of revelation exemplifies. Susan Morgan, indeed, has remarked on how, when Mrs. Smith tenders "proof" that Mr. Elliot is "black at heart" (187) and produces one of his old letters out her "small inlaid box" (190–91), Austen seems to be assessing what is at stake in thinking about the knowledge of character as a matter of unmasking. Mrs. Smith's stagey gesture, Morgan notes, reminds us of Wentworth's rhetorical flourish with the hazelnut, and both Mrs. Smith and the Wentworth who thinks he has apprehended Anne's fatal flaw are overinvested in an epistemology in which another's character is something liable to proof, something that can be disclosed once and for all.<sup>63</sup> The contrast between the two letters deciding the fates of Anne's two suitors could also be aligned with the contrast between the privacy of the earlier scene—a scene dependent on enclosed spaces, the "dark bed-room" behind Mrs. Smith's "noisy parlour" (146) and within that room the box in which the letter is housed (191)—and the relatively convivial and noisy surroundings in which Anne reads the letter that manifests Wentworth's better knowledge of *her* character.

The rooms at the White Hart Inn are ones the Musgroves have taken so as to shop in Bath for Louisa and Henrietta's wedding clothes. They are at

best a semiprivate site, "a quick-changing, unsettled scene": "One five minutes brought a note, the next a parcel" (208). The readers in and of the proposal scene are constantly on the verge of being jolted out of the space of romantic intimacy, and back into public; they are on the verge of being made cognizant once again of the social mechanisms of transmission and exchange that govern notes, parcels, and declarations of love alike. Loving and reading and writing are intermingled here, yet at the same time, radically reimagining the novelistic spaces of romance, this chapter finally associates all of these with being in a crowd.

For what remains of the novel, Anne and Wentworth continue to find themselves in a crowd. The conversation in which they return again into their private past transpires in urban space, in the midst of a crowd the narrator can only catalog with a series of generic terms: "sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, [and] nursery-maids and children" (227). Earlier in the novel, Mrs. Smith, finding that Anne has noticed very little about the evening concert at the octagon room that she has attended, alights on the reason: "There is a sort of domestic enjoyment to be known even in a crowd, and this you had" (182). Potentially a description of the way that Captain Wentworth and Anne must work to make the business of common life accommodate the possibility of intimacy, this statement could double as a comment on Austen's comfort with the crowded conditions of the book market and of her genre. It seems to capture the practice of a writer who made her peace with the impersonality of publication: the novels, potentially any person's property, are dotted with in-jokes about the Austen family's private affairs.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, the scene of writing that is the proposal scene of *Persuasion* seems reinscribed in the portraits of the artist that Austen's biographers paint when they depict her at work in the "general sitting room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions"—writing with the obviously bothersome accompaniment of the slams of a door and the buzz of other people's words.<sup>65</sup> We often hear about this "domestic white noise" because reminders of it expose the contrast between the ineluctably social circumstances of most women writers and the asocial solitariness that Austen's male contemporaries, licensed by their masculinity, made into the hallmark of canonical romantic authorship.

Too often, however, the scholarship that mobilizes this contrast makes privacy into an absolute value: it assumes that the difference between life in a family circle, on the one hand, and romantic solitude, on the other, inevitably worked to Austen's disadvantage. This covertly normative presupposition

about writing's relationship to social circumstance has been contested by Deborah Kaplan, who has recently studied Austen's reliance on her network of female supporters and studied the writings that passed like greeting cards among the members of her gentry community.<sup>66</sup> To be sure, acknowledging how Austen's own writings could have functioned as a social currency, and conceding that authorship is sometimes underwritten by community, conflicts with the investment many readers have in Austen's privacy—with many readers' conviction that if she was in her society she was not *of* it. Even if they have trouble getting her out of earshot of her domestic milieu, literary histories, for instance, have tended to set Austen apart from the crowd. Segregated from her merely fashionable female contemporaries in the book market, insofar as their names had been forgotten while hers was remembered, or segregated from them by being cast as the “ironical censorer” who had seen through their pretensions, Austen thus for a long time seemed to have the ladies' room of literature to herself.<sup>67</sup> The efforts that produced that appearance of a feminized romantic solitariness represent a variation on the campaigns against automatic reading machines and writing machines that otherwise engaged Austen's contemporaries. The model of cultural work as the expression and the property of a singular creative personality—a model reinforced in Austen's lifetime by the discourse of literary biography—both reacts and stands in symbiotic relation to the model of cultural pathology that Austen's contemporaries elaborated as they complained about the “shoals of composition” churned out by the presses: too many texts, too cheaply printed, and too given to repeating themselves. Such crowd-repelling strategies also play a role in the history of Austen's audiences: her reception history is punctuated by moments when her readers have, in their urge to make the novels into personalized property, sounded a bit like the caricature of Marianne Dashwood that Edward Ferrars offers when he talks about her plan to buy up all of Cowper. In the nineteenth century it was a critical commonplace that Austen's attractions blushed unseen. Appreciation of Austen was cast as a minority taste, or, as Virginia Woolf put it half-facetiously but a tad nostalgically in 1913, as “a gift that ran in families and . . . a mark of rather peculiar culture.”<sup>68</sup>

