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Introduction

HER SIX COMPLETED novels may have been published within the narrow span of six years and two months, but Jane Austen lived long enough and wrote a sufficient quantity of work in the course of three decades to have identifiably early, middle, and late phases in her authorial career. Or, to borrow the categories employed by her first biographers, she began with ‘juvenile tales’ and ‘childish effusions’, moved on to ‘betweenities’, and ended with ‘novels’ proper. To consider the body of her work in this way is to progress in a straight line from immaturity to maturity, from ‘how she ought *not* to write’ into ‘the right direction’ (*Memoir*, pp. 42–3, 186).

The trouble with this view of things is that it does not square with the compositional record. Austen preserved, returned to, and revised her earliest unpublished works long after she became a published author. The book-length fictions with which she made her name cannot be securely demarcated from the shorter juvenilia in terms of when they were composed, or according to their subject matter, or on the basis of their author’s concern and affection for them.¹ Nor, it seems, would even her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh—a man who voiced strong objections to the public appearance of Austen’s first known writings—necessarily have argued that there was a firm division between the teenage and adult works. Not, at least, in terms of style. ‘Perhaps the most characteristic feature in these early productions’, he wrote, ‘is that, however puerile the matter, they are always composed in pure simple English, quite free from the over-ornamented style which might be expected from so young a writer’ (*Memoir*, p. 40).

1. See Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 204.

Like many literary careers, Austen's begins and ends in manuscript compositions left unpublished until long after she died. These writings, which emphatically display what her great-niece, Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, summed up as 'strong family instincts and quick power of observation', emerged piecemeal into print, initially in the context of biographical accounts by her relatives.² After her death, family members retained control of her manuscripts for decades, permitting only the gradual and partial release of texts deemed a risk to the status of the increasingly renowned six novels. Austen's first known literary works are fair copies or transcriptions dating in the earliest case from around 1787, when she was eleven or twelve, and concluding in mid-1793, when she was seventeen. It is not known how long a gap there may have been between the creation and subsequent transcription of these works (accompanied, perhaps, by some fresh composition); it might have been a matter only of weeks or months. Now referred to collectively as 'juvenilia', or 'teenage writings', these twenty-seven pieces were originally entered into three stationer's notebooks styled 'Volume the First' (Bodleian Library, MS. Don. e. 7), 'Volume the Second' (British Library, Add. MS. 59874), and 'Volume the Third' (British Library, Add. MS. 65381). The contents of the three books are not arranged chronologically, although Austen seems to have begun to transcribe with that intention. The earliest entries (c. 1787–90) are to be found in 'Volume the First'. But so are the last, from 1793. All three volumes contain later revisions and corrections, not all of them in Austen's hand. Some changes seem to have been implemented during the first transcription, but others are clearly made later.³ This material is already, at the point of being written down, the result of some kind of authorial re-reading, and of second thoughts if even of the most cursory kind. It is therefore not quite evidence of a primary creative process working itself out on the page, but of an author returning to something in order to record it and in the process also correcting, supplementing, or otherwise altering it. When she re-read and wrote out her work, Austen's revisions were fitful and opportunistic, perhaps the effect of sharing the texts

2. Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, *Personal Aspects of Jane Austen* (London: John Murray, 1920), p. 13.

3. See for example *JAFM*, vol. 1, pp. 132–3, where the word 'must' in the first story of 'Volume the First' is corrected to 'first'; this correction 'appears from ink and hand to have been made on an occasion distinct from the general copying of this piece'.

with others, or of having them read aloud to her as she wrote them down.⁴ The teenage works then circulated across generations within a close group of relatives and friends who kept and sometimes changed those works as they saw fit.

Austen's tiny one-act 'The Mystery an unfinished Comedy'—perhaps composed as an afterpiece for her family's 'private Theatrical exhibition' in 1788 (*TW*, p. 275)—was the first of the teenage writings to appear in print, in the second edition (1871) of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*. In this context, it was offered 'as a specimen of the kind of transitory amusement which Jane was continually supplying to the family party' (p. 40).⁵ In the first edition of the *Memoir* (published on Austen's ninety-fourth birthday, 16 December 1869, but dated 1870), the author had printed none of his aunt's juvenilia, explaining that 'it would be as unfair to expose this preliminary process to the world, as it would be to display all that goes on behind the curtain of the theatre before it is drawn up.'⁶ (The theatrical analogy remains a commonplace in the period, as it had been in the eighteenth century; fending off a would-be biographer, William Wordsworth offered 'One last word in matter of authorship; it is far better not to admit people so much behind the scenes as it has been lately fashionable to do.'⁷) In the second edition of the *Memoir*, retaining exactly the same language of resistance to exposure, Austen-Leigh also chose to include—as his specimen display of all that goes on behind the curtain before it is drawn up—an early, very short drama.

