Jane Austen as critic: a study of her novelistic theory and practice

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Contents

Abstract

This MA Thesis is a study of the relationship between Jane Austen's critical views on the novel and her own creative practice as a novelist. The first chapter delineates Austen's novelistic theory using the five letters on fiction that Austen wrote to Anna Lefroy. The second chapter focuses on "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*," examining how Austen's editorial ventriloquism of the opinions reflects her own critical voice. The third chapter shows how Austen modified her reviewers' hints from "Plan of a Novel" to fit within her own novelistic standards in *Persuasion*. The fourth chapter comprises a comparative reading of the cancelled and published versions of the final chapters of *Persuasion*, observing the effects of Austen's literary standards on her writing practice. Collectively, these chapters explore the degree to which Austen's theoretical literary standards, and her reflections on the criticisms that her readership made of her own works, inflect her own novelistic technique.

Résumé

La présente thèse de maîtrise étudie le rapport entre les idées théoriques de Jane Austen sur le genre du roman, et sa propre pratique créative comme romancière. Le premier chapitre extrait sa théorie du roman des cinq lettres qu'elle a écrites à propos du roman de sa nièce, Anna Lefroy. Le deuxième chapitre porte sur les « Opinions of *Mansfield Park* » et « Opinions of *Emma* » rassemblées par Austen. Ce chapitre examine la manière dont sa ventriloquie et sa mise au point des opinions reflètent sa voix de critique. Le troisième chapitre montre comment Austen a modifié les suggestions des critiques dans « Plan of a Novel » pour les rendre compatibles avec ses principes littéraires dans

Persuasion. Le quatrième chapitre compare les deux versions, publiée et non publiée, des derniers chapitres de *Persuasion*. Ce chapitre examine les effets des normes littéraires d'Austen sur sa pratique comme romancière. Collectivement, ces chapitres évaluent dans quelle mesure ses principes littéraires, et ses réflexions sur les critiques que ses lecteurs ont faites de ses œuvres, guident sa propre technique comme romancière.

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Preface

Before the professionalization of English literature, literary criticism and theory existed in a variety of forms, as early critics and theorists of the novel had to be creative in finding modes through which to express their views of this budding literary genre. With her amused and often ironic regard for eighteenth-century novelistic tropes, Jane Austen was just such an innovator. To illuminate her ideas on contemporary novels and on the genre in general, critics have traditionally turned to the allusions in her own novels,[1] and in particular to the oft-quoted passage on novels from *Northanger Abbey*. Because of this critical focus on Austen's published works, a valuable resource for insight into her ideas about the novel has been overlooked: her later manuscripts, unpublished until the pioneering editorial work of R.W. Chapman, and recently collected anew by Janet Todd and Linda Bree.[2]

The reason that Austen's later manuscripts are so important for a study of her novelistic theory is inherent in their very name. She wrote these documents later in her career, after she had established herself as a respected novelist and was in a position to reflect meaningfully on her own authorial practice, and on the art of fiction more generally. Indeed, in their new edition, Todd and Bree group a number of the manuscript texts under a section entitled *Jane Austen on Fiction*, including the five letters on fiction from Austen to her niece Anna Lefroy, the two collections of "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*," and the playful burlesque "Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters." As noted in their introduction, "The cancelled chapters of

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[1] See Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[2] See Jane Austen, *Later Manuscripts*, eds. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Persuasion, which would otherwise have found a place in the volume, have been included in *Persuasion* in [the Cambridge] edition" (Todd and Bree xxxi). Collectively, these manuscripts contain a wealth of information about Austen's ideas on the novel: variously, they shed light on her peculiar theory of novelistic technique; they indicate how she wished to innovate certain eighteenth-century literary conventions; and they express her opinions on what features were essential in a novel to realise the full potential inherent in the genre.

To garner this information, this project proceeds in chronological order through the manuscripts. Chapter one focuses on Austen's letters on fiction to Anna Lefroy from the summer and autumn of 1814, and distils from them the tenets of her novelistic theory. Chapter two addresses her two collections of opinions, assembled after the respective publications of *Mansfield Park* in May 1814, and *Emma* in December 1815. Austen's editorial choices in these two collections indicate how her opinions on her innovations interacted with those of her readership, illuminating her experience of having her works become objects of public review. This topic extends into Chapter three on "Plan of a Novel" of 1815-16, an ironic sketch made up of readers' suggestions about the features that Austen should include in a novel. Her conflicted relationship to these readers' hints commingles with her own novelistic principles to inflect her writing practice in *Persuasion*. Finally, chapter four comprises a comparative study of the cancelled and published chapters of *Persuasion*, both written in the summer of 1816. This chapter shows Austen implementing her theory of the novel – as she delineates it in her letters on fiction – in her own writing practice.

This purpose of this study is to approach the late period of Austen's career through the less common avenue of her later manuscripts, thus generating a clearer picture than is visible through the lens of her published works alone. The manuscripts show us Austen in various capacities: as a seasoned writer in a position to dispense criticisms and dictate tenets of literary technique to her young niece; and, conversely, as a prominent author having to receive and process public criticisms in her turn. These multiple facets of Austen's authorial experience shape the manner in which she executes her novelistic theory in practice, revealing this mistress of the eighteenth-century burlesque as her own most stringent critic.

Chapter 1

Letters on fiction to Anna Lefroy: Austen's theory of the novel

Jane Austen devoted her life to studying and perfecting the art of fiction. Having famously described herself and her family as "great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so" (*Letters* 26), she had an unparalleled knowledge of the genre that she chose as her literary medium. Her extensive reading led her to develop convictions about what novelistic features she liked and disliked; she had strong opinions about what a worthy piece of fiction should accomplish, and through what mechanisms. As she never wrote an essay on fiction to delineate her literary principles, scholars have gained a clearer picture of them through analysis of her novels, and from comments she made in her letters about her reading and writing practices.

Austen wrote a series of letters to her niece Anna Lefroy in the summer and autumn of 1814 that are particularly important for this project. At about the age of twenty, Anna started writing a novel of her own, which she sent in instalments for her aunt's perusal (Sabor 231). Neither Anna's letters nor her unfinished novel have survived. The five letters that Austen wrote to her in reply, however, are extant. Austen tells Anna where she has done well and where she has fallen short, and in the process, states many of her own literary standards and preferences with striking precision and definiteness. The significance of the letters on fiction is widely acknowledged; as Cronin and McMillan note in their introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Emma*, they "represent [Austen's] most sustained exercise in literary criticism" (xxiv). Notwithstanding, critics have cited them sparingly thus far, and have yet to undertake the larger task of analyzing their contents to distil the literary tenets that underlie them. They

have probably avoided doing so because of anxiety about the inferential reading strategy that may come into play when using the letters as evidence of Austen's theory of the novel. On one hand, inferring such a theory from Austen's comments on Anna's work is somewhat problematic, insofar as she does not explicitly articulate it in its entirety; on the other hand, she comes closer to doing so in these five letters than anywhere else in her oeuvre and her manuscripts. In the absence of an unequivocal statement on fiction from Austen, a thorough expository reading of her letters to Anna is certainly a worthwhile exercise to sharpen our current picture of her novelistic principles.

Although the lack of a comprehensive reading of the letters to Anna is indeed a critical lacuna, scholars have not entirely overlooked them. Both Paula Byrne and Richard Cronin cite the letters in their respective essays in *Jane Austen in Context*, "Manners" and "Literary Scene." Quoting Austen's criticisms of Anna for misrepresenting various social mores, Byrne illustrates the author's "concern with realistic detail" (299). Cronin invokes Austen's instruction not to let fictional representation go beyond the realm of one's experience – "Let the Portmans go to Ireland, but as you know nothing of the manners there, you had better not go with them" (*Later MSS* 218)[3] – to support his claim that she "has no ambition at all to write a novel such as *Thaddeus Of Warsaw*" (293). Tellingly, Cronin immediately inserts a qualifying statement: "But even this much can be assumed of Jane Austen only tentatively" (293). In the introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Emma*, Cronin and his co-editor Dorothy McMillan include a handful of comments from the letters to provide a sketch of the novelistic standards that must have shaped *Emma*, which Austen was writing

[3] All quotations from Austen's five letters on fiction are taken from Todd and Bree's new edition of her *Later Manuscripts* rather than from Le Faye's edition of her collected letters.

contemporaneously in 1814. Most recently, Todd and Bree devote a paragraph to the letters in their 129-page introduction to Austen's *Later Manuscripts*, in which they are printed. This paragraph opens with the statement, "Something of what Jane Austen thought a novel should be can be gauged from the series of letters she sent to her niece Anna" (ci), followed by contextual information about the letters.

Todd and Bree's introductory sentence smacks of the same critical reticence that informs Cronin's brief discussion of the letters in "Literary Scene." The language that these scholars use to talk about them bespeaks their reluctance to treat them as a legitimate source of Austen's novelistic theory. Cronin draws a conclusion about Austen's character as a writer, and promptly undermines it by labelling the process by which he arrived at it "tentative assumption." He implies that by claiming "even this much," he may have exercised too much critical license. Similarly, Todd and Bree only go so far as to acknowledge that "something…can be gauged" from the letters about Austen's authorial point of view. These critics are palpably uneasy about the tentative assumption and gauging that they believe the letters require. This uneasiness probably accounts for their having avoided dealing with them in a sustained and serious manner.

As her daughter Fanny-Caroline reports, Anna Lefroy burned the manuscript of her unfinished novel in 1825 (*Family Record* 193), and with it the possibility of comparing Austen's criticisms to their source. Notwithstanding, there is a great deal more than merely "something" of Austen's literary theory to be "gauged" by analysing the letters in isolation, without relying on assumption. Austen was remarkably definite and specific in explaining what she disapproved of in Anna's novel. In the opening of her letter dated Friday 9 – Sunday 18 September, she prepares Anna for the critique she is

about to deliver: “My dear Anna We have been very much amused by your 3 books, but I have a good many criticisms to make – more than you will like” (219). Indeed, an almost percussive enumeration of criticisms ensues. Todd and Bree note that “The letters are remarkable for the fluency of the writing: on these manuscripts there are almost no additions or deletions” (ci). That Austen did not need to rephrase and revise her comments speaks to the strength of her conviction and her confidence as a critic; she knew her own mind very well on the topic of the novel.

Nearly all of Austen’s ideas about novelistic technique are based on two general principles, to which she alludes in the letter to Anna dated Wednesday 10 – Thursday 18 August:

> Your Aunt C. does not like desultory novels, & is rather fearful yours will be too much so, that there will be too frequent a change from one set of people to another, & that circumstances will be sometimes introduced of apparent consequence, which will lead to nothing. – It will not be so great an objection to *me*, if it does. I allow much more Latitude than she does – & think *Nature & Spirit* cover many sins of a wandering story – and People in general do not care so much about it – for your comfort. (my emphasis, 218)

Austen may be employing a variation on apophasis here, making a criticism while seemingly remaining detached from it by attributing it to her sister Cassandra. Regardless of whether or not Austen is indirectly warning Anna against the dangers of a wandering story, what *is* clear is that she sees plot as secondary to the broad qualities of nature and spirit in a novel. Fittingly, the letters on fiction embody a tension between

rigidity and playfulness, as Austen demands from Anna not only meticulously accurate representation of detail, but also readerly amusement. In fact, the former is a prerequisite to the latter; she encourages her niece to draw realistic characters within a milieu that is socially and topographically plausible, and subsequently to generate within this framework an engaging and enjoyable experience for the reader.

The first principle, nature, denotes "fidelity or close adherence to nature or naturalness" (*OED*), and underlies a wide range of the novelistic features that Austen encourages Anna to incorporate. In the broadest sense, when Austen uses the term nature, it refers to realism of representation in fiction. It informs, for example, her criticism of the social mores that Anna gets wrong in her novel. On a number of occasions, Anna neglects the etiquette involved in the ritual of introductions: Austen explains that "As Lady H. is Cecelia's superior, it w^{d}. not be correct to talk of *her* being introduced" (214), and she deletes the scene in which Mr. Griffin is introduced to Lord P. and his brother, explaining that "A Country Surgeon (don't tell Mr. C. Lyford) would not be introduced to Men of their rank" (217). Anna overlooks other intricacies of this custom, namely that it varies according to social setting. Austen makes corrections accordingly, explaining that "he w^{d}. not be introduced as *the Honourable – That* distinction is never mentioned at such times" (217). Shifting her attention from the particulars of introductions to those of making calls, Austen writes that Anna's grandmother – who, along with Cassandra, was a secondary reader of the chapters – "is more disturbed at M^{rs}. F.'s not returning the Egertons visit sooner, than anything else. They ought to have called at the Parsonage before Sunday" (220). In pressing Anna to

satisfy contemporary standards of manners in her depictions of social interactions, Austen shows her commitment to social verisimilitude in novel writing.

For Austen, geographic verisimilitude also forms an integral part of the foundation on which to build a story, made clear by her demand that Anna pay careful attention to geographic details in the plot of her novel. She writes bluntly to her niece, "Lyme will not do. Lyme is towards 40 miles distance from Dawlish & would not be talked of there. – I have put Starcross indeed. – If you prefer *Exeter*, that must be always safe" (217). Austen's use of the word "safe" is indicative of her views on the dangers of misrepresentation in fiction. Within the same letter, Austen responds in the affirmative to a prior question that Anna must have asked about the topography of a city: "Yes – Russel Square is a very proper distance from Berkeley S^{t}." (218). She alters two more geography-related points of the plot, explaining that "They must be *two* days going from Dawlish to Bath; They are nearly 100 miles apart" (218), and that "M^{r}. Griffin must have lived in Devonshire; Dawlish is half way down the County. –" (219). These details, seemingly trivial, are hardly ones that would detract from genuine literary merit; notwithstanding, Austen calls for careful attention to such minutiae, prioritizing nature in every aspect of novel writing.

This priority underlies Austen's diverse feedback about characterization in Anna's novel. On the rarer occasions when she makes favourable comments about characters, the language in which she frames them bespeaks her commitment to realism. She tells Anna that "It was very fit that you should advance [Cecilia's] age" (214), and that "Bell Griffin is just what she should be" (217). Referring to things that are "fit" and to characters that are what they "should be," Austen employs near synonyms of the term

"natural" to indicate her approval. At times she uses the term itself as a compliment, telling Anna encouragingly that "Jane Egerton is a very natural, comprehendable Girl – & the whole of her acquaintance with Susan, & Susan's Letter to Cecilia, very pleasing & quite in character" (222). Realistic contrast between characters is also an asset, as she tells Anna approvingly that Cecilia's "disposition is very well opposed to Susan's – her want of Imagination is very natural" (221). Austen reserves her few compliments for specific aspects of characters that Anna has depicted in a plausible manner.

In contrast, Austen criticizes the characters in Anna's novel that do not satisfy her standards for plausibility. She objects to unrealistic extremes in characters, doubting "whether Ly Helena is not almost *too* foolish" (222) and commenting that "Cecilia is perhaps a little too solemn & good" (221). She admits that "Cecilia continues to be interesting inspite of being so amiable" (214), showing her belief that when a character exhibits a trait in its extreme form, it jeopardizes that character's capacity to engage the reader. Instead, she prefers psychologically realistic characters that subsume a variety of traits such as D. Forester, whom she likes "a great deal better than if he had been very Good or very Bad" (214).