When in *Persuasion* the customers at the confectioner's shop start gossiping about the Elliots, just after Anne has left the shop with her cousin, one lady says to two others: “She is pretty, I think; Anne Elliot; very pretty, when one comes to look at her. It is not the fashion to say so, but I confess I admire her more than her sister” (168). With these phrases the lady, unnamed and

never heard from again, stakes her claim to the chic territory of a minority taste. Refusing to copy others and say what is fashionable, she distinguishes herself by making distinctions. She separates herself from the crowd. In roughly the same way, the bit of heroine description that Austen offers here participates in a tradition of character writing that furthered the reader's projects of self-enhancement. This lady's phrases are not, however, the final word on the subject. Does Austen introduce a hint of irony about what it is and isn't the fashion to say when two more anonymous voices chime in and concur with the first speaker—“Oh! so do I” and “so do I”?

42. Here I draw on Brown's "Anorexia, Humanism, and Feminism," esp. 214 n. 46.

43. When Burney chronicles the story of the bills that Camilla racks up with the milliners and drapers of Southampton, fashion epitomizes the social contingencies that override individual desires or powers. Just when she's trying to practice economy, Camilla finds that "all she wore, by the quick changes of fashion, seemed already out of date" (689). Burney's next novel also portrays fashion in these terms, but the Wanderer, by contrast to Camilla, inhabits the kind of world that Deborah Valenze depicts when she describes the effects the winds of fashion had on women engaged in the cottage industry of straw plaiting: "The size of the bonnet was important," a historian of the craft pointed out, "for an increase of only two inches in the size of the ridiculously small bonnets worn in the middle of the [eighteenth] century would have required twice as much plait." Straw plaiters simply fell victim to all of these variables, and available work and wage rates fluctuated mercilessly, ranging anywhere from 6s. or 10s. to only 2s. 6d. a week" (Valenze, *First Industrial Woman*, 119-20, citing Dony, *History of the Straw Hat Industry*).

44. I owe this insight to Gillian Brown's discussion of authorship in *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 146.

45. It is no accident that the Wanderer finds herself "advertised" in a newspaper. Transported across the Channel and into the novel by a smuggler, she is from the start of her narrative associated with commodities such as French lace and face powder, contraband goods that female shoppers in particular might hanker after (e.g., 406, 720).

46. Christine Cullens, "Female Difficulties: English and German Women Writers, 1740-1810" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1988), 485.

47. In the seventh chapter of the novel, the protagonist tries to collect letters that the post office has been holding for L.S. This is the closest she gets in the first third of the narrative to owning a name, adopting one that is applied more properly to the pounds and shillings of English currency and that allies her with the money-centered narratives I discussed in chapter 2. Doody's introduction to *The Wanderer* offers a number of provocative suggestions about the resonances of this name.

48. Here I take issue with Miranda Burgess, who in "Courting Ruin" seems to argue that Burney is unremittingly antagonistic toward figures such as Hume and Burke. But see, for instance, the passage (319) in which the narrator accounts for why the Wanderer's merit as a musician is undervalued by her audience: "The public at large is generally just, because too enormous to be individually canvassed; but private circles are almost universally biased by partial or prejudiced influence." I don't think that this vindication of the heroine's worth and this critique of the world's faulty powers of discrimination underwrite a critique of the Whigs' belief in a self-regulating, impersonal market: instead, the point of the passage is that the economy in which the Wanderer must operate is imperfect because it's insufficiently impersonal.