'The Mystery' is the only one of Jane Austen's teenage works to be dedicated to her father, the Rev. George Austen, who had seemingly unworriedly sanctioned the same early satirical experiments about which Austen's late nineteenth-century relations expressed such anxiety. Having his name at the head of this work might have given it some additional, and reassuring, authority in the eyes of his descendants. Billed as 'unfinished', 'The Mystery' is an intergenerational drama of comically thwarted disclosure; thwarted, at least as far as the audience is concerned. Older and younger generations mingle in

4. See for example *JAFM*, vol. 1, pp. 130–31, where the correction of 'Thro' to 'Threw' suggests that 'at this point JA may have been copying from dictation'.

5. On the Austen theatricals, see *Family Record*, p. 63.

6. J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: Richard Bentley, 1869 [dated 1870]), p. 62; *Memoir*, p. 43.

7. Wordsworth to Barron Field (16 Jan. 1840), *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. De Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88), vol. 4: *The Later Years, 1821–1853*: part 1: 1821–28 (1978), p. 440.

the cast list. ‘Old Humbug’ and ‘Young Humbug’ recall Old and Young Hamlet; they also reflect the young author’s assumed identity as ‘your most Hum.^{le} Servant’, where humility is transparently a pose. The names ‘Corydon’ and ‘Daphne’, conventional for rustic lovers, come from ancient pastoral and its English imitators, literature that—like the somewhat jaded, clapped-out atmosphere of dramatic comedy conjured by the name ‘Spangle’—would have been well-known to Austen’s parents (there is another Corydon in ‘Frederic & Elfrida’, *TW*, p. 8 and p. 275 n.).⁸ The more everyday, home-grown names of ‘Colonel Elliott’ and ‘Fanny Elliott’ anticipate characters in Austen’s later fiction (‘Fanny’ in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*; ‘Elliott’ in *Persuasion*).⁹

‘The Mystery’ permits nothing to reach fruition in terms of our understanding of character or action. In the first scene, Corydon—as befits a swain—enters a garden, only to say he is interrupted and swiftly to leave again. Old and Young Humbug are then discovered, ‘talking’. The father tells the son he wishes him to follow his advice, and the son agrees; we never learn what the advice is about. In the second scene, women are sewing and a ‘narration’ has ‘nearly concluded’ because Mrs Humbug has ‘nothing more to say on the subject’. We might guess that while the men in the garden have been discussing careers, the separate group of women indoors has been discussing love. Or perhaps the ‘advice’ given by Old to Young Humbug relates to the same narration that is being concluded among the women inside the house. But nothing is explicitly said to this effect. The conclusion of scene 2 is that Fanny, thanks to Daphne’s whispered communication, now knows ‘every thing about it’—whatever ‘it’ may be. So she too determines ‘I’ll go away’. Mrs Humbug and Daphne then also declare ‘And so will I’, and the audience is none the wiser. The mirror episode at the end of scene 3 sees the Colonel whisper *his* secret to a sleeping Sir Edward. The need to share is thereby satisfied, with no risk incurred of damaging publicity (*TW*, pp. 49–51).¹⁰

8. ‘Corydon’ in defined in the *OED* as ‘A generic proper name in pastoral poetry for a rustic.’ Thomas Love Peacock’s *Melincourt* refers to ‘the character of *Corydon sospirioso*’ (‘sighing Corydon’), and to ‘lords, baronets, and squires, all Corydons, sighing.’ *Melincourt*, 3 vols. (London: T. Hookham, Jun., and Co.; Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817), vol. 1, p. 16; vol. 2, p. 2.

9. Two other surnames in the teenage writings resurface in the later fiction: Annesley and Musgrove (‘A Collection of Letters’, pp. 138, 145). A Mrs Annesley, companion to Miss Darcy, appears in *P&P*; the Musgrove family in *Pers*.

10. On Austen’s style as a combination of ‘wish and refusal’, whereby a ‘secret is kept and told’, see D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 59.