To achieve this kind of natural characterization, Austen encourages Anna to espouse subtlety in her novelistic technique. She acknowledges that Mrs. F. "must be difficult to manage & make entertaining, because there is so much good common sense & propriety about her that nothing can be very *broad*" (221). Here, Austen implies that realism must be preserved in order to generate amusement. When a character displays extreme traits – in this case, common sense and propriety – it limits the character's range, depth, and thus entertainment value. Suggesting a remedy for this problem with Mrs. F's

character, Austen writes, "Her Economy & her Ambition must not be staring" (221); in other words, her obtrusive qualities need to be depicted with greater delicacy. Austen's advice about Miss Egerton similarly condemns extreme behaviour: "She is too formal & solemn, we think, in her advice to her Brother not to fall in love; & it is hardly like a sensible Woman; it is putting it into his head" (222). Her alternative suggestion – "We should like a few hints from her better" (222) – encourages Anna to be more nuanced and moderate in her characterization.

As a proponent of moderation in novel writing, Austen criticizes characters whose actions are erratic or unnatural in the broader context of their development. She takes issue when behaviour does not befit social status, as in the conversation between Lady Clanmurray, Lady Clanmurray's daughter, and Devereux Forester: "We think they press him too much – more than sensible Women or well-bred Women would do. *Lady C.* at least, should have discretion enough to be sooner satisfied with his determination of not going with them" (217). Austen's use of the modal verbs "would" and "should" suggest the existence of a hypothetical natural ideal that Anna's representation must reflect. Social status aside, Austen presses Anna simply to maintain consistency in her characters' behaviour over the course of the novel, objecting to a marked and inexplicable shift in Susan's treatment of a suitor:

> I like her as she is *now* exceedingly, but I am not so well satisfied with her behaviour to George R. At first she seemed all over attachment & feeling, & afterwards to have none at all; she is so extremely composed at the Ball, & so well satisfied with M^{r}. Morgan. She seems to have changed her Character. (220)

Similarly, she sees improbabilities in Mrs. F's behaviour: "M^{rs}. F. is not careful enough of Susan's health; – Susan ought not to be walking out so soon after Heavy rains, taking long walks in the dirt. An anxious Mother would not suffer it" (220). Having perceived that Mrs F. is an anxious mother, Austen expects that her actions will consistently befit this facet of her character. In this sense, the principle of "nature" dictates that characters' actions follow smoothly and logically from what has come before, fitting within the behavioural expectations established for them by their social standing, their previous actions, and their character traits.

To help make characters' behaviour consistent in the context of the attributes they have been given, Austen advises Anna to use the plot of her story as a tool. Identifying another discrepancy between Mrs. F.'s character in theory and in practice, she writes to Anna:

> We are not satisfied with M^{rs}. F.'s settling herself as Tenant & near Neighbour to such a Man as Sir T.H. without having some other inducement to go there; she ought to have some friend living thereabouts to tempt her. A woman, going with two girls just growing up, into a Neighbourhood where she knows nobody but one Man, of not very good character, is a an awkwardness which so prudent a woman as M^{rs}. F. would not be likely to fall into. Remember, she is very prudent; – you must not let her act inconsistently. – Give her a friend, & let that friend be invited to meet her at the Priory, & we shall have no objection to her dining there as she does; but otherwise, a woman in her situation would hardly go there, before she had been visited by other Families. (219)

Ever a disciple of nature in novel writing, Austen wants this fictional episode to unfold in the same way that it would in life, and she suggests that Anna use the plot to facilitate this goal. By devising a new character – a friend – and a new event – an invitation to this friend to meet Mrs F. at the Priory – Anna can easily eliminate the incongruity between Mrs. F.'s established traits and her behaviour that is currently detracting from her character's plausibility.

For Austen, achieving convincing characterization also depends on the reader's reception of those characters. Thus, the novelist has a duty to the reader to maintain a plausible relationship between appearance and reality. She tells Anna, "I like Lord P. & his Brother very much; – I am only afraid that Lord P.–'s good nature will make most people like him better than he deserves" (215). Anna's focus on Lord P.'s good nature obscures his character. Austen does not object when a character's exterior does not align with his or her interior, as proven by the existence of Wickhams and Willoughbys in her oeuvre. But any such discrepancy must be – or become – sufficiently clear to a discerning reader. In the same letter, Austen gives a variation on this piece of advice. Explaining the rationale behind one of her excisions, she writes,

> and I have scratched out Sir Tho: from walking with the other Men to the Stables &c the very day after his breaking his arm – for though I find your Papa *did* walk out immediately after *his* arm was set, I think it can be so little usual as to *appear* unnatural in a book – & it does not seem to be material that Sir Tho: should go with them. (217)

Apparently, Anna based her choice to have Sir Thomas walk to the stables the day after breaking his arm on her own experience of seeing her father do so. Even though her

representation of human resilience is accurate, the mere fact that it may seem improbable to readers is enough to warrant its deletion. For Austen, there is no difference between something that *is* unnatural and something that only *appears* unnatural. The author has an obligation to the reader to depict characters' behaviour and actions in a manner that is clear and above all, credible.

Spirit is the other quality in a novel that Austen believes can "cover many sins of a wandering story" (218) to maintain its high calibre. Indeed, one of the ways in which she compliments Anna's novel is by telling her that "The Spirit does not droop at all" (214). As broad as its counterpart term, nature, spirit denotes a quality of "liveliness, vivacity, or animation in persons, their actions, discourse, etc" (*OED*). It is inextricably linked to a novel's entertainment value, and it underlies Austen's diverse comments about Anna's characters and plot. Something as small-scale as a character's name can contribute to the spirit of a novel, evident in the surprising volume of feedback about nomenclature in her letters to Anna: "I like the scene itself, the Miss Lesleys, Lady Anne, & the Music, very much. – Lesley *is* a noble name" (219).[4] She finds the name Progillian to be "a source of delight" (223), and in reference to the character named Newton Priors, she reports that Cassandra "quite enters into the exquisiteness of that name. Newton Priors is really a Nonpareil" (221). She reiterates this praise in a subsequent letter: "The name of Newton-Priors is really invaluable! – I never met with anything superior to it. – It is delightful. – One could live upon the name of Newton-Priors for a twelvemonth" (224). Bad names are a liability – as Austen notes, "the name of Rachael is as much as I

[4] This aside is probably a sly allusion to Austen's own unfinished epistolary novella, "Lesley Castle," the second work in "Volume the Second" of her juvenilia. See Jane Austen, *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 142-75.

can bear" (220) – but good names are a source of delight, however small, that contribute to the pleasure one finds in a novel.

More broadly, Austen approves when characters engage the reader. Her compliments are rarer than her criticisms, but when she does offer praise, it is for aspects of characters that are either natural or amusing. She approves of Susan and St. Julian, calling the former "a very nice little animated Creature," and the latter "the delight of one's Life. He is quite interesting" (217). The descriptors "animated" and "interesting" bespeak these characters' entertainment value. In a subsequent letter, Austen reiterates and elaborates on her approval of Susan: "I like your Susan very much indeed, she is a sweet creature, her playfulness of fancy is very delightful" (220). She probably offered these words of encouragement to Anna because Susan's playfulness appealed to her own sense of fun.

Indeed, generating amusement for the reader is one of the primary functions of fictional characters for Austen. She explicitly tells Anna, "I expect high fun about M^{rs}. Fisher & Sir Thomas" (223). For Austen, one circumstance in particular should be in place in order to maximize entertainment for the reader: "You are but *now* coming to the heart and beauty of your book; till the heroine grows up, the fun must be imperfect – but I expect a great deal of entertainment from the next 3 or 4 books" (220). With a touch of characteristic irony, she playfully echoes this sentiment later in the letter, telling Anna that "One does not care for girls till they are grown up" (221). Austen's demand for a heroine who has recently come of age seems like more of an idiosyncratic preference than a novelistic standard. Notwithstanding, she makes a strong statement in equating the heroine's coming of age with "the heart and beauty" of a novel. The effusiveness of her

language in this passage, notable by contrast to the rest of the letters, shows the strength of her conviction that a grown-up heroine has the greatest potential to generate amusement for readers, and is thus the most worthy subject for a novel.

In contrast, characters that are bland or flat and that detract from the story's overall entertainment value are targets for Austen's suggested alterations. She mildly complains that "there is nothing to *enchant* one certainly in M^{r}. L.L. – but we make no objection to him, & his inclination to like Susan is pleasing" (220). Although she does not explicitly condemn this character, she stresses that he is lacklustre and does nothing to contribute to the story's interest. She urges Anna to shape the plot to showcase characters in a way that engages the reader's attention:

> What can you do with Egerton to increase the interest for him? – I wish you c^{d}. contrive something, some family occurrence to draw out his good qualities more – some distress among Brothers or Sisters to releive by the sale of his Curacy – something to [take] him mysteriously away, & then heard of at York or Edinburgh – in an old great Coat. – I would not seriously recommend anything Improbable, but if you c^{d}. invent something spirited for him, it w^{d}. have a good effect. (223-24)

Ironic suggestions aside, Austen talks about the plot of a novel as more of an indirect than a direct source of amusement for readers; it adds to the entertainment value of a novel in its secondary capacity to facilitate character development. Plot episodes provide opportunities for characters to show different traits as part of their reactions. In this case, Austen wants Anna to devise a challenge for Egerton to which he will respond in a manner that shows his good qualities, engaging readers and augmenting their investment

in him. Events in the plot are not always amusing in isolation; rather, they often function in relation to characters to increase the quality of spirit in the novel.

This technique of enlisting plot in the service of character development does not only make readers more interested in a given character; it can also establish dynamics between characters, thus generating intrigue. In contrast to her usual constructive criticism, Austen actually identifies a point of the story in which Anna has used plot effectively to this end:

> S^{t}. Julian's History was quite a surprise to me; You had not very long known it yourself I suspect – but I have no objection to make to the circumstance – it is very well told – & his having been in love with the Aunt, gives Cecilia an additional Interest with him. I like the Idea: – a very proper compliment to an Aunt! (224-25)

Cecilia's interest with St. Julian is not the same as the reader's interest; in other words, Austen does not use this word to mean that St. Julian excites Cecilia's curiosity or holds her attention. Rather, the word functions here in its literal sense: "the feeling of one who is concerned or has a personal concern in any thing" (*OED*). This tidbit of St Julian's romantic history increases Cecilia's investment in him, and in turn it generates an additional point of intrigue in the novel, as shown by Austen's approving comments: it "was quite a surprise to me" and, "I like the idea."

Although Austen often talks of plot in relation to characters, occasionally she refers to points of the plot that are particularly spirited or pleasing in their own right. She tells Anna tersely that "The Papers left by M^{rs}. Fisher is very good. – Of course, one guesses something" (221). The added intrigue is an asset. Austen's letters on fiction

suggest that a novelist's task is to draw natural and engaging characters within circumstances that have the potential to generate fun for the reader, and Anna has drawn a set of circumstances of which Austen particularly approves: "You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life; – 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on" (220). Her emphatic language is notable; it bespeaks an ideal fictional model to emulate, by assembling characters into "*exactly* such a spot" as is "the *very* thing to work on." Austen reiterates her delight as a reader, heartily approving of Anna's chosen paradigm and anticipating the pleasure that it will produce.

While much of Austen's advice to Anna in the letters on fiction is motivated by the two broad principles of nature and spirit, she promotes some additional novelistic features that do not fall directly into these two categories. She emphasizes the importance of concision in novel writing, justifying some of her corrections by telling Anna, "here and there, we have thought the sense might be expressed in fewer words" (217). In a subsequent letter, she repeats her advice in more specific terms: "You describe a sweet place, but your descriptions are often more minute than will be liked. You give too many particulars of right hand & left" (220). Austen repeatedly tells Anna to be meticulous about minutiae in her writing, demanding that careful attention be paid to every detail from geography to characters' names. Her simultaneous call for descriptive minimalism, then, may seem to be a contradiction. In fact, this tension evidences Austen's belief in a critical limit for details in novel writing. Novelists must maintain a fine balance so that details are an asset, contributing to a novel's realism, rather than becoming a liability, generating extraneous material that will only serve to irk

readers. To maintain this balance, Austen encourages heavy revision and excision, writing to Anna, "I hope when you have written a great deal more you will be equal to scratching out some of the past" (221). As Todd and Bree note, Austen's famous comment in a letter to Cassandra about *Pride and Prejudice* – "I have lopt & cropt so successfully however that I imagine it must be rather shorter than S. &S. altogether" (*Letters* 202) – proves that she too practises this technique.

Aside from concision, Austen values innovation in novel writing, and she encourages her niece to do the same. She gives the following advice to Anna, who presumably has informed her aunt of two possible titles for her novel: "I like the name 'Which is the Heroine?' very well, & I dare say shall grow to like it very much in time – but 'Enthusiasm' was something so very superior that every common Title must appear to disadvantage" (215).[5] Austen sees a need for the novel to uphold the legacy of the genre's name; clearly, she appreciates that a title has the potential to set a novel apart, announcing its departure from the norm.

Her commitment to innovation, along with her preference for subtlety over extremes, prompts Austen to warn Anna against straying into the realm of cliché in her character drawing. The most explicit example of this advice comes at the expense of Henry Mellish, whom Austen is "afraid will be too much in the common Novel style – a handsome, amiable, unexceptionable Young Man (such as do not much abound in real Life) desperately in Love, & all in vain" (222). Frustrated with tired novelistic

[5] The way in which Austen frames her statement suggests that Anna has had to change the name of her novel unwillingly from *Enthusiasm* to *Which is the Heroine*, probably because another novel was published under the former. As Todd and Bree note, "in the early years of the nineteenth century there was a vogue for one-word titles to indicate the moral nature of the novel, as, for example, with Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1815) and Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809) and *Patronage* (1814)" (681, n.6). Todd and Bree also record Chapman's conjecture about which novel, published contemporaneously, may have deterred Anna from using her original title: *Les Voeux Temeraires ou L'Enthusiasme* by Mme de Genlis.

conventions, Austen encourages her niece to depart from them. Interestingly, though, Austen cares more about seeing this break with convention occur in form than in content. She makes this distinction in a comment to Anna about Devereux Forester:

> Devereux Forester's being ruined by his Vanity is extremely good; but 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. (223)

Austen does not object to the stock event in Anna's plot – Devereux's supposed descent into depravity – as much as she objects to the clichéd language in which it is represented.[6] Similarly, Austen praises Anna simultaneously for "collecting [her] People delightfully...in a Country Village" (220) – a plot line that is far from new – and for devising the title "Enthusiasm" for her novel, one that makes "every common Title...appear to disadvantage" (215). It seems, then, that Austen believed in striving for newness in novel writing on a micro-level rather than on a macro-level.

All of the tenets of Austen's literary theory discussed thus far have been distilled from her explicit statements in the letters on fiction. One can infer still more information about her authorial perspective from the diction in which she frames her comments. Her understanding of the relationship between author and characters is implicit in her remarks on characterization. She makes a number of objections to Mrs. F.'s character: to reiterate, she tells Anna, "I wish you could make M^{rs}. F. talk more, but she must be difficult to manage & make entertaining, because there is so much good common sense &

[6] The phrase "vortex of dissipation," as Todd and Bree note, "became popular around 1770 and was indeed very widely used by novelists in the final decades of the eighteenth century" (n. 36, 686).

propriety about her that nothing can be very *broad*" (221). Interestingly, Austen does not talk about Anna's characters as if they are her own creative productions, inevitably at the mercy of her authorial agency. Rather, Austen's language suggests that characters are independent entities that have a certain degree of autonomy, insofar as they can be difficult to manage. As noted, characters that are particularly stubborn must be manipulated and showcased to advantage using the plot. This attitude is evident in Austen's concern for Devereux's potential to be unpredictable: "I should like to have had more of Devereux. I do not feel enough acquainted with him. – You were afraid of meddling with him I dare say" (218). Austen obscures the hierarchical link between author and characters, problematizing the concept of authorial control.