49. To understand the effects here of Burney's adoption of a pointedly impersonal perspective, we might draw on a distinction that Catherine Gallagher lays out in her discussion of *Evelina* and note that the crucial fact about the Wanderer at this point is not, as it was previously, her namelessness. Instead, it's the fact that she's *nobody*—for this figure in the landscape could be anybody or everybody. Namelessness draws attention to the self that's operating incognito: asserting the existence of a secret, it grants to the self the substance and distinctness of a "somebody." By contrast, to consider the Wanderer's condition

in this scene is to move from "the altogether private to the altogether public." See Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 214.

50. Johnson's remarks on the "extensive views" of the practitioner of political economy are quoted in Kathryn Sutherland's introduction to Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, x. The description of the individual's moment of sublime vision as a "summons to self-consciousness" is that of Geoffrey Hartman, whose discussion of Wordsworth's locodescriptive poetry is cited in Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individualism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 125. Ferguson discusses how the fascination with sublime vision was a fascination with technologies of individuality: "Against the . . . fear of a diminution of consciousness produced by the very act of communication, the sublime establishes nature as the instrument for the production of individuality itself" (130). The natural scenes in question are, customarily, ones whose magnitude brings the viewer face to face with "the limitations of individual perception" and at the same time recuperates that limitation by providing an occasion where human reason proves itself able "to think past those very perceptions" (138). It is because intellectual phantasms like "commerce" also force the mind to confront what is supersensible that Burney can so easily move between the extensive views of political economy and the expansive prospects of aesthetic theory.

51. Adam Ferguson is quoted in John Barrell's introduction to *English Literature in History, 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 46, 30.

52. John Barrell, "Visualising the Division of Labour: William Pyne's *Microcosm*," chap. 5 of *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 90; Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, cited in Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (New York: Viking, 1985), 105.

53. Chow, "Postmodern Automaton," 110: this phrase comes from Chow's characterization of an essay ("Fiction and Its Phantoms") in which Hélène Cixous talks back to Freud and talks for E. T. A. Hoffmann's clockwork woman.

54. Chow, "Postmodern Automaton," 109.

55. For a discussion in similar terms of new feminist uses for autobiography, see Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

## CHAPTER FIVE

1. Sophie von LaRoche, *Sophie in London, 1786, being the Diary of Sophie v. La Roche*, trans. Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), 192 (Sept. 9); Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 271; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Causes and Nature of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 175.

2. LaRoche, *Sophie in London*, 123 (Sept. 11); Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), xii.

3. In this paragraph, I draw on Neil McKendrick, "The Commercialization of the Potteries," in McKendrick et al., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 99-145. McKendrick quotes from manuscripts in the Wedgwood museum, Stoke-on-Trent.

4. Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 42-43. Subsequent references to *Persuasion* are to this edition and appear in the text.

Throughout this chapter, references to Austen's other novels are handled in the same way: I have used the Oxford editions of *Sense and Sensibility* (ed. James Kinsley [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970]), *Pride and Prejudice* (ed. James Kinsley and Frank W. Bradbrook [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970]), *Mansfield Park* (ed. James Kinsley [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970]), *Emma* (ed. James Kinsley [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971]), and *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon* (ed. John Davie [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971]).

5. The only other discussion of noise and Austen with which I'm acquainted occurs in Adela Pinch's account of the lyricism of *Persuasion*: "Lost in a Book," chap. 5 of *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). I am greatly indebted to Pinch's discussion throughout this chapter.

6. For example, for Marilyn Butler (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], 274), Austen "masters the subjective insights that help to make the nineteenth-century novel what it is, and denies them validity."

7. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957; reprint, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972), 338.

8. See David Kaufmann's pithy comments on novels' disciplinary distinction (*The Business of Common Life: Novels and Classical Economics Between Revolution and Reform* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995], 63): "[Political economics and the novel] show the relation of the part to the whole, the individual to the alien totality that appears to stand over and against that individual. Nevertheless they are not redundant. Economics began by looking at the general and inferred the individual; the novel began with the individual and allegorized the general."

9. See Barbara M. Benedict, "Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*: The Politics of Point of View," *Philological Quarterly* 69 (1990): 453.

10. See Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 145.

11. On *Persuasion* as a "second novel," see Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 211. For the argument that almost all Austen's love stories are framed as repetitions of a prior narrative, see Daniel Cottom (*The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985], 90): "There is no such thing as an original love in Austen's novels," Cottom writes. Another way to say this is to say that Austen's hero and heroine, who never fall in love at first sight, also never really see each other as strangers. The couple in Austen is the product of an erotic alchemy that affects, in Susan Morgan's words, "people who are already familiar to each other": Darcy may look perfect for the part of the glamorous stranger, "but the first movement of his feelings is a failure and he must return to propose again" (*In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988], 187). The look of love is always a second glance at someone who is already known and remembered. When Elizabeth Bennet visits the picture gallery at Pemberley, she finds that there are "many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Elizabeth walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her—and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her" (220).