The author's definitive 'Finis' wraps up 'The Mystery', a work that is both complete and abruptly broken off. This text has rightly been said to anticipate Austen's later fiction in that it 'provides a model in miniature of the kinds of narrative and dramatic reticence on which her mature novels depend'.¹¹ Games with suppressed or evacuated content and vanishing protagonists continue from 'The Mystery' and 'Jack & Alice' (whose 'Hero' never enters his own story, other than in a brief narratorial report of his death, *TW*, p. 20) into the longer and later compositions. The 'intelligent, gentlemanlike' apothecary Mr Perry—quoted, summarized, or invoked at least seventy times in *Emma*—never appears in his own person (vol. 1, ch. 2, p. 18). The joke of his pervasive yet invisible authority flares suddenly into view when he is reported (by Miss Nash, to Harriet, who then repeats the story to Emma) to have remonstrated with Mr Elton on 'how shabby it was in him, their best player, to absent himself' (vol. 1, ch. 8, p. 72). Here, the character with whom Mr Woodhouse encourages us to associate the 'best' qualities, the man whose words are constantly, admiringly, circulated around Highbury—and someone we are never permitted to approach except through other people's accounts of him—is indirectly presented as telling off another character, 'their best player', for having left the stage because of 'a lady'. Some readers might recall at this point that Austen's authorial identity, at least in her first published work of fiction, *Sense and Sensibility*, was that of 'A LADY' (it was advertised on 31 October 1811 as 'a New Novel [. . .] By Lady—'). In her lifetime, she never appeared on her own title pages as 'Jane Austen'.¹² It is she, as a 'lady' and author, who causes the absence of Mr Perry, not the 'lady' ostensibly in question, Harriet Smith—or even Emma Woodhouse, the real object of Mr Elton's attentions, whose tussles for control of the narrative make her a storyteller with whom Austen's narrator is competing throughout the novel.

'The Mystery' bespeaks, intentionally or not, the Austen family's habitual exclusivity and inwardness, its self-sufficiency and opacity to outsiders. The function of 'The Mystery' in its late nineteenth-century biographical setting is akin to that of Jane Austen's handwriting—which, far from being mentioned

11. Bharat Tandon, *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem, 2003), p. 62.

12. The title page of *Sense and Sensibility: A Novel*, 3 vols. (London: T. Egerton, for the author, 1811), states that the novel is 'BY A LADY'; 'assertively and modestly', as Tony Tanner remarked, 'the name [is] withheld, the sex proclaimed'. 'Jane Austen: "By a Lady"', *New York Times* (6 May 1979), p. 266. The advertisement appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, no. 13254 (31 Oct. 1811), p. 1, col. 4, and thereafter with slight variations in the wording. See also *A Family Record*, p. 188.

in that same setting as a way of apprehending the character of the author, was described by her niece Caroline Austen in a marvellously self-enclosed piece of redundant effusion as something that ‘remains to bear testimony to its own excellence’ (*Memoir*, p. 171).¹³ The Austen family tendency to close ranks and take cover within its own private little world was remarkable. One relative, Philadelphia Walter, described the clan as ‘all in high spirits & disposed to be pleased with each other’.¹⁴ This ‘hard humorous family’ was, as E. M. Forster put it in a 1932 review of Austen’s letters, ‘the unit within which her heart had liberty of choice; friends, neighbours, plays and fame were all objects to be picked up in the course of a flight outside and brought back to the nest for examination’.¹⁵ Austen-Leigh himself was mildly prickly on the subject: ‘There was so much that was agreeable and attractive in this family party that its members may be excused if they were inclined to live somewhat too exclusively within it’ (*Memoir*, p. 19).¹⁶ Within that closed circle was another, yet smaller one, that of the two sisters who were

everything to each other. They seemed to lead a life to themselves within the general family life which was shared only by each other. I will not say their true, but their *full*, feelings and opinions were known only to themselves. They alone fully understood what each had suffered and felt and thought. Yet they had such a gift of reticence that the secrets of their respective friends were never betrayed to each other. (*Memoir*, p. 198)

13. Austen family papers held by the Hampshire Record Office include a letter analysing Jane Austen’s handwriting (8 Feb. 1893); it begins: ‘I receive the impression of precision.—exactitude—Underlying the surface of this character seem to be many deep qualities which at first sight would not be recognized. Much tender regard for the feelings of others strikes me—This writer would not act impulsively or under pressure—Devotion to what appears to be duty is strong. Reserve forms a considerable ingredient in this character keeping many qualities in the shade’ (‘Character, given by Mrs Wingfield when holding a letter written by Jane Austen’, [n. p.]. 23M93/64/4/1/2, Hampshire Record Office).

14. See *Austen Papers 1704–1856*, ed. R. A. Austen-Leigh (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co., 1942), p. 131.

15. E. M. Forster, ‘Miss Austen and Jane Austen’, *Times Literary Supplement* (10 Nov. 1932), pp. 821–2.

16. One of the closest parallels to Jane Austen’s circle on this score is offered by the Burneys’ ‘familial culture’ of collaborative play, creation, and performance (musical and theatrical), as discussed in Lorna J. Clark, ‘Teaching “The Young Idea How to Shoot”: The Juvenilia of the Burney Family’, *Journal of Juvenilia Studies*, 1 (2018), 20–36 (p. 21).