Austen's approval of Anna's having collected her characters so delightfully in a country village is similarly indicative: "I hope you will write a great deal more, & make use of them while they are so favourably arranged" (220). The way in which she frames this statement distances Anna as an author from her characters. The word "while" implies a time limit within which Anna must work, and a sense of urgency for her to execute her authorial goals before this favourable arrangement dissipates. Austen positions Anna as an external party who must try to benefit from a pre-existing situation in a timely manner, and in doing so, she detracts somewhat from Anna's agency. These inferences generate a clearer picture of how Austen might have conceptualized her relationship to the characters in her own novels as she wrote them, illuminating a new aspect of her authorial persona.

A contrasting facet of Austen's attitude towards authorship emerges through the diction of the letters. Primarily, the letters comprise a number of highly specific

criticisms enumerated in rapid succession. Austen is careful, however, to show deference to her niece's authority while communicating them. She does so by tempering her criticisms through careful word choice. She writes, for example, "A few verbal corrections were all that I felt tempted to make – the principal of them is a speech of S^{t}. Julians to Lady Helena – which you will see I have presumed to alter" (214). She distances herself from the act of correcting by using the convoluted verb phrase "I felt tempted to make"; moreover, she acknowledges the presumption inherent in her role as an editor and critic. In a subsequent letter, she prefaces new corrections by telling Anna, "My Corrections have not been more important than before" (217), ever so slightly undermining herself and the corrections. She later writes to her niece, "The scene with M^{rs}. Mellish, I should condemn" (221), positioning herself at one remove from the act of condemnation by framing the sentence in the conditional tense, and making the act hypothetical rather than concrete. After suggesting some scenarios that would draw out Egerton's good qualities, Austen concludes her list with an explicit request for pardon – "Excuse the liberty I take in these suggestions" (224) – thereby tempering its impact.

Occasionally, Austen employs the first person plural pronoun "we" when she pens her criticisms, denoting both her and Cassandra as subjects. While it is true that Cassandra also read Anna's draft, making a point to highlight the collective nature of the criticisms may be a technique through which Austen, conscious of her status as a literary figure, makes them more oblique. By framing them as comments issuing from two aunts reading the novel draft as evening entertainment, rather than from a skilled published author, Austen makes them seem less serious. As Anna sent a number of drafts to her aunts, Austen saw some of her corrections implemented, which she made a point to

acknowledge. Probably referring to the comment in which she had advised her niece to give Mrs F. a friend who is invited to meet her at the priory, Austen tells Anna explicitly, "We feel really obliged to you for introducing a Lady Kenrick, it will remove the greatest fault in the work, & I give you credit for considerable forbearance as an Author in adopting so much of our opinion" (222-23). Austen's diction here betrays an acute awareness of the deference that an author is owed by her editors and critics.

Austen's letters on fiction to Anna contain explicit as well as implicit expressions of her theory of novel writing. She clearly delineates the manifold tasks of an author to Anna. First, an author must draw natural characters, that do not possess traits in their extreme forms, and that behave in a manner that is consistent with their social standing, their previous actions, and their peculiar traits. She must situate these characters within a set of circumstances that are equally plausible, prioritizing verisimilitude in every detail from social mores to geography. Only after this prerequisite of realism is satisfied can the author work within this framework to generate readerly amusement, devising spirited plot lines that may in turn help to showcase characters' appealing qualities. All the while, concision and innovation work to sustain readers' interest and engagement. Austen consistently demands that Anna maintain a balance of oppositions: between rigid adherence to social customs, and flexible, subtle representation of human nature; between meticulous rendering of details and playful humour. The implicit content of these letters reveals additional tensions in Austen's authorial philosophy. Her appreciation of a certain degree of autonomy in fictional characters is unusual as it challenges traditional ideas of authorial control. The deferential language in which she frames many of her criticisms to Anna, however, affirms her great respect for her as the novel's author. That

all of these oppositions coexist in Austen's concept of authorship speaks to the complexity of her craft, something she perfected over time with the publication – and, as I shall trace in the next chapter, the public reception – of each novel.

Chapter 2

"Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*": Austen as editor

In recent years, scholars such as Mary Waldron and Jocelyn Harris have used the allusions in Austen's novels as well as comments in her letters to make inferences about her assessments of other novels. These scholars have illuminated her oeuvre by charting how her opinions of contemporary fiction shaped her own literary innovations. Austen satirized certain eighteenth-century tropes that she saw in the novels of her contemporaries, such as gothic sensationalism, sentimental excess, and two-dimensional models of extreme virtue or vice. She revamped these tired novelistic conventions in her own novels, and in turn they became prime targets for criticism. Austen was well aware of this fact, and in letters written in 1813 to her sister Cassandra, she both recorded opinions of *Pride and Prejudice* collected from various acquaintances and solicited Cassandra to ascertain the opinions of particular parties.

Austen later formalized this project of amassing her readers' criticisms by recording them in "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*." In compiling these collections, Austen displays critical and editorial judgment. She almost always ventriloquizes the opinions through her own pen rather than recording them verbatim, inflecting them with her own point of view. Not coincidentally, her ventriloquism bears striking resemblance to the technique of free indirect discourse that Austen herself pioneered, in which the narrative voice reports the thoughts, attitudes, and idiolect of a given character in the third person, inevitably modulating them in the process. By analysing Austen's "Opinions" in the context of her editorial choices and ventriloquism, I will provide insight into her experience of having her works criticized. Specifically, I

will examine how Austen's perceptions of others' opinions interacted with her own opinions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, and I will suggest ways in which this commingling of opinions shaped her authorial practice.

Although "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*" have received some scholarly attention since their initial publication in Chapman's edition of Austen's *Plan of a Novel*, critics have largely overlooked comments in her 1813 letters about the reception of *Pride and Prejudice*, which represent the earliest record of her impulse to collect readers' opinions. None of the letters that Austen wrote between June 1811 and October 1812 survives, and as *Sense and Sensibility* was published in October 1811, it is possible that the missing correspondence from the ensuing year contained references to popular opinions of the novel. In the surviving letters, there exists only one general comment from Austen to Cassandra: that *Sense and Sensibility* "was very much admired at Cheltenham" (252). For all scholarly intents and purposes, then, Austen's project of amassing opinions began in earnest only with the publication of her second book. In total, there are eight opinions in her 1813 letters that refer unequivocally to *Pride and Prejudice*, all of which express general praise of the novel. Two further opinions – one positive and one negative – probably refer to *Pride and Prejudice*, as they were written in the aftermath of its publication. All but two of these ten opinions are recorded in letters that Austen wrote to Cassandra, not only her sister but also her closest friend and confidante. As such, they reflect a rare level of candour on her part, and they offer valuable insight into her experience of having *Pride and Prejudice* criticised.

Austen maintained a strong conviction of the merit of her "own darling Child," as she affectionately refers to *Pride and Prejudice* in a letter of 29 January. In the same

letter, she states, "I must confess that *I* think [Elizabeth] as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print" (201), and in a letter of 4 February, she admits, referring to the book, "I am quite vain enough & well satisfied enough" (203). She implies the high calibre of her work by proclaiming, through an allusion to Walter Scott's *Marmion*, that her target audience comprises only intelligent people: "I do not write for such dull Elves As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves" (202). When people did not share in her warm admiration of *Pride and Prejudice*, she was quick to undermine the legitimacy of their opinions with biting irony. In a letter of November 1814 to her niece Anna, she alludes to just such a person, a man whose name was later cut out of the page:

> I will redeem my credit with him, by writing a close Imitation of 'Self-control' as soon as I can; – I will improve upon it; – my Heroine shall not merely be wafted down an American river in a boat by herself, she shall cross the Atlantic in the same way, & never stop till she reaches Gravesent. (283)

Austen disliked Mary Brunton's *Self-Control*, and thought that it was a novel "without anything of Nature or Probability in it" (234). By sardonically implying that this anonymous reader would only approve if she were to write an even more sensational imitation of an already bad novel, she condemns his literary taste and effectively dismisses his opinion of her own book.

Although in theory irony and humour can function purely as mechanisms of criticism, they can also be used to deflect attention away from real concerns and insecurities. Austen may in fact have had more invested in readers' opinions of *Pride and Prejudice* than her playful irony implies. The jokingly self-deprecating language that

characterizes her epistolary chatter to Cassandra about *Pride and Prejudice* indicates that at times, she felt insecure about the merit of her book. Telling Cassandra about Falknor's newspaper advertisement for *Pride and Prejudice* that prices the book at 18^{s}, Austen says, "He shall ask £I-I – for my two next, & £I-8 – for my stupidest of all" (201). Seemingly trivial, this little joke in fact conveys Austen's simultaneous confidence and diffidence. Her certainty of success in selling copyrights of her novels is in tension with her mocking use of the superlative "stupidest," and its implied adjective and comparative, "stupid" and "stupider," to describe them.

Austen's insecurity often outweighs her own belief in her novel's worth, as shown in the validation she obtains from positive feedback. She writes to Cassandra on 4 February, "I am much obliged to you all for your praise; it came at a right time, for I had had some fits of disgust" (203), and later in the same week she admits to finding her niece Fanny's praise "very gratifying" (205). In September, she tells Cassandra, "I long to have you hear M^{r} H's opinion of P&P" (221), and in November she dubs Anne Sharp "an excellent kind friend" after having had "more of such sweet flattery" from her (250).

When Austen receives complimentary reviews of *Pride and Prejudice,* however, the diction she uses to paraphrase them in her letters often betrays her impulse to question their sincerity. Fanny Knight praises the book directly to the author, but Austen is only satisfied when a third party, Cassandra, confirms this praise: "To *me*, it is of course all praise – but the more exact truth which she sends to *you* is good enough" (205). In further instances, she writes that Miss Benn "really does seem to admire Elizabeth" (201), and that "Lady Robert is delighted with P. & P – and really *was* so as I understand before she knew who wrote it" (218). The use of the word "really" in both of these

comments evidences Austen's need to convince her sister – and, indirectly, herself – of the genuineness of the praise that her acquaintances accord to *Pride and Prejudice*. In their spirit of sisterly openness, Austen's letters to Cassandra show that she is convinced of her own merit, but she needs external corroboration of it; she seeks praise, but she registers it with scepticism. This process is a way for Austen to think about novelistic technique, in *Pride and Prejudice* as in her compilations of opinions.

The informal documentation of opinions of *Pride and Prejudice* in Austen's letters is the precursor of her formal collections, "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*." The very existence of these formal collections is evidence of her continuing battle to reconcile her own opinion of her works with those of her readership, and to reflect on her novelistic practice. Moreover, a letter to John Murray in which Austen laments Sir Walter Scott's neglect of *Mansfield Park* indicates that she had a great deal invested in others' reviews:

> I return you the Quarterly Reveiw with many Thanks. The Authoress of *Emma* has no reason I think to complain of her treatment in it – except in the total omission of Mansfield Park. – I cannot but be sorry that so clever a Man as the Reveiwer of *Emma*, should consider it as unworthy of being noticed. (313)

The circumstances surrounding her compilation of readers' opinions are murky at best. She collected "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" after its publication in early May 1814. Although the period of the project remains ambiguous, Austen tells Cassandra in a letter of November 24 of that year that "M^{rs} Creed's opinion is gone down on my list" (*Letters* 282), Mrs. Creed's being the last opinion to appear in the document (Todd and Bree 696).

She started a new collection after *Emma* was published in December 1815, and probably added to it over a longer period. She makes reference in a letter of February 1817 to having received Mrs. Charles Cage's praise of *Emma* (Todd and Bree 702), which she included as the 35th opinion on her list of 41. The form in which readers communicated these opinions to Austen is unknown: some of them are recorded verbatim, suggesting that she had written transcriptions of them; others are paraphrased, so it is impossible to discern whether she drew them from a written source or from her own memory of a conversation with the person in question. Hearsay is another possible source of opinions, as Austen wrote letters to Cassandra and Fanny Knight thanking them for reporting the responses of mutual friends.

The lack of information about the process of assembling these opinions makes analysis of them problematic. Grounded in the views of other people, they cannot be categorized with Austen's fictional works, nor can they be analysed as such. In many ways, however, they are also a product of her own mind: she decides which opinions to include or omit, which ones to quote verbatim or paraphrase, and how to order them in relation to each other. The hybrid status of the "Opinions" – part fact and part fiction – has been largely overlooked by Austen critics, who have invoked them almost exclusively to paint a picture of the popular reception of these novels following their publications. These opinions, however, have the potential to illuminate Austen's oeuvre and her authorial experience in a new way. To this end, they should be analysed in the context of the editorial choices that she made in shaping how they would be read and received, if only by herself and select friends and family. These editorial choices implicitly record her own point of view, as it alternately contends or dovetails with those

of her readers. Reading the opinions through this editorial lens, one is able to make inferences about the ways in which Austen's perception of readers' criticism influenced her literary practice.

Particularly revelatory is Austen's choice of which opinions merit direct quotation rather than paraphrase. In the list of 38 "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*," seven are transcribed word for word, and three are a combination of transcription and paraphrase. Unlike the paraphrased opinions, which record the strengths and weaknesses of the novel, the verbatim opinions are overwhelmingly favourable in nature.[7] Moreover, they generally praise the same feature of the novel: Austen's naturally depicted characters. Frank Austen says that "The Characters are natural & well supported" (*Later Manuscripts* 230). Mary, Lady Kerr praises "The excellent delineation of Character" (232), while Anne Sharpe writes, "Your Characters are drawn to the Life, so *very*, *very* natural & just" (233). In a similar view, John Plumptre observes that "the characters are all so remarkably well kept up & so well drawn" (233), and Lady Gordon remarks that

> In most novels you are amused for the time with a set of Ideal People whom you never think of afterwards or whom you the least expect to meet in common life, whereas in Miss A-s works, & especially in MP. you actually *live* with them, you fancy yourself one of the family. (234)

Another shared point of merit, according to Harriet, Lady Gordon and the others whom Austen quotes directly, is the credibility of the novel's setting and events. She says that "the scenes are so exactly descriptive, so perfectly natural, that there is scarcely

[7] The only possible exceptions to this rule come from Frank Austen, Miss Anne Sharpe, and Alethea Bigg, who state overall preferences for *Pride and Prejudice*. Their statements of preference, however, are couched within praise of *Mansfield Park*, and thus even these verbatim opinions cannot truly be categorized as negative.

an Incident a conversation, or a person that you are not inclined to imagine you have at one time or other in your Life been a witness to, born a part in, & been acquainted with" (234). In a similar view, Mrs. Pole states that she takes particular satisfaction in reading Austen, as "Everything is natural, & the situation & incidents are told in a manner which clearly evinces the Writer to *belong* to the Society whose Manners she so ably delineates" (234).