12. Pinch, "Lost in a Book," 160 (emphasis in original).

13. Discussing how in *Persuasion*, more than in other novels by Austen, the heroine's consciousness seems to monopolize the narrative voice, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth characterizes the novel as the record of the conversation that Anne sustains with herself (*Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], 166).

14. To cap this equation, Austen presents Louisa's change of heart—her turn from Captain Wentworth to Captain Benwick—as a change in reading matter: Byron's *Glaucou* replaces the navy list. What Austen wants us to notice is how the book-man analogy is retained.

15. Austen would have known that Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary* used Pope's poem to illustrate the definition of *character* as "personal qualities; particular constitution of the mind."

16. See, among the many readings of the novel, James Thompson's discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* in "Character and Interpretation," chap. 3 of his *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988). *Northanger Abbey*, a novel more frequently associated than *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* are with lessons in literacy, defines the enterprise of reading character similarly: Catherine's misreadings of *Northanger Abbey* happen because she proceeds as if General Tilney's covert nastiness might be recognized in, and pinned down to, a single flamboyant deed (preferably one that would produce a corpse or depend on a dungeon). Instead the general's villainy can be established only from the dispersed and multiple strands of meaning that compose his "character."

17. These conversations are Austen's versions of the nostalgic tours that her contemporaries include in the final chapters of their novels, and in which the heroine and her new husband revisit the scenes of their story: in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*, "every cottage in which the Wanderer had been harboured" (ed. Margaret Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 872), and, in Ann Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*, "the Swiss mountains, the sight of which revived a thousand interesting recollections in the mind of Adeline" (ed. Chloe Chard [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986], 359). These carriage journeys down memory lane operate in the same way as the conversations that engage Austen's couples—as a means of interiorizing plot as reminiscence.

18. August Schlegel, cited in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 112.

19. Freud, "Dynamics of Transference," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1958), 12:168. Both stereotypes and clichés were used to provide duplicates of printing formes, which meant, according to Michael Twyman, that "the original could be preserved from damage in printing and that more than one forme could be printed at a time when large editions were needed quickly" (*Printing 1770-1970: An Illustrated History of Its Development and Uses in England* [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970], 22).

20. Stuart Cosgrove, "The Circulation of Genres in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*," *ELH* 63 (1996): 109.

21. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1975), 21. The keys of a barrel-organ, according to the *OED*, "are mechanically acted on by a revolving barrel or cylinder studded with metal pins." See also the *OED's* quotation

from the 1796 *Monthly Review*: "A barrel-organ . . . would do the business much more to his satisfaction than the fingers of a man of genius."

22. Review of J. Wedderburne Webster, Esq., *Waterloo, and Other Poems*, *Quarterly Review* 30 (July 1816): 345.
23. [Sydney Smith], review of *Delphine*, by Madame de Staël-Holstein, *Edinburgh Review* 2 (1803): 176, 177.
24. Thomas Carlyle, "Goethe," *Works of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), 26:229; "The Projector," no. 49, *Gentleman's Magazine* 75 (1805), quoted in Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 43.
25. Ferris, *Achievement of Literary Authority*, 43. In addition to Ferris's incisive remarks on the critical tropes that put novels in their place, see Sonia Hofkosh's discussion of romanticism and a "circulating library sensibility" ("The Writer's Ravishment: Women and the Romantic Author—The Example of Byron," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988], 93-114).
26. That Bath is a site where one must immerse oneself in conventionality is made clear in the chapter in which Catherine first meets Henry Tilney. Henry shows us that conversation there follows a script that every one, Catherine aside, knows in advance. He remarks on how he has "hitherto been very remiss . . . in the proper attentions of a partner here": "I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether" (11-12). Having set the conversational ball rolling in this fashion, Henry then proceeds to make those very enquiries.
27. Studying the novel's use of free indirect discourse, Narelle Shaw argues that Austen returned to the manuscript of *Northanger Abbey* shortly before beginning work on *Sanditon* ("Free Indirect Discourse and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of *Northanger Abbey*," *Studies in English Literature* 30 [1990]: 591-601).
28. On Minerva fiction and publishers' chicanery see E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 140. I quote the description of such fashionable retail practices offered by "The Projector," no. 88, *Gentleman's Magazine* 78 (1808): 884.
29. On this topic see Tanner's chapter on *Sanditon* in *Jane Austen*; D. A. Miller, "The Late Jane Austen," *Raritan* 10 (1988): 55-79; John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body: The "Picture of Health"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
30. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 259.
31. Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 3.
32. In referring to how Austen recycles novel slang I quote from the letter in which she guides Anna Austen in the latter's first attempts at a novel. "I wish you would not let him plunge into a 'vortex of dissipation.' I do not object to the Thing, but I cannot bear the expression;—it is such thorough novel slang—and so old, that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened" (*Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 277; 28 September 1814). Austen is being somewhat disingenuous here. She herself feels free to put novel slang into the mouth of a Sanditonian like Sir Edward Denham; what Anna has not learned from her aunt's fictions, perhaps,