Heralding the author's later experiments in novelistic reticence, 'The Mystery' also encapsulates the Victorian biographer's view of Austen's career and the dearth of event that appears to characterize her life. The play stages a reluctant act of disclosure in the simultaneous (and successful) hope of preserving its secrets. G. K. Chesterton remarked that 'A very real psychological interest, almost amounting to a psychological mystery, attaches to any early work of Jane Austen'. He did not propose a solution, suggesting instead that Austen was a genius who was 'born, not made', a claim which only deepens the very real interest as well as the near-mystery.¹⁷ With its conclusion in which nothing is concluded at the 'End of the 1st Act', young Austen's 'The Mystery' might nevertheless, as its author suggests, be considered a perfectly finished thing, since it is left 'as *complete a Mystery as any of its kind*' (*TW*, p. 49). The mystery is complete, even if the work in which it appears is not finished, because it remains unrevealed to us; indeed, it is impossible to solve. The most finished of literary works is the one in which the answer is never discovered or shared. There may be an additional comic element in play, involving an Irish use of 'completely', such as is invoked in relation to solving a mystery in Thomas Love Peacock's 'The Dilettanti' (1812–3):

Comfit. M^r O'Prompt! will you do me the favor to clear up this
mystery?

O'Prompt. Oh bless your old soul! you must not apply to me: for, by
the faith of S^t Patrick, I'm bothered completely.¹⁸

The pun on or joke about 'complete' in Austen's early spoof persists into her later works of fiction, where several characters' (often suspicious) habit of referring to something as 'quite complete' or 'very complete' or 'most complete' is already undoing the work of finitude that it describes.¹⁹ Such wording gestures

17. Jane Austen, *Love and Freindship and Other Early Works Now First Printed from the Original MS.* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922), 'Preface', p. xiii.

18. 'The Dilettanti' (1812–3), in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, eds. H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. (London: Constable & Co.; New York: Gabriel Wells, 1924–34), vol. 7: *Poems and Plays* (1931), p. 356. Compare *Headlong Hall* (1816), in which Sir Patrick O'Prism declares 'by my soul, I'm bothered completely'. [Thomas Love Peacock], *Headlong Hall* (London: T. Hookham, Jun., and Co., 1816), p. 73.

19. For 'quite complete', see for example *Emma*, vol. 1, ch. 14, p. 129; for 'very complete', see for example *MP*, vol. 2, ch. 8, p. 295, *Emma*, vol. 3, ch. 2, p. 355; for 'most complete', see for example *NA*, vol. 1, ch. 9, p. 61, *S&S*, vol. 1, ch. 11, p. 252, *MP*, vol. 1, ch. 6, p. 62. *Emma* has more examples than any other Austen novel of 'complete' and its cognates.

to the larger moral point that ‘complete truth’ is a truly uncommon property of ‘any human disclosure’ (*Emma*, vol. 3, ch. 13, p. 470); these communications will almost always retain an element of uncertainty or inconclusiveness.

‘The Mystery’, of all Jane Austen’s early texts, best reflects or rather anticipates, in comically miniaturized and accelerated form, the family biographer’s insistence on a ‘personal obscurity’ in his subject that is ‘so complete’ as virtually to strangle the memorial impulse (*Memoir*, p. 90). The playlet takes the ‘gift of reticence’ to its logical conclusion in betraying virtually nothing of what its characters are talking about. Its position within the biographical narrative of 1871 may officially serve as evidence of ‘the first stirrings of talent’ within the young Austen; perhaps even more importantly, it is made to introduce the mature novelist’s reported opinion that ‘such an early habit of composition’ should not be encouraged (*Memoir*, p. 42). Releasing one tantalizing fragment of the teenage author’s compositions, Austen-Leigh could not allow himself to do so without making it part of a general campaign against such writing’s existence. That campaign that is all the more curious in view of his own early compositions and collaborations with his aunt in her unpublished works: he supplied continuations to ‘Evelyn’, and ‘Kitty, or the Bower’, the two unfinished tales in ‘Volume the Third.’²⁰ It was his own career as an aspiring teenage novelist that prompted Austen’s famous description of her writing as ‘the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labour’ (*Letters*, 16–17 Dec. 1816, p. 337).

In November 1814 Austen wrote to her niece Anna about the latter’s novel, ‘Indeed, I do think you get on very fast. I wish other people of my acquaintance could compose as rapidly’; one month later, to Anna’s younger half-sister Caroline, she repeated the sentiment even more emphatically: ‘I wish I could finish Stories as fast as you can’ (*Letters*, pp. 296–7, 301).²¹ The desirability or not of completion as it relates to completeness—the need to have done, even if elements of the work are left undone or uncertain—is rehearsed in many of Austen’s early as well as late pieces of fiction. The opening tale in ‘Volume the First’, ‘Frederic & Elfrida’, is dedicated to Martha Lloyd in gratitude for ‘finishing my muslin Cloak’. The story that follows shows an interest in muslins (‘the different excellencies of Indian & English’, *TW*, p. 5) and an even stronger desire to reach the finish line. The first chapter is already

20. See Kathryn Sutherland, ‘From Kitty to Catharine, James Edward Austen’s Hand in *Volume the Third*’, *Review of English Studies*, 66 (2015), 124–43.