Austen considered the naturalness of characters and the credibility of events to be essential in a worthy piece of fiction, as shown in the five letters on fiction that she wrote to Anna in 1814. Interestingly, these letters show Austen performing the same critical task for Anna's book that she solicited her own acquaintances to perform for *Mansfield Park*. She urges her niece to draw characters that behave consistently, and that do not display extreme traits. She objects to characters that are "too solemn & good" (221), "*too* foolish" (222), or "too formal and solemn" (222), preferring mixed characters instead. In the interest of maintaining realism in the novel's setting and events, Austen cautions Anna, "Let the Portmans go to Ireland, but as you know nothing of the manners there, you had better not go with them. You will be in danger of giving false representations. Stick to Bath & the Foresters. There you will be quite at home" (218). Making editorial interventions into Anna's fiction sharpens Austen's own taste in character and plot, and the manner in which they are represented. Not coincidentally, the novelistic features that Austen encourages Anna to perfect are entirely congruent with those praised in the verbatim quotations in the opinions of *Mansfield Park*. As editor of this collection, Austen chooses to quote at length any opinion that reflects literary standards in line with her own.

In the paraphrased opinions, Austen's editorial style aims for brevity and directness. These opinions address a narrow range of the novel's features. Some of them simply rank *Mansfield Park* – usually unfavourably – in relation to *Pride and Prejudice*, and, less frequently, to *Sense and Sensibility*. Others note a scene or an aspect of the plot that was particularly admired or disliked. Most of them pertain to the novel's characters, and Austen draws on a very limited lexicon of verbs to sum them up. She notes the characters that readers "liked," "admired," or "enjoyed," and those with which readers were "delighted" or "pleased," or of which readers were "fond." Similarly, she records the characters that readers "disliked," "couldn't bear," or "hated," and those to whom readers "objected." Using this limited roster of modifiers, Austen produces in the paraphrased opinions a tone of homogeneity and vagueness. Moreover, paraphrases are abridged by definition, and they are thus far less specific than the verbatim opinions. Austen records them in terse, straightforward terms, often omitting the rationale behind them. Many of the paraphrased opinions contradict one another, and, as John Wiltshire notes, "Austen puts them down so that their contradictoriness is amusingly exposed" (*Mansfield Park* lix). Her juxtaposition of contradicting opinions paraphrased in generic terms, compounded by her omission of the reasoning behind them, effectively implies their arbitrariness, and perhaps even their insignificance.

This arbitrariness and insignificance does not apply universally to the paraphrased opinions; in fact, there are a select few that Austen was inclined to rephrase in detail, making them stand out against the others. Just as all of the verbatim opinions are overwhelmingly positive, all of the opinions that she rephrases at length are negative. The verbatim opinions generally praise the same features of *Mansfield Park*, the natural

depiction of characters and the verisimilitude of events, while the longer paraphrases object to the same aspect of the novel, the human frailty of characters. For her nephews Edward and George, Austen writes that "Henry C.'s going off with M^{rs}. R – at such a time, when so much in love with Fanny, [was] thought unnatural by Edward" (230). Fanny Knight's opinion also merits longer paraphrasing, as she "could not think it natural that Edm^{d}. sh^{d}. be so much attached to a woman without Principle like Mary C. – or promote Fanny's marrying Henry" (230). Mary Cooke "Admired Fanny in general; but thought she ought to have been more determined on overcoming her own feelings, when she saw Edmund's attachment to Miss Crawford" (232). These opinions specifically object to one of Austen's boldest literary innovations: the replacement of two-dimensional characters with ones that exemplify the complex and often variable nature of the human mind.

As she reveals in her letters to Anna, Austen was opposed to characters that displayed virtue or vice in their absolute forms, preferring a more realistic depiction of human fallibility in her own novels. As a result, she achieved what Mary Waldron has described as a "blurring of the moral focus" that leaves the reader unsure whether to approve or disapprove of characters (35). The objections in the longer paraphrased opinions come from people who approached *Mansfield Park* armed with the expectations of the typical eighteenth-century reader. When faced with characters' weaknesses, they often saw them as flaws in Austen's execution. These readers belong to the group, identified by Waldron, whose "adverse criticism often centred on the shortcomings of a character the commentator clearly thought intended to be virtuous by the author" (112). By affording these objections prominence in relation to the other tersely paraphrased

opinions, Austen acknowledges them; by framing them in her own language, however, she renders this a grudging acknowledgement. She consistently asserts her own editorial – and thus authorial – control.

Austen's apparent need to reassure herself of her authorial control may or may not have shaped her next literary endeavour, *Emma*. As noted, the most common criticism of *Mansfield Park* refers to Austen's penchant for drawing characters that are guilty of occasional moral missteps. According to John Wiltshire, people have often read Fanny Price as a model for a conduct book, a reading that he condemns as an oversimplification ("*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion*" 60-61). Since morality is undeniably paramount in Fanny's life, however, it is understandable that some readers may think that she was intended to be a "picture[…] of perfection" (Austen, *Letters* 335), and thus object when she errs. Austen's next heroine, Emma, is all the more endearing to her lover Knightley *because of* her flaws, and as Waldron points out, "nobody could mistake [her] for an attempt at a conduct-book model" (112). In the same spirit of authorial control that governs her editorial choices in the opinions, Austen took the imperfect morality to which readers objected in *Mansfield Park* and amplified it in Emma. Insecurity about popular opinions did not, apparently, affect her faith in her own literary innovations, nor did it change her novelistic practice.

Although *Emma* was "widely regarded as the greatest of her novels" by the end of the nineteenth century (Cronin and McMillan xxix), it was not the case at the time of its publication, and Austen's acute awareness of this fact inflects her editorial choices in compiling "Opinions of *Emma*." Totalling 41, there are three more opinions in this second collection than in the first, which contains 38. Paradoxically, there are only three

fully or partially verbatim quotations in "Opinions of *Emma*," striking a sharp contrast to the ten in "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*." The three verbatim opinions in the *Emma* collection corroborate that Austen reserved direct quotation for positive opinions. Penelope Lutley-Sclater wrote that Austen had "brought it all about very cleverly in the last volume" (238), while Austen's brother Charles wrote, "I am delighted with [Emma], more so I think than even with my favourite Pride & Prejudice, & have read it three times in the Passage" (239). While complimentary, these quoted opinions are fairly general. The third verbatim opinion expresses specific approval of Austen's innovative method. Like the admirers of *Mansfield Park* whom Austen quoted directly, Mrs. Cage is all praise for the verisimilitude with which she draws her characters. She writes, "Every character is thoroughly kept up…I am at Highbury all day, & I ca'nt help feeling I have just got into a new set of acquaintance" (238). Austen's editorial choice to highlight favourable opinions in line with her own through verbatim quotation is the same in both collections; there are simply far fewer such opinions for *Emma* than for *Mansfield Park*.

This comparative increase of negative feedback for *Emma* is also apparent in the opinions that Austen paraphrases, the impact of which she editorially tempers through her diction and syntax. Of the 38 paraphrased opinions in this collection, seven are purely positive, outnumbered by the twelve that are purely negative. All of these unequivocal opinions, positive and negative alike, are recorded in terse and generic terms. In the 19 paraphrased opinions that express favourable and unfavourable comments simultaneously, Austen's editorial technique is more complex. She often uses mildly hyperbolic language to highlight the positive aspect of the opinion, and then reframes the negative part syntactically to minimize its impact. Of her brother Frank's wife Mary,

Austen writes that she "liked & admired [*Emma*] very much indeed, but must still prefer P. & P." (235). Similarly, of her maternal uncle James Leigh Perrot and his wife Jane, she writes that they "saw many beauties in it, but cd not think it equal to P.&P." (236). In the first opinion, she employs near redundancies for the sake of emphasis, using two verbs, "liked" and "admired," and two qualifiers, "very much" and "indeed." She uses the verb forms "must" and "could" in the respective opinions instead of the more straightforward verb form "did," implying a lack of agency on the parts of the opinion holders. These verbs suggest that Mary Austen and the Perrots hold these opinions almost against their will, or perhaps against their better judgement. Indirectly, these adjusted opinions hint at the merit of *Emma*.

With her talent for turning criticism to virtue, Austen writes that Ben Lefroy, her niece Anna's husband, "thought that if there had been more Incident, it would be equal to any of the others" (237). Framing a negative criticism in the affirmative, she employs the conditional tense to create a hypothetical situation in which *Emma* is on par with her other works. She equates *Emma* with her other novels syntactically, even though Lefroy's real message is in fact that *Emma* is not equal to them. Austen's frustration with her readership's apathetic reception of *Emma*, by contrast to *Mansfield Park*, emerges in her decreased use of verbatim quotation and her increased tendency to paraphrase and temper negative criticisms. Her efforts to assert editorial control over her readers' unfavourable opinions – motivated by her own convictions about the worth of her work, and by her impulse to maintain authorial control – are even more apparent in this second collection of opinions than in the first.

The link between Austen's editorial control in her collections of opinions and her authorial control in her novels becomes clearer in the context of her development and use of free indirect discourse. Dubbed "Austen's greatest formal innovation" by Cronin and McMillan (lx), free indirect discourse is a narrative technique that has manifold complex effects. As a result, there is a long history of critical debate about its definition. M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham explain that the term free indirect discourse

> refers to the way, in many narratives, that the reports of what a character says and thinks shift in pronouns, adverbs, tense, and grammatical mode, as we move – or sometimes hover – between the direct narrated representation of these events as they occur to the character and the indirect representation of such events by the narrator of the story. (208)

Abrams's and Harpham's definition is sound, with one exception. They position the collective reader as the agent of free indirect discourse, "as we move" between direct and indirect representations of characters' spoken words and inner thoughts. In doing so, they obscure two important features of this narrative mode: the narrator's active role as the mediating voice that represents what characters say and think, and thus, more broadly, the narrator's status as an instrument of control for the author. There is an undeniable similarity between the manner in which Austen's narrators modulate characters' voices in passages of free indirect discourse, and the manner in which Austen herself re-inflects her readers' opinions when she paraphrases them. Just as the technique of free indirect discourse affords a considerable degree of control to Austen as an author, so does the parallel technique of ventriloquizing opinions afford the same degree of control to Austen as the editor of the "Opinions."

Understanding the similarity between free indirect discourse and ventriloquism as mechanisms of control in her novels and in her "Opinions," respectively, requires a retroactive look at Austen's abandonment of the epistolary method in favour of objective narration. The epistolary method is a typical eighteenth-century novelistic paradigm that comprises almost exclusively direct speech and thought recorded in letters, written mainly by the protagonist. Objective narration – which eventually superseded the epistolary method – is a form of the novel in which an omniscient and often unidentified third-person narrator relates events through a combination of direct quotation and narrative summary. Among other works, Austen uses epistolary narration in an early novella, *Lady Susan*. As Waldron notes, "When Lady Susan presents her motives differently to different correspondents, the deception is clear, but unsubtle" (25). The critic adds that in subsequently framing *Catharine, or the Bower* in third-person narration, Austen discovered the more complex technique of free indirect style, which "allowed the character to speculate about her own motives, to deceive herself and enlighten the reader through irony" (25). Waldron concludes that "It must have struck Austen that the possibilities in her kind of straight narrative for the manipulation of the reader's attention and allegiance are infinitely greater and require much less space than the exchange of letters" (25).

An epistolary text, produced through and contained within one character's consciousness, is analogous to an opinion recorded verbatim; both are inevitably subjective, and limited by the direct representation that constitutes them. Similarly, a third-person narrative is analogous to a paraphrased opinion; both allow for a mediating agent – narrator and editor, respectively – to represent the perspectives of various

subjects, slightly modifying and inflecting them as desired. In compiling her collections of opinions, Austen may have had a realization akin to the one, identified by Waldron, which prompted her strategic decision to abandon the epistolary method; indeed, she must have recognized the increased possibilities that indirect representation through ventriloquism affords for subtly manipulating others' opinions of her work.

As Austen's techniques of free indirect discourse in her novels and ventriloquism in her "Opinions" are so similar, much of the theory written about the former can also be applied to the latter to illuminate its diverse functions. Free indirect discourse in Austen's fiction is a sophisticated mechanism of control that operates in two distinct ways, best articulated by David Lodge: on one hand, it allows her "to give the reader intimate access to a character's thoughts without totally surrendering control of the discourse to that character;" and on the other hand, it allows her simultaneously to "control and direct the reader's affective and interpretive responses to the unfolding story" (175, 176). Free indirect discourse makes it possible for Austen not only to act as puppeteer to the characters, but also to dictate the reader's reactions to them. This capacity for exercising control on multiple planes is also inherent in Austen's ventriloquism, as she manages to maintain a degree of control over the people who have contributed opinions, as well as over the manner in which the opinions would be interpreted by whoever had access to them. By framing readers' opinions in the past tense and using third-person pronouns, for instance, Austen denies them the immediacy that the present tense and the first-person afford. Grammatically keeping her novel's detractors at a distance, she maintains the focus on the novel itself. Moreover, she rephrases negative opinions according to her own agenda, thereby rendering her

acknowledgement of them a partial one, and never surrendering control to the critic in question. Paraphrasing many of the opinions in her own diction, Austen sets them up to be interpreted in a particular way, whether by a family member, a friend, or herself.

Critics have observed that in *Emma*, free indirect discourse is a tool for the narrative voice to educate readers, "encourage[ing] readers to sympathise, identify and agree with the heroine" as Gary Kelly notes (260), and "standing in for the implied author and embodying her designs," as Daniel Gunn suggests (41). Similarly, Austen controls readers' responses to ambivalent opinions by using diction to temper the impact of the negative and to highlight the positive. She re-inflects her readers' criticisms as she sees fit, so that they acquire new shades of meaning, subtly commenting on the opinions that she seemingly is reporting objectively. Daniel Gunn comments on the impressive range of effects that Austen achieves through her narrator's free indirect representation of characters' speech and thoughts, aptly dubbing her "the orchestrating voice behind it all" (48). Similarly, as editor of her collections of opinions, Austen positions herself at the centre, exercising control in every direction, from the representation of opinions to their reception.

In the years after her novels were first published, Austen was torn between her own conviction of the need for specific novelistic innovations, and her desire for her readership to understand and appreciate such innovations. As demonstrated in her 1813 letters to Cassandra about *Pride and Prejudice*, she had faith in her own literary worth, yet at the same time she had an undeniable impulse to have others corroborate it. In her editorial act of compiling the "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*," this impulse persists, as Austen highlights opinions that praise her literary innovations, and reframes in her own

diction those that do not. Faced with a comparative onslaught of negative feedback while collecting "Opinions of *Emma*," Austen's editorial presence is even more evident. In light of the scholarship on Austen's pioneering of free indirect discourse as an instrument of control, it becomes all the more clear that her technique of ventriloquism is an extension of her effort to maintain authorial control. Empowering herself and her literary vision by editorially manipulating readers' criticisms, Austen likewise armed herself with the courage to draw her imperfect heroine Emma, in spite of readerly objections to the human fallibility exemplified in Edmund and Fanny of *Mansfield Park*. Largely overlooked in the critical literature, these ventriloquized opinions are gems in Austen's oeuvre. They begin to paint a clearer picture – one that will sharpen with the next chapter's discussion of "Plan of a Novel" and *Persuasion* – of how Austen reconciled public opinion with her aim to forge the generic innovations, in both the representation of character and events, of novelistic realism.