is that in that context novel slang is always in virtual quotation marks. It is never used, and never to be read, "straight."

33. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 49.
34. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, 152-53. For guidance in thinking about Austen's capacity to be comfortable and to comfort readers, I am indebted to Clifford Siskin's discussion of Austen's canonization and what it can tell us about the history of the category of literature. Siskin focuses on the ways her novels respond to worries about the proliferation of writing. "The discomfiting question is whether we become what we read. Austen's answer—an answer that I would argue signals a change in writing's status from a worrisome new technology to a more trusted tool—is 'Yes and no, but don't worry.' Catherine Morland does, at times, behave somewhat like the gothic heroines she reads about but she is neither 'born' . . . to be such a heroine or doomed to become one. The linkage is too complex to be predictable" ("Jane Austen and the Engendering of Disciplinary," in *Jane Austen and the Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney J. Looser [New York: St. Martin's, 1995], 60-61).
35. Literally, a hackneyed language is a language hired out by others—as the *OED*'s definition has it, "worn out like a hired horse by indiscriminate or vulgar use." In eighteenth-century usage, the word *hackney* is also freighted with suggestions of prostitution. Marianne's complaint about the hackneyed language of books thus points to the connections that commentators who were worried about female reading and writing often made as they linked automatic, indiscriminate reading to automatic, indiscriminate sexuality.
36. *Monthly Review* 1:419; *Critical Review* 32:144; *Edinburgh Review* 4:208; all quoted in Richard G. Swartz, "Dorothy Wordsworth, Local Tourism, and the Anxiety (or Semiotics) of Description," *Prose Studies*, forthcoming.
37. Claudia L. Johnson, "A 'Sweet Face as White as Death': Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 22 (1989): 159-74; cf. Deborah Kaplan, "Achieving Authority: Jane Austen's First Published Novel," in *Jane Austen: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1986), 203-18.
- According to Colonel Brandon, Marianne resembles his first love, Eliza Williams, in body and mind; she likewise resembles Eliza's namesake and illegitimate daughter in being the second victim of Willoughby's charms. Johnson aligns the Elizas in their turn with a long list of heroines that extends from Clarissa to Charlotte Temple; Nicola J. Watson, concentrating on anti-Jacobin tales of seduction that flourished in the 1790s, also locates them within a crowd of fictional predecessors (*Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994], 89 n. 28).
38. Benedict, "Politics of Point of View," 458.
39. For one of the most adept examples of such a reading see Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, "The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury": Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*," *Representations* 31 (1990): 1-18.
40. Cottom, *Civilized Imagination*, 91.
41. Emma is the exception, perhaps, since she is, as Miss Bates inadvertently discloses, a topic for Highbury's gossip. She looks like a heroine to them. But Emma's conviction that the incentives women usually have for marrying do not apply to her make her much readier to identify other people's desires than she is to identify her own: she does, however deludedly, consider herself Harriet Smith's foil.