21. Compare ‘you write so fast’ (to Anna Austen, 9–18 Sept. 1814, *Letters*, p. 288).

wrapping things up: 'so ended this little adventure, much to the satisfaction of all parties' (*TW*, p. 3). As an adult, Austen remained averse to protracting the final stages of her stories, on one occasion imputing to the reader her own impatience to have done:

The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity. [. . .] I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience. (*NA*, vol. 2, ch. 16, pp. 259, 261)²²

In Austen's first compositions, characters are thrust forward as finished without any effort to lend them plausibility; stories break off without the distribution of just rewards and punishments, or in some cases any events deserving the name. Tragedies are 'not worth reading,' perhaps because they imply a sort of justice or completion for which the young author has no appetite ('The History of England,' *TW*, p. 124). Two other early works in 'Volume the First' are, like 'The Mystery,' styled 'unfinished' in their titles while sporting 'Finis' as their last word ('Sir William Mountague an unfinished performance'; 'Memoirs of Mr Clifford an unfinished tale—,' *TW*, pp. 34–6). Many years later, Austen wrote 'Finis' and the date (18 July 1816) at the end of *Persuasion*, before deciding to re-write the last chapters (*JAFM*, vol. 4, p. 282), suggesting perhaps a continued sense of the provisional as far as endings were concerned.²³ In her published novels, the resistance to finality that shapes her early tales becomes a moral problem or question as well as a joke about the limits of novelistic 'pictures of perfection' (*Letters*, 23 March 1817, p. 350). There is sometimes, too, a perceptible impatience with the generic requirements of marriage fiction which seems in turn to generate a refusal quite to conclude, or an ending that is wilfully inadequate. For the teenage Austen, partiality of

22. Compare the last paragraph of 'Lady Susan': 'I leave him therefore to all the Pity that anybody can give him' (*JAFM*, vol. 3, pp. 639–41), and a deleted passage in a draft closing chapter of *Persuasion*: 'Bad Morality again. [. . .] I [. . .] shall leave it to the mercy of Mothers & Chaperones & Middleaged Ladies in general' (*JAFM*, vol. 4, p. 269).

23. 'The three Sisters' ('Volume the First') and 'Lesley-Castle' ('Volume the Second') are described in their titles as 'unfinished' but do not have 'Finis' written at the end (*TW*, pp. 52, 62, 96, 119).

feeling and narration such as that which governs her ‘partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian’ (*TW*, p. 120)—‘partiality’ in the twin senses of incompleteness and personal bias—is a matter of eluding detection, a game of impersonation without responsibility or consequences.

There was nothing sudden or spectacular about Jane Austen’s rise to widespread acclaim. It has taken an especially long time for her earliest writings to gain critical attention and discussion, let alone interest and praise. Richard Simpson, reviewing Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir* in 1870, was exceptional in construing her teenage works as direct evidence of her development from a ‘critic’ into an ‘artist’:

She has left many manuscripts, which her family refuses to publish, on the ground of their not being worth it. None of them were intended for publication; they were exercises, not studies. What she wrote was worked up by incessant labour into its perfect form.²⁴

Simpson’s brusque appraisal (‘refuses to publish’, ‘not being worth it’) is a fair representation of how Austen’s family treated and regarded her teenage works. The first appearance in print of these largely burlesque ‘exercises’ was hesitant and grudging—permitted only after much throat-clearing and in the context of a growing public appetite for information about her authorial and biographical origins—and did not begin until more than three decades after her death. No complete text of the juvenilia was published until the twentieth century. Those who might have been expected to champion their arrival in print could seem as regretful as her own family that these minor works had ever seen the light of day. R. W. Chapman, introducing Austen’s ‘Volume the First’ to her public with an apologetic grimace in 1933, ended his preface on a cautionary note:

It will always be disputed whether such effusions as these ought to be published; and it may be that we have enough already of Jane Austen’s early scraps. [. . .] But perhaps the question is hardly worth discussion. For if such manuscripts find their way into great libraries, their publication can hardly be prevented.

24. Richard Simpson, unsigned review, *North British Review* (April 1870), repr. in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols., ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968–87), vol. 1: 1811–1870 (1968), pp. 241–65 (pp. 243, 253).