Chapter 3

"Plan of a Novel" and *Persuasion*: from reviews to realism

As a published author, Austen reflected considerably on the various elements that constitute a novel worthy of the name. Her reflections show up in various forms in various places, from her novels themselves to her playful parodies, such as "Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters."[8] The "Plan" is a short burlesque that Austen drafted in late 1815 or early 1816, while she was in the process of writing *Persuasion*. It outlines, ironically, how *not* to write a novel; the sketch that Austen proposes therein is the antithesis of what she wants to do herself. Critics such as Mary Waldron, however, have observed that there are elements in *Persuasion* that ironically parallel the "Plan" (150). The sensational eighteenth-century plot conventions that Austen includes in the "Plan" do not, of course, make up any part of *Persuasion*. What do appear in the novel, in one form or another, are a handful of the hints from her friends and acquaintances that pertain more generally to characterization. My purpose is to examine the differences between various novelistic features as they appear in the parodic "Plan" and in *Persuasion*, aiming to show that Austen subtly modulates them in the latter to meet her chief standard of realism in fiction. I will consider what Austen's having taken these hints says about her relationship to reviews, and how this relationship shapes her writing practice.

The origins of Austen's "Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters" are multiple. As its title indicates, the "Plan" unites suggestions that Austen received from family, friends and acquaintances about what features would be pleasing in

[8] See also: "To Mrs. Hunter Norwich" in *Later Manuscripts*, eds. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 213.

a novel. One of these acquaintances was James Stanier Clarke, who, in his capacity as the Prince Regent's Domestic Chaplain and Librarian at Carlton House (Todd and Bree ciii), had contacted Austen to inform her subtly that she was "at liberty to dedicate any future Work to HRH the P.R. without the necessity of any Solicitation" (*Letters* 296). On a number of occasions during their ensuing correspondence, Clarke offered Austen unsolicited – not to mention inept – suggestions about what to write about in her next novel, all of them motivated by a self-important desire to see his own experiences in print. He first asks Austen to "delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman…Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature – no man's Enemy but his own" (296-97). About a month thereafter, he renews his plea for an English Clergyman, instructing Austen to

> shew dear Madam what good would be done if Tythes were taken away entirely, and describe him burying his own mother – as I did – because the High Priest of the Parish in which she died – did not pay her remains the respect he ought to do…Carry your Clergyman out to Sea as the Friend of some distinguished Naval Character about a Court – you can then bring foreward like Le Sage many interesting Scenes of Character & Interest. (307)

Clarke's final suggestion, although not as strictly autobiographical in nature as his first two, is nevertheless closely related to his own pursuits. Having recently been appointed Chaplain and Private English Secretary to the Prince of Cobourg, Clarke hinted that "any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg, would just now be very interesting" (311).

Austen was sensible of the ridiculousness of Clarke's propositions; indeed, Todd and Bree note "The irony inherent in [her] mock-demure replies" in their introduction to *Later Manuscripts* (civ). It may have struck Austen as particularly comical, then, when Clarke earnestly directed her to "continue to write, & make all your friends send Sketches to help you" (*Letters* 307), such as those that he had sent. Having always maintained strong convictions about what constitutes a good novel, Austen must have been amused by Clarke's proposed task: to write a novel based on the preferences of other people – such as himself – who think that they know better. She undoubtedly saw that were she to undertake such a task, the result could take no other form than a biting burlesque. Clarke thus unknowingly provided both the patchwork and the parodic premises for "Plan of a Novel," a text that is as remarkable for its flagrant irony as Clarke's own suggestions are for their perfect sincerity.

There are eight contributors to the "Plan," who each offer anywhere from one to four hints about the features that they would like to see in a novel, for a total of fifteen suggestions. The notation system that Austen uses to credit the hints is somewhat vague: she inserts a number beside one word in the body of the text that corresponds to the same number written in the margin beside the contributor's name. As a result, demarcating where each hint begins and ends, judging where Austen herself amplified hints with hyperbolic language, and seeing where she supplemented the "Plan" with her own absurd ideas, requires a small margin of speculation. Clarke's hints, however, offer some insight into this issue. They are unique in the "Plan" as they correspond, and can thus be compared, to an existing written source: his letters to Austen. This comparison shows Austen to be quite faithful in recording his hints, as she adds no extra details and makes

only slight changes to his diction. Notwithstanding, it is certainly important to acknowledge that Austen exercised editorial and authorial license in assembling these hints into her amusing spoof.

The hints from various quarters account for a considerable portion of the content of the "Plan," and generally focus more on characterization than on plot. Naturally, nearly all of the hints from Clarke's letters make it in; Austen disregards his suggested premise of a historical romance about the august house of Cobourg, but honours his Clergyman particularly by making him the father of the heroine. According to the "Plan," part of the novel will depict him recounting the tale of

> his going to sea as Chaplain to a distinguished Naval Character about the Court, his going afterwards to Court himself, which introduced him to a great variety of Characters & involved him in many interesting situations, concluding with his opinion of the Benefits to result from Tythes being done away, & his having buried his own Mother (Heroine's lamented Grandmother) in consequence of the High Priest of the Parish in which she died, refusing to pay her Remains the respect due to them. The Father to be of a very literary turn, an Enthusiast in Literature, nobody's Enemy but his own – (227)

Like Clarke, William Gifford, an associate of Austen's publisher John Murray, requests "a Clergyman, one who after having lived much in the World had retired from it, & settled on a Curacy, with a very small fortune of his own" (226). Similarly, Reverend Joseph Sherer, in whose parish the Knight family lived, asks that the Father be "the

model of an exemplary Parish Priest" (227). Taken together, the input of these three male critics furnishes the nature and pursuits of the heroine's Clergyman father.

In contrast, three of the female critics focus their hints on the heroine's characterization. Austen's niece Fanny Knight suggests that she be "a faultless Character herself, – perfectly good, with much tenderness & sentiment," "very highly accomplished" (226) and occupying "the most elegant Society & living in high style" (229). Knight issues a parallel request for the hero to be "all perfection of course" (228). Austen's second cousin Mary Cooke, another frequent contributor, adds that the heroine should have "not the least Wit" and be "quite beautiful – dark eyes & plump cheeks" (226). She declares that "all the Good will be unexceptionable in every respect – and there will be no foibles or weaknesses but with the Wicked, who will be completely depraved & infamous, hardly a resemblance of Humanity left in them" (228). Finally, Cooke suggests that "the heroine's friendship […] be sought after by a young Woman in the same Neighbourhood, of Talents & Shrewdness, with light eyes & a fair skin, but having a considerable degree of Wit, Heroine shall shrink from the acquaintance" (227). According to Mrs. Anne Pearse's hint, the heroine "receives repeated offers of Marriage – which she always refers wholly to her Father, exceedingly angry that *he* sh^{d}. not be first applied to" (228).

The final two hints pertain more generally to the novel's title: Mrs. Catherine Craven wants "The name of the work *not* to be *Emma*" (229), while Mr. Henry Sanford, a friend and business associate of Henry Austen's, wants the title to be "of the same sort as S & S. and P & P." (229). Austen also collectively credits "Many Critics" for having suggested that the "Heroine & her Father [are] never above a fortnight together in one

place" because of the vile advances of the novel's "totally unprincipled & heart-less" anti-hero (227).

The remaining features outlined in the "Plan" are Austen's own inclusions; they do not, however, originate with her, but rather in the eighteenth-century tradition of novel writing. Austen recognizes that the unfailingly perfect hero and heroine requested by the "Plan's" contributors firmly belong to this literary tradition. In the spirit of parody, she includes more of such amusingly silly conventions as abound in eighteenth-century fiction. Todd and Bree identify Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* as one of the main targets of the "Plan's" irony. Austen condemns it as a novel "without anything of Nature or Probability in it" (*Letters* 234), and so it follows that "Some of its many adventures bear a striking resemblance to those plotted for the proposed heroine of 'Plan of a Novel'" (Todd and Bree cii). Indeed, the novel's predatory anti-hero, Hargrave, from whom the heroine, Laura Montreville, constantly struggles to escape, parallels the "Plan's" own anti-hero, a "totally unprincipled & heart-less young Man, desperately in love with the Heroine, & pursueing her with unrelenting passion" (227). In *Self-Control*, Laura's father dies bankrupt. Unprotected and economically vulnerable, she very nearly falls prey to Hargrave's scheming advances, but she evades danger at the last moment, only to be surprised by the sudden appearance of the novel's hero, de Courcy, whom she marries. Similarly, in the "Plan," the heroine's father dies, leaving her "inconsolable for some time – but afterwards crawls back towards her former Country – having at least 20 narrow escapes of falling into the hands of Anti-hero – & at last in the very nick of time, turning a corner to avoid him, runs into the arms of the Hero himself," after which "The Tenderest & completest Eclaircissement takes place" (229). The structural elements of

Brunton's plot form the foundation of "Plan of a Novel"; the difference is that Austen depicts these elements in mildly hyberbolic terms, effectively highlighting their incredibility.

The other primary literary target of the "Plan," identified by Janet Todd and Antje Blank in their introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Persuasion*, is Fanny Burney's *The Wanderer*. Todd and Blank conjecture that on first reading *The Wanderer*, "Jane Austen probably joined other readers in observing that Burney had not moved with the literary times and was still writing largely in the mode of the late eighteenth century, with hyperbolic sentimental style and tropes" (li). Indeed, if Austen did make such an assessment, it may be the root for the "Plan's" father and daughter, "who are to converse in long speeches, elegant Language – & a tone of high, serious sentiment" (226). As Todd and Blank effectively summarize, "['Plan of a novel'] poked fun at *The Wanderer*'s sentimental account of the seemingly interminable misfortunes thwarting Juliet's efforts to gain financial independence" (li). *Self-Control*'s Laura Montreville, too, is forced to sell her paintings on the street to sustain herself and her ailing father. The "Plan's" nameless heroine, who is "often reduced to support herself & her Father by her Talents, & work for her Bread; – continually cheated & defrauded of her hire, worn down to a skeleton, & now & then starved to death" (228), surely finds her disenfranchised precedents in Brunton's Laura and Burney's Juliet.

In "Plan of a Novel," Austen renders all of these novelistic conventions in a manner that lays bare their sensationalism and their implausibility, mocking them with the spirit that animates her juvenilia, a direct antecedent of the "Plan." Todd and Bree note two other generic antecedents for the "Plan" that come from without Austen's

oeuvre: *The Heroine, or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* by Eaton Stannard Barrett, and *The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox, a particular favourite of Austen's. These two novels mock the conventions of British sentimental fiction and seventeenth-century French romance, respectively. In the "Plan," Austen has a parallel aim of ridiculing recycled features of a particular genre, but her resulting burlesque is unique, in that its humour is amplified by its hybrid nature. As a text that comprises hints from contributors as well as novelistic features that Austen selects herself, "Plan of a Novel" has a jumbled quality that is particularly conducive to generating the sense of absurdity for which she is aiming. Take, for instance, the scene in the "Plan" in which the heroine's father dies:

> they are compelled to retreat into Kamschatka where the poor Father, quite worn down, finding his end approaching, throws himself on the Ground, & after 4 or 5 hours of tender advice & parental Admonition to his miserable Child, expires in a fine burst of Literary Enthusiasm, intermingled with Invectives against Holders of Tythes. (228-29)

Austen is evoking the classic novelistic image of a heroine losing her beloved father, at the same time as she is recalling James Stanier Clarke's idiosyncratic hints for the Clergyman's character: a man as ardently enthusiastic about literature as he is adamantly opposed to tythes. The result is a composite image, a tired novelistic cliché injected with a dose of Clarke's own peculiar egoism, rendering the episode all the more absurd. In effect, the miscellaneousness of "Plan of a Novel" facilitates Austen's aim of parodying the conventions included therein.

Given that Austen effectively ridicules the clichés that she includes in "Plan of a Novel," it may seem surprising that critics have noted affinities between this short sketch and *Persuasion*, the novel that she was working on contemporaneously. Mary Waldron argues that "In the *Plan of a Novel* of (circa) 1816, Austen postulates a heroine very like Anne" (137). With a few minor alterations in the areas of wit and musical talent, this character sketch represents "both Austen's rather contemptuous concept of the conventional heroine *and* Anne Elliot to the life" (137). Indeed, Anne does not seem to have faults, nor to err. Austen characterizes her as a woman of understanding, who is consistently conscious of social propriety. She is clearly the pillar of the Elliot and Musgrove families, looked to for guidance in every matter from child-rearing to regulating family squabbles, the burden of which she bears patiently, and with a strong sense of duty. But this description is a superficial assessment of Anne, for Austen also depicts, subtly yet deliberately, a fallible side of her character. Too profound to be drawn out through dramatic dialogue, this side of Anne is glimpsed only through the narrative voice as it reports her private introspections. On their return from Lyme after the accident, Captain Wentworth laments the fateful combination of his own indulgence and Louisa's eager and resolute character. Anne remains silent, but privately wonders

> whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character; and whether it might not strike him, that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits. She thought it could scarcely escape him to feel, that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character. (126)

Here emerge the first hints of resentment that one might naturally expect a woman to feel towards the new object of her first love's affection. Thus far, Anne has witnessed Wentworth's and Louisa's flirtation, and has forborne reacting with an almost preternatural grace. She has indeed felt pain, but never the baser human emotions that finally become quietly apparent in this passage.

Anne's failings manifest themselves even more clearly in a faulty criterion that she invokes in her assessment of Mr. Elliot's character. He implies that Sir Walter's connection with Lady Dalrymple is advantageous as it will "divert[…] his thoughts from those who are beneath him" (164), after which he looks meaningfully at Mrs. Clay's empty seat; and

> though Anne could not believe in their having the same sort of pride, she was pleased with him for not liking Mrs. Clay; and her conscience admitted that his wishing to promote her father's getting great acquaintance, was more than excusable in the view of defeating her. (164)

Bordering on spiteful, these sentiments are jarring coming from Anne Elliot, from whom the reader has grown accustomed to expect the utmost generosity of spirit. The narrator's diction explicitly acknowledges the baseness of Anne's feelings, as her "conscience" had to "admit" them. Anne partly bases her approval of Mr. Elliot on his dislike of Mrs. Clay, a most unsound foundation. Ultimately, Anne is made to feel the negative repercussions of her petty logic.

Notwithstanding these instances in which the narrator hints at Anne's fallibility, she is, in fact, overwhelmingly good. Austen was certainly aware of Anne's walking a

dangerously fine line between being a plausible character and a "picture[…] of perfection" (*Letters* 335), as shown in a letter she writes to Fanny Knight:

> Do not be surprised at finding Uncle Henry acquainted with my having another ready for publication. I could not say No when he asked me, but he knows nothing more of it. – You will not like it, so you need not be impatient. You may *perhaps* like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me. (*Letters* 335)

The language in which Austen frames this statement is indicative of the conscious manner in which she has drawn *Persuasion*'s heroine. Significantly, she writes that Anne Elliot is "almost too good for me," the operative word being "almost." For all of Anne's outward propriety and semblance of perfection, there are introspective instances in which she clearly exposes herself as human. Austen recognizes that she has achieved a delicate equilibrium in Anne's character, coming as close as she can to creating a perfect heroine without violating her own law – stated clearly in her letters on fiction to Anna Lefroy – of preserving nature in novel writing.

According to the marginalia of "Plan of a novel," it was Fanny Knight who suggested that Austen draw a heroine who is "a faultless character" (226). Austen seems to have done so, but on her own terms. In fact, a number of Fanny Knight's and Mary Cooke's hints appear in *Persuasion*, similarly tempered to meet Austen's standard of credibility in fiction. Knight requests that the heroine be "very highly accomplished" and "particularly excelling in Music – her favourite pursuit – & playing equally well on the Piano Forte & Harp – & singing in the first stile" (226). In *Persuasion*, Austen complies with this request as far as realism will permit. Anne's playing country dances on the

piano "drew this compliment; – 'Well done, Miss Anne! very well done indeed! Lord bless me! how those little fingers of yours fly about!'" (51). Indeed, as the narrator relates, Anne

> played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves; but having no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little thought of… she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste. (50)

In direct contrast to the heroine of the "Plan," Anne lacks ability in playing the harp and in singing. But the narrator promptly offers a poignant justification for Anne's deficiencies: the death of her mother, who was the only person who encouraged her musical pursuits. Austen effectively conveys the impression that her heroine has great natural talent, while tempering it slightly with the sad reality that she was never able to realise her full potential because of her mother's death.