42. I draw here on the discussion of narrative omniscience in Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus*.
43. Eve Sedgwick, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 830. A germinal account of the technical innovations in *Sense and Sensibility* is Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*.
44. Benedict, "Politics of Point of View," 464.
45. In a strange way, the story that Willoughby recounts to Elinor to explain his conduct toward Marianne becomes Elinor's property—a personal effect. Austen emphasizes the "heightened" degree of "influence" Willoughby exercises "over [Elinor's] mind" (292). She also has Elinor first withhold the story and then retell it with "address," first to Marianne, and then to Mrs. Dashwood, doling it out selectively and to a slight degree begrudgingly: "it was neither in Elinor's power, nor in her wish, to raise such feelings in another . . . as had at first been called forth in herself" (305, 307; emphasis mine).
46. See Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, 146–52.
47. Here I receive assistance from Nancy Bentley's suggestive discussion of Henry James and manners: *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–18.
48. For a good discussion of Austen's endings, see Cottom, *Civilized Imagination*.
49. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 76.
50. Margreta de Grazia, "Sanctioning Voice: Quotation Marks, the Abolition of Torture, and the 5th Amendment," in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 288–89.
51. See Jane Barker, *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen in The Galesia Trilogy*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 271–72.
52. Cottom, *Civilized Imagination*, 91–92.
53. Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays in Literature and Society* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 194.
54. Pinch, "Lost in a Book," passim. On overhearing and eavesdropping, see the discussions of *Persuasion* offered by Keith Thomas ("Jane Austen and the Romantic Lyric: *Persuasion* and Coleridge's Conversation Poems," *ELH* 54 [1987]: 893–924) and Cottom (*Civilized Imagination*, 119–20).
55. Quoted in Carol Shiner Wilson, "Lost Needles, Tangled Threads: Stitchery, Domesticity, and the Artistic Enterprise in Barbauld, Edgeworth, Taylor, and Lamb," in *Re-visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776–1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 182.
56. See Pinch, "Lost in a Book," 139 ff.
57. *Ibid.*, 155.
58. For an extended discussion of the barriers to communication in *Persuasion*, see Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 236.
59. The allusion to the eleventh number of the *Spectator* is noted by Cottom (*Civilized Imagination*, 122).
60. Pinch, "Lost in a Book," 162.
61. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, 79. By reauthenticating the episto-

lary mode, *Persuasion* reopens questions about the language of individual feeling that Austen seemed to have settled when *Sense and Sensibility* gave preference to an unspoken language of selfhood—to the free indirect discourse that puts Elinor's inner life in the safekeeping of an impersonal narrator—over Marianne's epistolary self-representations. Unlike the practitioners of characteristic writing, Austen does not comfortably make her characters into men and women of letters. The letters that Marianne writes to Willoughby are intended as words from the heart. Her commitment to a private, unmediated expression aside, however, Marianne's clandestine correspondence is exceedingly public. As Mary A. Favret and Nicola Watson each point out in discussions of the romantic-period decline of the novel-in-letters, Elinor and Colonel Brandon both see the letters to Willoughby that Marianne sends to the post, and Willoughby's fiancée reads them. Marianne's dependence in volume 2 of the novel on the institution of the two-penny post is, ironically enough, another result of her conviction that self-respect entails rejection of social forms. That dependence is problematic in a culture increasingly perturbed by commercial growth and by the growth of a state committed to the surveillance of the post: it points up the overlap between the interchange of sentiments and the traffic in circulating goods and intelligence. It muddles the distinctions between the realm of personal relationships and the realm of the market and the state.

62. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, 171.

63. Morgan, *In the Meantime*, 176–82.

64. The first paragraph of *Northanger Abbey* is reported (by the editor of the most recent Oxford edition) to contain one such in-joke: Catherine Morland's father, the narrator informs us, was "a very respectable man, though his name was Richard" (1). The general public has yet to come up with an explanation of this grudge against the name "Richard," and the Oxford editor surmises that the name must have some private associations for the Austen family; the editor surmises, that is, that public bafflement was Austen's point.

65. J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen in Persuasion*, ed. D. W. Harding (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 339. Austen-Leigh's memoir of his aunt was first published in 1870. The parallel between the scene in the *Memoir* and the scene in *Persuasion* is also noted by Adela Pinch in the course of her excellent discussion of "domestic white noise" ("Lost in a Book," 159).

66. Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 4.

67. In an 1870 essay (*North British Review* 12), Richard Simpson described Jane Austen as the "ironical censor" of her contemporaries; for illuminating remarks on these ways of separating Austen from the women's writing of her time, see Clifford Siskin, "Jane Austen and the Engendering of Disciplinarity."

68. Virginia Woolf, review of *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters. A Family Record* by William Austen-Leigh, in *Essays (1912–1918)*, vol. 2, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1986), 10. On Austen's reception history in the first part of this century see my "At Home with Jane Austen," in *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, ed. Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

#### CONCLUSION

1. For a critical account of how Eliot focuses fiction on the question of the individual's relation to society—and of what it means to accept that there is indeed a discontinuity