That Chapman would have preferred to adopt a more drastic course of action than to publish is suggested by a chilly final sentence, extraordinary from a man who devoted so much of his life and work to preserving Austen's words: 'The only sure way to prevent it is the way of destruction, which no one dare take.'²⁵ Brian Southam—also responsible for ground-breaking work on the juvenilia—continued to refer to Austen's teenage compositions in the reluctant, disparaging vein established by the author's family, suggesting that we need not regret the (putative) loss of more of her early works.²⁶ Chesterton, introducing 'Love and Friendship' (1790) and a selection of other writings by young Austen, wrote of one transitional fiction, unpublished in her lifetime: 'I hope I may be allowed to say that I for one would have willingly left "Lady Susan" in the waste-paper basket.'²⁷ As late in the day as 1989, the great grand-daughter of James Edward Austen-Leigh and co-founder of the Jane Austen Society of North America was confidently imagining that Austen felt 'ashamed' of her early writings, described here as 'tedious': 'The juvenilia, I believe, could well have been left [. . .] in a drawer, for study by scholars, who I venture to suspect are pretty much the only people who ever really peruse them.'²⁸ In comments such as these, Austen's early writings—'trifling enough', according to David Cecil—acquire a status akin to that of the tawdry treasures that Harriet Smith consigns to the flames when her romance with Mr Elton is finally proved to be a sham (*Emma*, vol. 3, ch. 4, pp. 366–9).²⁹ Unfortunately, as far as Chapman and Southam were concerned, the same could not be done with the 'early scraps'.

Such attitudes to Austen's first known works resemble that of Leslie Stephen to the Brownings' letters (Austen's letters have routinely incurred similarly dismissive responses): 'It does not follow that because I want fact not fiction I therefore want all the facts, big and small; the poet's washing-bills, as well as his early drafts of great works.'³⁰ The point Stephen is making does

25. R. W. Chapman, 'Preface' to Jane Austen, *Volume the First* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. ix.

26. *JALM*, pp. 18–19.

27. *Love and Freindship and Other Early Works*, 'Preface', p. x.

28. Joan Austen-Leigh, 'The Juvenilia: A Family "Veiv"'; in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. J. David Grey, intro. Margaret Drabble (Ann Arbor, MI, and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp. 173–9 (pp. 177, 178).

29. David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1978), p. 59.

30. Leslie Stephen, 'The Browning Letters', in *Studies of a Biographer* [1898–1902], 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 3, pp. 1–35 (p. 30).

not quite fit the case of Austen's teenage compositions; they are neither 'washing bills' (although these can be crucial, as in *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 2, ch. 7, p. 176; ch. 16, p. 260) nor quite, *pace* Q. D. Leavis, 'early drafts of great works' (although many of them both anticipate and overlap with the later novels).³¹ But the instinctive critical sense that it would be better for certain juvenile, unfinished, or otherwise seemingly trifling materials *not* to have survived—that the persistence of some kinds of literary evidence is to be lamented rather than celebrated—has long governed one strain of reaction to these works. It is reflected in how little has been written about them. Would she had blotted a thousand such tales, rather than taken such pains to secure them.

Austen's early works are, like the houses of the Musgrove family in her last completed novel (indeed, like the Musgroves themselves), preserved 'in a state of alteration' (the author's, and her family's), 'perhaps of improvement' (*Pers*, vol. 1, ch. 5, p. 43). Recent critics of these writings have adopted Dr Johnson's stance when he professed that 'All knowledge is of itself of some value. There is nothing so minute or inconsiderable, that I would not rather know it than not.'³² But they have not always known what kinds of knowledge or evidence the juvenilia might constitute, or what they could suggest as points of critical enquiry and comparison. James Sutherland hailed 'Love and Friendship' as 'a remarkable performance [. . .] for a girl of fifteen', but what he found remarkable about it was primarily the 'subtlety' that, even in this rather 'crude' work, keeps 'breaking in, and we become aware of that cool intelligence that was to preside over all her mature writing'.³³ A. Walton Litz was and is representative of many in his wish to accord the early tales a subordinate, preparatory role, 'chiefly important in relation to [Austen's] major novels', while stressing that 'it would be a mistake to place too much emphasis on the relationships between these fictions and the later novels'. Doing 'too much' of anything is by definition 'a mistake'; in any event, it is not clear how this sense of critical priorities fosters Litz's conclusion that the teenage writings 'are remarkably self-sufficient': parodies and burlesques are necessarily reliant on something

31. See Q. D. Leavis, 'A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings', *Scrutiny*, 10 (1941–2), 61–87, 114–42, 272–94; and 12 (1944–5), 104–19. Her theory is discussed in chapter 1.