Mary Cooke's request for a beautiful heroine with "dark eyes and plump cheeks" (226) is fulfilled in *Persuasion*, but it too is slightly modified. The narrator introduces Anne's physical description in negative terms, with the statement that "her father had found little to admire in her, (so totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own)" (6). Austen gives her heroine the coveted feature – dark eyes – but strips it of its value by framing it in terms of her father's disapproval. The narrator also explains that "A few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early" (6). Only later in the novel, after Anne's amorous feelings for

Wentworth have been reawakened, does Sir Walter begin "to compliment her on her improved looks; he thought her 'less thin in her person, in her cheeks; her skin, her complexion, greatly improved – clearer, fresher'" (157-58). The reader does not meet with a beautiful heroine at the outset of *Persuasion*; rather, Anne evolves into one over the course of the novel, an evolution that culminates in the narrator's final description of her as "Glowing and lovely in sensibility and happiness, and more generally admired than she thought about or cared for" (267). As soon as Anne's bloom and beauty returns, it simultaneously becomes irrelevant, as it is completely secondary to the happiness that precipitated its return in the first place. By the novel's end, she is indeed the dark eyed, plump cheeked heroine requested by Cooke; but she has a more realistic – and thus more appealing – relationship to her own physical appearance.

Another one of Fanny Knight's hints in "Plan of a Novel" is that the heroine "be in the most elegant Society & living in high style" (229). Fittingly, *Persuasion* begins with Sir Walter's perusal of the Baronetage, in which he proudly records the details of the Elliot family's genealogy. Anne is certainly immersed in an environment in which one's rank, one's connections, and one's style of living are of the utmost importance. But as the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that this particular kind of social consciousness is a liability, not an asset. Sir Walter's and Elizabeth's obsession with rank renders them one-note characters, incapable of transcending their petty selfish concerns, and Lady Russell turns out to have been gravely mistaken in persuading Anne against Wentworth on the grounds of his being a sea captain with no fortune. Austen represents Anne's social class in the same way that she represents her beauty: she places Anne within circumstances

that are generally perceived to be desirable, and promptly suggests that perhaps they are not necessary after all.

Knight also asks that the heroine in the "Plan" meet with a hero who is "all perfection of course – & only prevented from paying his addresses to her, by some excess of refinement" (228). Considering this hint in the context of *Persuasion,* Captain Wentworth is indeed represented in a very favourable light throughout the greater part of the novel. On seeing Wentworth again for the first time in years, Anne must acknowledge to herself that "the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages" (65). Aside from his person, his character is greatly admired as well; all of the Musgroves – not only Louisa and Henrietta, but also Mary and Charles – covet his company and attention. But as is always the case in Austen, it is not that simple. She cleverly reformulates the latter part of Knight's hint to allow Wentworth's perfection to exist within the realistic framework of *Persuasion*. Wentworth is not prevented from paying his addresses to Anne by "some excess of refinement," but rather by his anger towards Anne for giving him up, his jealousy of Mr. Elliot, and his pride. These qualities certainly do not bespeak a perfect character. During the tender éclaircissement that takes place between Wentworth and Anne at the novel's end, however, he humbly acknowledges these flaws and the grave mistake that they led him to make. Demonstrating an uncommon degree of self-knowledge, he asks Anne rhetorically, "whether there may not have been one person more my enemy even than [Lady Russell]? My own self" (268). He is not perfect, as he certainly is guilty of human foibles; but in

being able to admit and be accountable for them, he ironically becomes perfect, in a distinctly human, and thus plausible, way.

As noted in the margin of the "Plan," "Many Critics" suggest that the heroine and her father be "never above a fortnight together in one place," as the former is being pursued by "some totally unprincipled and heart-less young Man" (227). Naturally, the fortnightly flight of the heroine and her father is far too sensational an idea to find its way, in any shape or form, into the plot of an Austen novel. Austen does appear to acknowledge part of this hint, though, reformulating the stock character of the anti-hero to produce Mr. Elliot. Indeed, Mr. Elliot proves to be both unprincipled *and* heartless: first, Mrs. Smith shows Anne a letter that records his flagrant contempt for the name of Elliot, and his scorn for the baronetcy and the estate to which he is heir; second, Mrs. Smith discloses to Anne the infamous manner in which he abandoned her to destitution after the death of her husband, who was his best friend. Of course, in keeping with Austen's realism, Mr. Elliot is not as extreme an embodiment of vice and depravity as is the typical eighteenth-century anti-hero. He certainly has bad intentions, as he comes to Bath to ingratiate himself with Sir Walter, and to monitor Mrs. Clay, lest she obstruct his path to becoming Sir William Elliot. His romantic interest in Anne, however, comes from a genuine place in his heart, as Mrs. Smith assures her that "He had seen you indeed, before he came to Bath and admired you, but without knowing it to be you" (222). Unlike a traditional anti-hero, Mr. Elliot never poses a real threat to the union of Anne and Wentworth, beyond his inciting jealousy in the latter. Moreover, after Anne is made aware of his real character, Elliot quickly becomes a pathetic figure, as he earnestly tries "to animate her curiosity again as to how and where he could have heard her

formerly praised" (232), while Anne, to his great confusion, refuses to engage. He is in fact only human, confirmed by his failure by the end of the novel to gain anything but Anne's contempt and the reader's pity. Collectively, the slight differences between some of the hints from various quarters as they appear in "Plan of a Novel" versus *Persuasion* suggest that Austen translates them into fictional realism in the latter. Her commitment to the principle of nature in novel writing, claimed in theory in her letters on fiction to Anna, is here proven in practice.

The relationship between "Plan of a Novel" and *Persuasion* offers insight into Austen's investment in the wishes of her readership. Austen had a complex relationship to her reviews. She simultaneously harboured a conviction of her merit as a novelist and a need to have others corroborate it; she sought feedback for her collections of opinions, but asserted her authority by reframing it in her own diction. This tension shapes the complex relationship between "Plan of a Novel" and *Persuasion*. If all of the hints from various quarters in "Plan of a Novel" were given in the same spirit as James Stanier Clarke's, they can be thought of as constructive criticism – in short, as reviews. Austen's amplifying and juxtaposing these hints to expose more amusingly their ineptness is her way of creatively and playfully expressing her disdain for them. In essence, the chief sentiment that underlies the "Plan" is: "look what sort of foolishness I would end up with if I were to listen to critics." Moreover, noting stylistic affinities between "Plan of a Novel" and two unsigned reviews of *Pride and Prejudice* from the *British Critic* and *Critical Review*,[9] Deborah Kaplan astutely observes that in the "Plan" "Austen also may have been mocking, if not these reviews of her book, then reviewers' clichéd language in

[9] See *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B.C. Southam (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1968), 41 and 46, respectively.

general" (236). By manipulating her critics' suggestions to highlight their absurdity, and by framing the whole of the "Plan" in the clichéd language of reviews, Austen pokes fun at the practice of reviewing literature, and demonstrates her faith in her own writing method. On the other hand, of the fifteen hints in "Plan of a Novel," Austen seems to have heeded eight of them, demonstrating an investment in readers' opinions that is in tension with her parodic aims in the "Plan." Whatever the degree of her investment in her readership's opinions, the fact remains that she incorporated only the hints that she wanted, and she did so strictly on her own terms. She fitted them seamlessly within *Persuasion*'s realism, a feature of the novel which, as the next chapter shows, she applied her editorial skills to preserve.

Chapter 4

The final chapters of *Persuasion*: Austen's theory in practice

Austen's most concentrated period of literary productivity lasted from 1811 until early 1817. This six-and-a-half year era of success as a published novelist drew to a close with the completion of *Persuasion*, the last novel that she wrote in full before she died. *Persuasion* is particularly important for a study of Austen's novelistic practice, as it is the only one of her published novels for which there is extant manuscript material: the first draft of the book's last two chapters. Within fewer than three weeks of drafting these chapters, Austen partially cancelled and partially revised them to produce the final three chapters of the published version. *Persuasion* is thus singular in her oeuvre as it provides the only opportunity to see precisely how she edited a manuscript draft to produce a publishable piece of fiction. My purpose is to perform a comparative reading of the cancelled and published chapters to observe directly the effects of Austen's literary principles on her novel writing. I aim to show Austen in the act of implementing her critical standards, so often imposed on others, in her own writing and editorial practices.

Austen wrote *Persuasion* over the course of a year, from 8 August 1815 to 6 August 1816. The stages in which she completed her novel can be traced easily from the dates that she inscribed on the manuscript pages of the cancelled chapters. They indicate that she began the first draft of chapter 10 on 8 July, and that she finished chapter 11 – originally the concluding chapter – on 'July 16. 1816,' which she wrote after the final paragraph, along with a definitive 'Finis' (*Persuasion* xl). She appended an additional paragraph to the manuscript two days later, and similarly inscribed it 'Finis. July 18, 1816' (xl). Austen evidently thought, however, that this ending was problematic, as she

cancelled a considerable portion of chapter 10, and carefully revised the remainder of it to reuse in two new chapters: 10 and 11 in the published version. The original chapter 11 retained its position as the novel's conclusion, becoming the 12th and final chapter in the published version.

Although scholars often allude to the feelings of dissatisfaction that prompted Austen to alter drastically the final chapters of *Persuasion*, none has provided a satisfactory justification for her doing so. Her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, made the earliest – and certainly the most speculative – attempt in his memoir of Austen:

> her performance did not satisfy her. She thought it tame and flat, and was desirous of producing something better. This weighed upon her mind, the more so probably on account of the weak state of her health; so that one night she retired to rest in very low spirits. But such depression was little in accordance with her nature, and was soon shaken off. The next morning she awoke to more cheerful views and brighter inspirations; the sense of power revived and imagination resumed its course. (157)

Austen-Leigh's justification of Austen's decision to revise seems highly presumptive, as it bespeaks an implausibly thorough knowledge of her personal experience. In fact, this passage amounts to a rhetorical construction of Austen's authorial identity, not unlike Henry Austen's famous 'Biographical Notice of the Author,' included as a preface to the first edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. In their introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Persuasion*, Todd and Blank point out the unreliability of Austen-Leigh's account, as he misrepresents the nature of Austen's revision process: he "implies a single

original followed by revision, where the manuscript shows that Jane Austen tinkered with her first draft more than once" (lxxviii-lxxix).

Austen-Leigh is doubtless correct in his general statement that Austen was dissatisfied with the original ending of *Persuasion* and wanted to improve it. His ensuing explanation would have been more sound, however, had he omitted his play-by-play account of her night of depression followed by her renewal of spirits the next morning, and replaced it with specific evidence suggesting *why* she did not want to end *Persuasion* in this way. In contrast to Austen-Leigh, Todd and Blank avoid outright assumption in their discussion of the subject. In fact, their hesitancy to make any kind of inference is clear, and thus they do equally little to further our understanding of what motivated Austen to revise. They simply state, somewhat vaguely, that the first ending "failed to provide something she wished her book to deliver and she was pleased with the second version" (lxxviii). Even Jocelyn Harris, who devotes two chapters of her study, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's* Persuasion, to Austen's revision of the cancelled chapters, circumvents the issue by quoting Austen-Leigh's justification for the revisions. I hope to show that Austen's dissatisfaction with the original chapters correlates directly to her novelistic theory, as articulated in her letters on fiction to Anna. Austen cancelled and revised with the clearest of intentions: to produce a novel that better satisfied her own specific critical standards.

Austen's revisions to the draft chapters of *Persuasion* – and the ways in which they reflect her novelistic standards – can be observed on both micro- and macro-levels. In her study of *Persuasion*, Harris offers important information about what the physical

appearance of the sixteen manuscript pages can tell us about Austen's writing and revision process during the end of the summer of 1816:

> At first her script is regular, as though she writes a fair copy rather than a first draft, but the fact that after July 16, 1816 it becomes more rushed and cramped, most noticeably on a scrap patched over a rejected paragraph and on two separate sheets to be inserted at 'X,' suggests that she began to revise even as she copied. (36)

Since, as Harris suggests, Austen revised these chapters as she copied them, her editorial style is recorded in all of the minute strikeouts and insertions that are clearly visible on the manuscript. By comparing deleted words with the ones that Austen inserted in their stead, one can gain a picture – available elsewhere only in the manuscripts of *The Watsons* and *Sanditon* – of Austen's writing process, as well as an appreciation of the meticulous care that went into her linguistic craftsmanship. In some cases, Austen reworked existing episodes in the draft, making changes in diction and narrative form to improve them for the published version. In others, she omitted entire episodes from the draft and replaced them with new ones, thus significantly changing the plot structure at the end of the novel. Collectively, these revisions offer general insight into what features belong to the fiction that Austen did – and did not – think worthy of publication.

Harris discusses Austen's revisions on both the micro- and the macro-levels. She looks at small changes within the cancelled material itself, often painstakingly reproducing Austen's strikeouts and insertions from the manuscript in typographic form. She also considers the larger narrative significance of the differences between the cancelled and published versions. These two approaches offer different information about

Austen's writing and editorial practices. The former paints an interesting picture of Austen engaged in the minutia of writing; the latter, however, is more indicative of the kinds of broad changes that ultimately satisfied Austen's specific standards, and will thus form the methodology of this study.

Juxtaposed with the published chapters, the cancelled chapters must appear to a certain degree of disadvantage in both form and content. In the published version, Austen drastically changes the manner in which the éclaircissement unfolds between Anne and Wentworth, testifying to the comparative inferiority of the first draft's content. Similarly, next to the material that Austen polished stylistically for printing, the draft material is, as to be expected, comparatively inferior in form. Virginia Woolf accounts for this discrepancy in her oft-quoted discussion of Jane Austen's manuscripts:

> The second-rate works of a great writer are worth reading because they offer the best criticism of his masterpieces. Here her difficulties are more apparent, and the method she took to overcome them less artfully concealed. To begin with, the stiffness and the bareness of the first chapters prove that she was one of those writers who lay their facts out rather baldly in the first version and then go back and back and back and cover them with flesh and atmosphere…Like other writers, she had to create the atmosphere in which her own peculiar genius could bear fruit. (149)

Austen generated the new ending of *Persuasion* remarkably quickly, within three weeks of having finished the original one. Presumably, then, she recognized soon after completing the original ending that in a considerable portion of it, her genius would not

be able to bear its best fruit, and she rejected it without going back to cover it "with flesh and atmosphere." Some parts of the original version, she *did* revisit to develop, and they all appear in their expanded form in the printed version. For all of these reasons, it is inevitable that the first draft will suffer in some ways by comparison to the final.

Although Austen cancels a considerable portion of chapter X[10] of *Persuasion*, she revises the opening for chapter 10, and the ending for chapter 11. Typically, when Austen revises part of the manuscript version for the final version, the result is two recognizable counterparts that share some of the same words and phrases. In revising the opening of X to produce the opening of 10, however, Austen works differently; she retains the general scenario from X – Anne's reaction following her discovery of Mr. Elliot's true character – but rewrites it in entirely new language. X opens with a distinctly frenzied tone, reflected in Austen's overuse of verbs – Anne's mind was "deeply busy in revolving what she had heard, feeling, thinking, recalling & forseeing everything" – and a proliferation of questions – "How to behave to him? – how to get rid of him? – what to do by any of the Party at home? – where to be blind? where to be active? –" (314). The rapid enumeration of verbs enacts Anne's busy revolving mind, while the questions show her at a loss as to how to proceed, placing her, to quote Harris, "disastrously within the convention of not just the silenced but the hysterical woman, distraught to the point of paralysis" (48). Moreover, the repetition of dashes situates this passage within the dramatic and clichéd language of sensibility fiction. Throughout the opening of X, Austen relies on strings of verbs and descriptors, effectively diluting Anne's experience through linguistic deferral rather than opening it up for the reader.

[10] For ease of reference, the manuscript chapters will hereafter be denoted with Roman numerals, X and XI, and the published chapters will be denoted with Arabic numerals, 10, 11 and 12.

Indeed, as Austen writes, "It was altogether a confusion of Images & Doubts – a perplexity, an agitation which she could not see the end of" (314). Anne is paralyzed and unable to interpret the situation, let alone to try to diffuse it.

In contrast, chapter 10 opens with a more measured mixture of Anne's distress at discovering Mr. Elliot's villainy, and her quiet certainty of how to proceed. She is certainly distressed, feeling "concerned for the disappointment and pain Lady Russell would be feeling, for the mortifications which must be hanging over her father and sister"; she "had all the distress of foreseeing many evils, without knowing how to avert any one of them" (230). But Anne's inability to avert future evils does not preclude her perceiving the situation calmly and clearly in the moment. Rather than witnessing Anne's thoughts spinning uncontrollably, the reader instead perceives her relief at having knowledge of the truth, and her "sensations unqualified, unperplexed" with regard to Mr. Elliot's "unwelcome obtrusiveness" and his "evil attentions" (230). The language is extreme in its own way – "There was *no longer any thing* of tenderness due to him" and "Pity for him was *all over*" (my emphasis, 230) – but it is not the clichéd, dramatic sort that makes Anne appear almost hysterical, as in the counterpart opening of chapter X. In 10 Anne has her wits about her, acknowledging to herself that "She must talk to Lady Russell, tell her, consult with her, and having done her best, wait the event with as much composure as possible" (230). From X to 10, Anne moves from experiencing a flurry of helpless thoughts – in short, a distinctly unproductive sort of distress – to experiencing a more controlled, thoughtful sort of distress, much better befitting the Anne Elliot to which the reader has grown accustomed over the course of the novel.

Austen's other additions to the opening of chapter 10 help to maintain consistency in a different aspect of Anne's character. Throughout *Persuasion*, Austen is careful to depict Anne as almost unfailingly good – the operative word being "almost." In fact, Austen punctuates the novel with a handful of introspective moments that show Anne to be distinctly human. Austen alters the opening of chapter X to include two such moments in 10. Anne has great generosity of spirit, and one of the ways in which Austen develops this character trait is by having her pay attention to an impoverished school friend, Mrs. Smith, despite the Elliot family's disapproval of the woman's low station in life. After hearing the truth about Mr. Elliot's character from Mrs. Smith, Anne muses that "She had never considered herself as entitled to reward for not slighting an old friend like Mrs. Smith, but here was a reward indeed springing from it! – Mrs. Smith had been able to tell her what no one else could have done" (230). Anne's thought is a form of apophasis, a rhetorical device whereby a person proves something by denying it. By claiming that she does not consider herself deserving of a reward for her benevolence, Anne effectively betrays that the contrary is true; her denial ironically shows that she is in fact well aware that she may deserve a reward for her kindness. A subtle hint of complacency is discernible in Anne's sentiments towards Mrs. Smith, and the fact that she is not conscious of it – clear enough from her denial – renders it all the more effective in humanizing her, and proving her to be imperfect.

The current of human fallibility underneath Anne's outward propriety is an important aspect of her characterization that Austen depicts subtly yet consistently throughout *Persuasion*. Significantly, consistency of character is one of the features that Austen believes is indispensable for a worthy novel; in her letters on fiction she

repeatedly warns her niece Anna not to let her characters behave in an inconsistent manner, often offering solutions to help her to avoid doing so. In effect, Austen provides such solutions for herself in revising the opening of chapter X: she inserts allusions to Anne's private inner suffering and to her mild complacency, continuing to develop her as a slightly imperfect character. She also converts Anne's helplessness in X to a controlled distress that does not preclude agency in chapter 10, consistent with the steady outward composure that has been typical of the heroine throughout the book. Similarly, she rescues Anne from the cliché of the helpless heroine that she very nearly embodied in X. In doing so, Austen satisfies her requirement of avoiding that which is "too much in the common Novel style" (*Later MSS* 222). Austen's amendments to X all serve her rigid novelistic principles.

Austen entirely expunges the middle section of chapter X from the new ending of *Persuasion*. As this material clearly did not merit revisiting, it provides its own peculiar insight into her literary standards. This section depicts an elaborate series of events leading up to the pivotal éclaircissement between Anne and Wentworth, in which they finally disclose their feelings for one another. In her letters on fiction, Austen condones using the novel's plot as a catalyst to draw out specific behaviour from characters. She seems to have gone wrong, however, in implementing this method in X, as it is painfully apparent that the unfolding events' sole purpose is to establish the circumstances in which Anne and Wentworth can speak. In a scene reminiscent of absurd comic theatre, Admiral Croft meets Anne in the street and immediately assumes that she is on her way to call on his wife. Despite Anne's denials – "No – she really had not time, she was in her way home" – the Admiral obtusely has already "stepped back & knocked at the door,

calling out, 'Yes, yes, do go in; she is all alone'" (314), apparently leaving Anne no choice but to comply. The scene proceeds in much the same awkward manner; the Admiral seems "crass, loud, and unobservant" (58), to quote Harris's assessment, and Anne repeats her feeble objections to his heedless ears. Responding to Anne's inquiry whether Mrs. Croft be "quite alone," the Admiral overcompensates in his replies: "Oh! yes, *quite alone – Nobody* but her Mantuamaker with her"; "you will find *nobody* to disturb you"; and finally, the anticipated contradictory statement – "there is *nobody* but Frederick here" (my emphasis, 314, 315). The Admiral's insistence seems forced and unnatural since he has no reason to try so hard to convince Anne of Mrs. Croft's being alone. To clinch the necessary tête-a-tête scenario, the Admiral explains to Anne, "I cannot stay, because I must go to the P. Office" (315). The Bath post office has never been mentioned before, so his reference to it at this point in the novel seems clearly to be, as Harris aptly puts it, "an authorial stratagem transparently designed to remove him from the scene" (44). Austen's sudden introduction of a new venue at this stage in her story is jarring, making for an uncharacteristically awkward reading experience.

Given the extraordinary circumstances into which Anne is propelled, and their implications for her personally, the reader expects her to call on her characteristic powers of exertion to carry her through. As in the opening of the chapter, however, Anne is simply unable to command herself. As she and the Admiral enter the house, he smilingly alludes to having heard "strange things" of her – presumably of a romantic nature – to which she responds only by blushing. Privately, however, she is "left to guess at the direction of his Suspicions; – the first wild idea had been of some disclosure from his B^{r} in law – but she was ashamed the next moment – & felt how far more probable that he

should be meaning M^{r}. E." (315). Harris remarks that Anne's thought process is "alarmingly chaotic" here (44). In using the word 'alarmingly,' Harris picks up on the rupture in Anne's typical composed behaviour. Panicking, Anne acknowledges that she is unable to gain control of herself: "– No time for recollection! – for planning behaviour, or regulating manners!" (315). Once inside, her panic manifests itself in her erratic comportment, as she "*was* sitting down, but now she arose again – to entreat him not to interrupt M^{rs}. C. – & re-urge the wish of going away & calling another time" (315). As if it were not clear enough, the narrator explicitly states that "[Anne] was very much distressed. – She knew not what to do, or what to expect –" (316). This kind of debilitating distress is new for Anne at this point in the novel; but the circumstances that she is facing are also the first of their kind to appear thus far. As noted, the far-fetched chain of events that have unfolded in a short space of time feel forced and unnatural, and thus it is understandable that they should elicit unusual behaviour from Anne. This domino effect spreads from Austen's plot into her characterization, wreaking negative effects along the way.

The unnaturalness of events and characters' behaviour is amplified, moreover, as Austen herself seems to be aware of it in the highly self-conscious quality of her writing in this section of chapter X. This self-consciousness motivates her to use free indirect discourse, the novelistic technique that she developed throughout her career. Elsewhere in Austen's oeuvre, free indirect discourse produces spectacular narrative effects, allowing her to nuance her prose in several creative ways. Here, however, free indirect discourse is not so elegantly deployed. Take, for example, the passage describing how

the Admiral secures the necessary circumstances for Anne and Wentworth's climactic conversation:

> the Admiral was too much on the alert, to leave any troublesome pause. – He repeated again what he had said before about his wife & everybody – insisted on Anne's sitting down & being perfectly comfortable, was sorry he must leave her himself, but was sure M^{rs}. Croft w^{d}. be down very soon, & w^{d}. go upstairs & give her notice directly. (315)

The free indirect discourse in this passage is merely an expedient to facilitate the rapid unfolding of several trivial events to set the scene, finally, for the éclaircissement. The Admiral's words and actions are all merely plot bolsters, and thus it makes sense that Austen chooses a narrative technique that allows her to relate them in quick succession without dwelling on them. By using free indirect discourse so obviously as a mechanism for accelerating her prose, however, Austen adds unwelcome momentum to the scene. More importantly, the free indirect discourse betrays to the reader that she is conscious of the comparative insignificance of these events in the novel, amplifying the sense of forcedness that pervades this section.

Austen's concern about this section is even more apparent from her occasional lapses into self-reflexive language. Anticipating the reader's scepticism about why Anne would not simply extricate herself from this distressing situation, Austen's own authorial voice chimes in with a rationalization:

> if she did not return to the charge with unconquerable Perseverance, or did not with a more passive Determination walk quietly out of the room – (as certainly she might have done) may she not be pardoned? – If she *had* no

> horror of a few minutes Tète a Tète with Capt. W—, may she not be pardoned for not wishing to give him the idea that she *had*? (315-16)

In trying to convince readers of the justness of the scene by addressing them with direct rhetorical questions, Austen not only punctures her sphere of fictional realism, but she also virtually admits to the reader that she is struggling to justify Anne's actions, and the scene as a whole. Austen's grasp over the scene weakens further as the narrator reports Anne's anxiety about her imminent meeting with Wentworth: "among other agonies [she] felt the possibility of Capt. W—'s not returning into the room at all, which after *her* consenting to stay would have been – too bad for Language" (316). This final hyperbole is particularly surprising in a text by Austen, the first proponent of "the best-chosen language" (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 31). Elsewhere in her oeuvre she is never wont to evade articulating complex thoughts and emotions, but here, her difficulty is palpable. As the scene progresses, it escapes her control increasingly, evident in these moments of authorial admission.

Before the moment of understanding between Anne and Wentworth arrives, the scene first forces itself through a handful of other preambulatory events, each one as implausible as those that went before. Admiral Croft requests a private audience with Wentworth, offering the following feeble excuse: "As I am going to leave you together, it is but fair I should give you something to talk of" (316). He then speaks to Wentworth "without any management of voice" so that "it was impossible for [Anne] not to distinguish parts of the rest," despite Wentworth's "trying to check him" (316). The Admiral rattles audibly on about the "Lease of Kellynch," explaining that he and Mrs. Croft "hate to be at an uncertainty," and that he is resolved to speak if Wentworth will not

(316). Meanwhile, Anne is – as usual – "very much distressed," while Wentworth "seemed remonstrating – wanting to be excused – wanting to put something off" (316). This scene awkward as it plays out behind a closed door; meanwhile, the narrator relates Anne's surprisingly detailed perception of it, all the more implausible for these added layers of mediation.

Finally, Wentworth addresses his speech to Anne, in which he must carry out the uncomfortable task of asking her whether the Crofts should prepare to annul their lease of Kellynch in anticipation of her marriage to Mr. Elliot. During this speech, Austen actually regains her authorial stride to some extent, as the prose is far closer to her characteristically elegant style than any other passage in this section. There are, however, a few awkward moments cluttering up the passage, in which Wentworth injects reflexive comments about the impropriety of the scenario, and his own particular embarrassment. Ironically, these fumbling moments are inserted into an otherwise smooth passage only so that it will fit within the equally awkward, forced circumstances that led to it.

Like Austen's revisions of the opening of chapter X, her mass excision of its middle section correlates directly to her novelistic principles. In her letters on fiction to Anna Lefroy, Austen delineates her two priorities in novel writing: "Nature & Spirit," which "cover many sins of a wandering story" (218). She encourages Anna to strive for realism in every aspect of novel writing by drawing consistent characters and credible events. Having also dismissed Sarah Harriet Burney's *Clarentine* as a work that is "full of unnatural conduct & forced difficulties, without striking merit of any kind" (*Letters* 120), it is not surprising that Austen expunged the string of events in the middle section of X that are simply too coincidental to be plausible. She would have wanted to avoid

any "unnatural conduct" and "forced difficulties" in her own writing, and the cancelled section of X is rife with both. Austen's insistence on realism also accounts for her expunging Anne's frenzied behaviour in this section, as it contradicts her previous characterization as level-headed and composed. Through this large-scale deletion, Austen eliminates Anne's erratic behaviour as well as the extraordinary circumstances that drew it out of her, preserving the realism that she has achieved thus far in *Persuasion*.

Having cancelled a considerable portion of chapter X, Austen devotes the body of chapter 10 to setting up entirely new circumstances to bring about the novel's climax. In doing so, she takes care to round out her story in ways that she failed to do in X. Anne and Mr. Elliot are allowed one final conversation following her discovery of his disingenuousness, in which Anne shows herself to be mistress of her own good conduct, as the reader has learned to expect: she tries "to be as decidedly cool to him as might be compatible with their relationship, and to retrace, as quietly as she could, the few steps of unnecessary intimacy she had been gradually led along" (232). With this added scene, Austen showcases Anne's good sense and propriety, and reinstates consistency in her characterization. Austen then reintroduces the Musgrove party, including Mrs. Musgrove, Mary and Charles, Henrietta, and Captain Harville. This particular plot twist effectively sets the stage for Austen's stunning scene at the White Hart; it also provides the reader with final access to these secondary characters, all of whom would otherwise have fallen completely by the wayside in the second half of the novel. It creates continuity between the two volumes, preventing the reader from concluding that these characters were only present in volume I to fulfil the needs of the plot at that point in the

novel. This added continuity helps to satisfy Austen's requirement to avoid circumstances in novels that are "nothing to the purpose" or "which will lead to nothing" (*Later MSS* 221, 218).