32. *Boswell's Life of Johnson: together with Boswell's journal of a tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's diary of a journey into North Wales*, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. and enlarged L. F. Powell, 6 vols., 2nd edition (Oxford: 1934–64), vol. 2, p. 357.

33. James Sutherland, *English Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 119.

that exists before and outside themselves. Wanting to insist that these tales are mostly 'self-explanatory' seems to be part of Litz's apprehension that attending to the sources and origins of the teenage writings might provoke the same loss of perspective and the same indecorum that are dramatized by young Austen in those very burlesque tales; hence the critic's attempt 'to avoid wherever possible the byways of literary detection', to resist being misled.³⁴ Rather than look back to investigate where these riotous early works came from, Litz is determined to look forward, to concentrate on where they were going. He may be unusually keen to acknowledge these texts as a starting point, but he sounds keener still to get away.

Fashions exist in editing and criticism, as in anything else. One generation of editors and critics will incline more favourably to late than to early work—however those categories and divisions are construed—the next, by way of reaction to its predecessor, will find reasons to prefer first thoughts to second. In the choices he made about how to present Austen's incomplete working drafts of 'The Watsons' (c. 1805), *Persuasion* (1817), 'Sanditon' (1817), and 'Lady Susan' (date unknown), R. W. Chapman was himself inconsistent. He offered clean transcriptions of the first three texts, retaining contractions and oddities of spelling but removing corrections or deletions and recording them in textual notes. However, in the case of the fairly short novel-in-letters 'Lady Susan'—a beautifully written fair copy of uncertain date which has almost no corrections or deletions—he altered the appearance of his transcription in order to make it less polished than the actual manuscript. In so doing, he could not but change the character of the work. Where Austen had scrupulously demarcated one speech from another, beginning each on a new indented line and thereby presenting her text in dramatic as well as epistolary form, Chapman ran the speeches together, ignoring the paragraph and line breaks and the visual separation of one speaker from another.³⁵ The editor's intervening hand here combines with that of the unwitting author to achieve a collaboration of uncertain purport.

34. A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 18, 24.

35. For commentary on this intervention, see Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives*, pp. 207–10; *JAFM*, vol. 1, p. 20. For direct comparison of Austen's manuscript with Chapman's edition, see *Jane Austen's Lady Susan: A Facsimile of the Manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library and the 1925 Printed Edition*, intro. A. Walton Litz (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989).

Chapman's aim was presumably to lessen the strikingly theatrical appearance of these dialogues within letters—a quality that early epistolary Austen shared with her beloved Samuel Richardson—and instead to make the tale look more like the draft of a later conventional third-person novel. Her nephew reported that Austen's

knowledge of Richardson's works was such as no one is likely again to acquire [. . .] Every circumstance narrated in *Sir Charles Grandison*, all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her; and the wedding days of Lady L. and Lady G. were as well remembered as if they had been living friends. (*Memoir*, p. 71)

She may have collaborated with her niece in transforming *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–4) into a comic play, *Sir Charles Grandison or The happy Man*.³⁶ Whether she did so or not, the young Austen seems to have responded to epistolary fiction as a form of theatre, with the potential for dramatic adaptation and performance.³⁷ When it came to transcribing successive letters in 'Lady Susan', it would therefore make sense for her to have given unusual care and attention to the division of one speaker and speech from another. In Chapman's version of the text, with this aspect of its presentation altered, Austen's unpublished manuscript has been made to appear less directly imitative of an eighteenth-century predecessor and more directly preparatory for her later published fiction. Rather than look back to the 1750s, this version of 'Lady Susan' looks forward to the 1810s (estimates of the novella's date of composition range from 1793 to 1812, giving it an uniquely mobile position in Austen's career; see *JAFM*, vol. 3, pp. 297–8).³⁸ The text is subtly reconfigured by Chapman so as to suggest imminent renunciation of the epistolary mode, and thus to fall in with 'teleological assumptions about the development of narrative forms' as

36. See Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (London: Methuen, 1973); Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002); Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002).

37. Brian Southam claimed the playlet was composed by Austen—the 53-page manuscript appears to be in her hand—but this is unlikely. Family tradition ascribes it to a very young Anna Austen (later Lefroy); see *JALM*, pp. 136–40; Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives*, pp. 246–7.