Austen develops the renewed connection between Anne and Wentworth in chapter 10, building tension in preparation for the éclaircissement. This added dimension of complexity between the two characters is not as directly traceable to one of Austen's statements on novel writing as some of the other additions to the chapter, but it is nevertheless important to acknowledge. By giving Wentworth and Anne the opportunity to interact once more in 10 before the scene at the White Hart in chapter 11, Austen adds nuance to the arc of Anne's character. In Wentworth's presence, the current of anxiety and profound emotion that has remained safely in check under Anne's composed façade bubbles increasingly close to the surface. Whereas before she never admitted their reunion to be possible, she has, by this point, learned to believe it so. This new possibility poses a threat to her outward composure: "She tried to be calm, and leave things to take their course; and tried to dwell much on this argument of rational dependence – surely, if there be constant attachment of each side, our hearts must understand each other ere long" (240). Calmness and rationality, formerly so readily available to her, now come only with concerted effort. As the scene in Camden-place progresses, Anne's two-tiered character structure of emotion safely contained underneath reason strains under pressure. Finally, it fractures with her outburst, "I am not so much changed!" after Wentworth has alluded to the changes that people may experience over time – read: the fading of once-ardent affection. This new material shows the workings

of Anne's consciousness during the intermediate stage of her reconciliation with Wentworth, enriching the narrative and increasing potential for readerly enjoyment.

The opening of chapter 11 is also entirely new material, and includes the stunning scene at the White Hart in which Anne makes her unprecedented claim for women's constancy, amounting to her own declaration of love for Wentworth. Throughout this scene, Austen continues to add depth and texture to Anne's character by placing her in close, emotionally-fraught quarters with Wentworth, as she does in the body of chapter 10.[11] Austen also uses this expansion to tie up the novel's loose thematic ends. As Harris notes, the scene at the White Hart "links up all the principle themes of the novel: the constancy of men and women, the gendering of reason and feeling, and the need for women to act and speak. In short, the subtexts of her finale unify the novel far beyond the level of the story" (59), doing much to avoid the novelistic desultoriness against which Austen warns Anna in her letters on fiction (218).

The respective endings of chapters X and 11 mark the long-awaited éclaircissements between Anne and Wentworth. The moment of understanding between the two lovers is considerably different in the two versions, as each stems from a vastly different set of plot events. Thus, these initial scenes share the same premise – reconciliation – but none of the same words or phrases. The version in X fits clearly within the tradition of eighteenth-century sensibility fiction, teeming with feeling that eludes the characters' powers of language. While at first Anne's words are "un-intelligible" (317), at last she somewhat stammeringly denies the Admiral's report. Wentworth then gives her a look

[11] While the scene at the White Hart certainly merits attention for the richness that it adds to Anne's character, its link to Austen's novelistic theory is not as direct as some of her other revisions. See Harris's chapter 2, "The Reviser at Work: MS Chapter 10 to Chapters X-XI (1818)" and chapter 3, "At the White Hart: MS Chapter 11 to XII (1818)" for a superb commentary on this addition to *Persuasion*'s ending.

with "something more than penetration in it, something softer," which "Her Countenance did not discourage" (318). Despite having depicted the scene sufficiently well as "a silent, but a very powerful Dialogue" (318), Austen's self-consciousness seeps through the narrative as she explicitly states it to be so, betraying her anxiety about its effectiveness. A rapturous reunion ensues with "a hand taken and pressed," followed by Wentworth's cry, "Anne, my own dear Anne! – bursting forth in the fullness of exquisite feeling" (318). As Todd and Blank note, "Austen may […] have thought that, in her reliance on non-verbal exchanges in such an emotional work, she was too close to the sentimental novel she had burlesqued in her youth and to Burney's *The Wanderer*, ridiculed in her 'Plan of a Novel'" (lxxxi). Moreover, she may have recognized that the few words she does deploy – especially Wentworth's rather hollow sounding exclamation – smack of the clichéd lexicon of sensibility, qualifying as "such thorough novel slang" as she objects to in Anna's novel (*Later MSS* 223).

For the éclaircissement in chapter 11, Austen expunges these clichéd elements and reinstates her almost unfailingly rational and composed heroine. To facilitate this change, she locates the scene in the public sphere with all its inherent social constraints, in contrast to chapter X, set in the Crofts' sitting room. In full view not just of Charles Musgrove but also of Bath's Union-street and all of its amblers, Wentworth does not address Anne, but "only looked," while she "could command herself enough to receive that look, and not repulsively" (261). Far from Anne's struggle to command herself, followed by her shared looks with Wentworth – "on his side, Supplication, on her's acceptance" – and culminating in his clichéd burst of "exquisite feeling" in X (318), their reunion in 11 occurs seamlessly, causing barely a ripple in the narrative. The focus of

the scene shifts from raw feelings in X, to keeping this private emotional experience safely concealed from public view in 11. Austen achieves this shift partly through diction, choosing words that emphasize propriety: Anne and Wentworth walk silently, with "a most proper alacrity, a most obliging compliance for public view; and smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture" (261). Austen rounds off the arc of Anne's character by stabilizing the relationship between her rationality and her feelings that was upset in the tension-filled ending of 10 and beginning of 11, when Anne came dangerously close to losing grip on her composure in Wentworth's presence. Interestingly, the moment of éclaircissement at the end of 11 represents more of a denouement than a climax for Anne; all uncertainty evaporates, and instead of being overcome with feeling, she instead rapidly reverts to her usual mode of conduct, basking in the joy of her reunion in an appropriately controlled, measured manner.

The remainder of chapter 11 – in which Anne and Wentworth re-examine together the circumstances leading up to their reunion – comprises original material from the ending of chapter X that Austen has revised and expanded. It provides one of the only opportunities to witness what happens when she goes back to a draft to allow "her own peculiar genius [to] bear fruit" (Woolf 149). Despite Woolf's assessment that Austen "was no conjurer after all" (149), evidently there were times when she got it right on the first try: a handful of passages in 11 match their original counterparts in X word for word, such as the passage reporting the evolution of Wentworth's thoughts about Louisa Musgrove, and the passage in which Anne gently remonstrates with Wentworth for failing to perceive that she would be less susceptible to persuasion now than eight years ago. The majority of the material in the end of 11, however, Austen has expanded

considerably from X, adding details that contribute in various ways to the new version's realism. In X, the narrator's description of Anne's and Wentworth's reunion is terse: "They were re-united. They were restored to all that had been lost. They were carried back to the past, with only an increase of attachment & confidence" (318). Pithy yet hyperbolic, the version in X depicts Anne and Wentworth as secure in the idealized realm of their renewed love. In contrast, Austen tempers her representation of their reunion in 11 with subtle reminders of life's inevitable uncertainty: "There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure every thing, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement" (261). Acknowledging the potentially problematic fact that the lovers have exchanged these promises once before, Austen implies that Anne and Wentworth, though happy, are still in the realm of real life, in which a promise is no guarantee. She then qualifies this statement with a healthy dose of optimism, explaining that "they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting" (216). Recognizing that life is neither perfect nor predictable, Austen nevertheless allows that her heroine and hero are situated well enough in their mutual understanding to have a strong chance for happiness. In so doing, she proves herself in practice to be ever a proponent of moderation rather than extremes in novel writing.

Austen similarly adds nuance and realistic detail to Wentworth's characterization at the end of chapter 11. In chapter X, the narrator provides a skeletal account of Wentworth's feelings for Anne:

> [her character] was now fixed on his Mind as Perfection itself – maintaining the just Medium of Fortitude & Gentleness; – he had never ceased to love & prefer her, though it had been only at Uppercross that he had learn't to do her Justice – & only at Lyme that he had begun to understand his own sensations; – (319)

Austen returns to this bare foundation in 11, polishing it to produce more elegant, fluid prose, and expanding it at the outset humanize Wentworth's character:

> He persisted in having loved none but her. She had never been supplanted. He never even believed himself to see her equal. Thus much indeed he was obliged to acknowledge – that he had been constant unconsciously, nay unintentionally; that he had meant to forget her, and believed it to be done. He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry; and he had been unjust to her merits, because he had been a sufferer from them. Her character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness; but he was obliged to acknowledge that only at Uppercross had he learnt to do her justice, and only at Lyme had he begun to understand himself. (262)

In X, the narrator reports terse, hollow statements of constancy on Wentworth's behalf, while in 11, the same statements are fleshed out to show Wentworth's understanding of his own folly, adding depth to his character. The fact that pride and anger prevented him from admitting his own constancy is characteristic of human nature; that he can acknowledge it is less common, demonstrating an admirable degree of humility and self-

knowledge on his part. The effect of this revision is twofold: first, it makes Wentworth more appealing for his ability to be accountable for his faults, contributing to potential readerly enjoyment; second, it justifies his behaviour earlier in the novel, effectively helping to maintain continuity throughout the work.

Aside from adding detail to refine the novel's realism, the change that Austen makes most frequently in this section is transposing passages of free indirect discourse into direct speech. Given that this particular revision requires very few changes in wording and phrasing, the scope of its effect on the prose is remarkable. Note, for instance, the simplicity of the following alteration:

> He found that he was considered by his friend Harville, as an engaged Man. The Harvilles entertained not a doubt of a mutual attachment between him & Louisa – (319)

becomes

> 'I found,' said he, 'that I was considered by Harville an engaged man! That neither Harville nor his wife entertained a doubt of our mutual attachment. I was startled and shocked.' (263)

Here and elsewhere, it is extraordinary what a difference this small change in narrative mode makes in the prose's potential to generate amusement for readers. Indeed, Harris agrees that "The improvement is dazzling when Austen converts Wentworth's indirect into direct speech, confirming Graham Hough's observation that her preferred mode of narration is the dramatic" (52). Not only does the added direct speech create a change of pace for the reader, increasing the momentum of the prose, but it also amplifies the scene's immediacy by removing a layer of mediation. Rather than listening passively to

the narrator, the reader has a distinct impression of Anne's interacting with Wentworth, generating excitement and satisfaction after the long period of anticipation leading up to their reunion. Moreover, by using direct speech Austen gives Wentworth the opportunity to state, from his own perspective, that he felt both "startled and shocked" that Harville considered him to be an engaged man. Austen performs similar conversions of indirect to direct speech throughout this passage, contributing considerably to the liveliness and energy – in short, the spirit, to use Austen's own term – of this section of *Persuasion*.

In revisiting the foundation that she laid for this scene in chapter X, Austen takes care to complete in chapter 11 various narrative arcs introduced early in the novel. In X, the narrator reports that "Before they parted at night, Anne had the felicity of being assured in the first place that – (so far from being altered for the worse!) – she had *gained* inexpressibly in personal Loveliness" (318-19). This statement has a hollow ring in light of the devastating statement that Wentworth made in volume I, subsequently reported to Anne by Mary: "'he said, "You were so altered he should not have known you again"'" (65). Not only does the narrator's account of Wentworth's profession of constancy in X detract from his character's genuineness, but it also unsatisfactorily bypasses Anne's impressions and feelings upon hearing it, given that she formerly endured "silent, deep mortification" to learn that he thought her drastically altered. In 11, by contrast, Austen effectively qualifies Wentworth's counterpart profession in the context of his earlier comment. Wentworth's statement – "to my eye you could never alter" (264) – gives Anne pause for reflection:

> Anne smiled, and let it pass. It was too pleasing a blunder for reproach. It is something for a woman to be assured, in her eight-and-twentieth year,

> that she has not lost one charm of earlier youth: but the value of such homage was inexpressibly increased to Anne, by comparing it with former words, and feeling it to be the result, not the cause of a revival of his warm attachment. (264)

Allowing Anne this moment of reflection that is absent in X, Austen effectively forgives Wentworth his "blunder" and reinforces some of Anne's best qualities: her understanding and her generosity of spirit. Moreover, Austen simultaneously guards against having circumstances of seeming consequence in her novel that ultimately lead to nothing.

Collectively, the manuscript and published chapters of *Persuasion* provide a number of different avenues through which to gain insight into Austen's novelistic technique. There are parts of the manuscript version that she expunges entirely from the final version, representing the kind of fictional atmosphere that would not allow her peculiar genius to bear fruit, to invoke Woolf's metaphor again. The body of chapter X fits under this category: it departs from realism in its reliance on clichéd language and plot paradigms, and it is rife with implausible events that elicit not only inconsistent behaviour from characters, but also self-conscious writing from Austen. Her palpable effort to justify characters' actions is a built-in indicator that this section of X simply doesn't satisfy her professed priority of nature in novel writing. The new set of plot events that Austen devises in chapters 10 and 11 helps her to generate depth and maintain consistency in characterization, to build continuity between volumes, and plausibly to establish the necessary circumstances for Anne's and Wentworth's reunion. In contrast, there are parts of the manuscript version that Austen expands and polishes for the final version, representing the various ways in which her genius operates when she goes back

to flesh out the foundation she has laid in her draft. The ending of 11 belongs to this category: its polished language and increased volume of direct speech add to the prose's liveliness, and its supplementary material thoughtfully wraps up storylines and character arcs. In her letters on fiction, Austen articulates her rigid novelistic standards in theory, to assist Anna in a mass-revision of her novel-in-progress. The cancelled chapters prove that Austen applies the very same rigorous standards to her own re-writing practice.

Conclusion

Austen's convictions about her theory of the novel began to develop early, when she started reading books from her father's library at Steventon during her childhood. As she fast became a voracious reader and re-reader of novels, she had the luxury of time to identify specific novelistic conventions that she felt needed revamping. She began her own literary career by directing the overtly critical burlesques of her juvenilia at these conventions. Eventually, she became subtler with her craft, actually implementing the innovations that she firmly believed were needed. She endured a prolonged struggle through the early years of the nineteenth century to produce a novel that would sell for publication. As her later manuscripts indicate, by the time she reached the final years of her career as an experienced author, she was aware that novel writing is not simply a matter of putting one's carefully honed theory into practice.

In her letters on fiction, Austen unequivocally states her preferences for certain novelistic features and techniques. Prioritizing nature and spirit – to use her own terms – as well as concision and innovation, Austen dispenses advice to Anna about how to improve her novel. These letters are valuable in that Austen's theory of the novel can be quite clearly extracted from them, and subsequently applied to illuminate her published works. Moreover, the letters shed light on Austen's attitude towards authorship. Her sensitivity towards Anna as an author is evident in the diction in which she frames her criticisms, and is probably a direct result of her own experience of being reviewed. It is clear from her collections of "Opinions of *Mansfield Park*" and "Opinions of *Emma*" that the novelistic innovations on which she reflected long and carefully, and in which she believed whole-heartedly, met with variable success when she submitted her works for

public consumption. That she bothered to collect the "Opinions" at all indicates her investment in them; notwithstanding, she flouted readers' opinions that did not coincide with her own through her editorial acts of assembling and paraphrasing them. She flouted them in her writing practice by amplifying the moral fallibility to which readers objected in *Mansfield Park* in her imperfect heroine, Emma.

Austen collected opinions in a different format in "Plan of a Novel," assembling them to create a burlesque that highlights, through ridicule, how poor the result would be if she were to abide by the advice of her critics rather than her own novelistic theory. But this short parody does not amount to flagrant disregard of her reviews, as she actually incorporates a number of hints from the "Plan" into *Persuasion*. That she did so may be a result of her having met with considerable negative feedback about *Emma*, after she persisted with a novelistic feature – human imperfection – to which readers had already objected in *Mansfield Park*. If her inclusion of some hints from the "Plan" in *Persuasion* is a concession, however, it is only partial, as she transposes them into the register of realism, which she unwaveringly believed to be essential in fiction. Moreover, a comparative reading of the cancelled and published chapters of *Persuasion* shows her staunch commitment to the same novelistic principles that she outlined to Anna two years previously in her letters on fiction. As the later manuscripts suggest, this part of Austen's career is characterized by a tension between her conviction of the merit of her novelistic theory and practice, and her undeniable investment in external opinions. Though Austen's writing practice may have evolved slightly in response to public opinion, the painstaking care she took to revise the final chapters of *Persuasion* shows that she was the critic who must ultimately be satisfied.

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