38. On establishing the date of the text, see also Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 45–6.

most influentially rehearsed in Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957).³⁹

The fact that 'Lady Susan' was not completed, other than by a relatively brief non-epistolary conclusion, seems to endorse Chapman's reading of its place within Austen's career and in the historical development of the novel. Fictional letters had to be abandoned in order for the author and her genre to progress. From now on, Austen would strive to finish and to publish, and those finished publications would not be epistolary. But there is at least one other way of reading 'Lady Susan'. If it is a failure—and it is far from clear why it should be considered as such—it might be for reasons that have nothing to do with the letter-form. Perhaps, in its very conclusion in multiple marriages, a younger Austen would have considered 'Lady Susan' a let-down. The heroine, a beautiful villain, ends up yoked to an empty-headed (albeit rich) man. She gains respectability, and the price is freedom. Lady Susan's triumph cannot but feel pyrrhic, at least by comparison with the fate of a comparably resourceful, albeit far less developed, heroine, Eliza in 'Volume the First':

No sooner was she reinstated in her accustomed power at Harcourt Hall, than she raised an Army, with which she entirely demolished the Dutchess's Newgate, snug as it was, and by that act, gained the Blessings of thousands, & the Applause of her own Heart. ('Henry & Eliza,' *TW*, p. 32)

If we accept Southam's suggestion that 'Lady Susan' was composed in two phases, across a period of perhaps ten years or more, significant alterations could have been made to the draft during fair copying, and the 'Conclusion' may well have been a late addition.⁴⁰ Between starting and finishing 'Lady Susan', how might Austen and her attitude to conclusions have changed? The possible ten-year divide between the author who wrote most of the tale and the author who brought it to a close might even be alluded to in the two women—a decade apart in age—who appear in the very last sentence of 'Lady Susan': 'For myself, I confess that I can pity only Miss Manwaring, who coming to Town & putting herself to an expence in Cloathes, which impoverished

39. David Owen, 'The Failed Text That Wasn't: Jane Austen's *Lady Susan*', in *The Failed Text: Literature and Failure*, ed. José Luis Martínez-Duenās Espejo and Rocío G. Sumerilla (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 81–96 (p. 88: citing Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook). On the choice of epistolary form as 'regressive', see *ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

40. See *JALM*, pp. 45–52; B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen: A Students' Guide to the Later Manuscript Works* (London: Concord Books, 2007), pp. 26–7.

her for two years, on purpose to secure him, was defrauded of her due by a Woman ten years older than herself. / FINIS' (*JAFM*, vol. 3, p. 641). Could this 'Conclusion' be written in the voice of an older Austen, ironically confessing to pity 'For myself', the younger author she once was—someone who is now being defrauded of her right to this work by a mature Austen who has sailed in and married off her characters, thereby putting an end to and a dampener on things? If so, the irony would be compounded by the fact that the marriage for which Miss Manwaring had been planning (and spending) is itself left unaccomplished; it is the price of authorial completion.

Partly because of their perceived status—until very recently—as mere trifles, partly because of the 'damage [...] done to these early works by the determined tendency to consider them only or chiefly in light of the great works to come', very few readers encounter Austen's first writings before they have read her mature fiction (and relatively few thereafter).⁴¹ Thanks to the efforts of two pioneering critics and editors, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster, that is in the process of changing. The Juvenilia Press, established by McMaster and developed by Alexander, has published editions of the early works of (among many others) Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, and Sophia Burney. Alongside the International Society for Literary Juvenilia (launched in 2017) and the *Journal of Juvenilia Studies* (begun in 2018), whose work the Society supports, the Juvenilia Press has fostered knowledge of and enthusiasm for childhood and teenage writing across the globe. Its originators have always put teenage Austen at the fore of their activities and productions. In 2005, McMaster and Alexander edited a collection of essays, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, in which Margaret Anne Doody suggests that, if we read 'early works' looking solely for evidence of 'the mature author', we will be missing out.⁴² Alexander's edition of Austen's *Love and Freindship and Other Youthful Writings* appeared in 2014; in 2016, McMaster published a collected edition of her own essays, *Jane Austen, Young Author*, in which she discerned an 'ethic of energy' and 'ethic of sympathy' that persist from the juvenilia into

41. Jane Austen, *Catharine and Other Writings*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 'Introduction', p. xxx. See also pp. 86–7.

42. Margaret Anne Doody, 'Jane Austen, That Disconcerting "Child"', in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, ed. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 101–21 (p. 101).

the later novels. This book, like McMaster's, finds 'the continuity as notable as the discontinuity' between the teenage and the adult writer.⁴³

Jane Austen, Early and Late examines her first known works and their reception, initially within and then, gradually, outside her own familial circle. It focuses on the dubious chronology of her compositions, her likely sources and influences, on her comic and stylistic repertoire, and on the relationship of her earliest known manuscript works to the later, celebrated novels. In so doing, it considers the ways in which authorial careers tend to be presented, by critics and biographers, in terms of the subject's development from childhood to maturity, and asks whether such a pattern best captures the achievements of this novelist; indeed, whether it makes sense to refer to an 'early' or a 'late' Jane Austen at all.

Another interdisciplinary field within which this study of the early and the late writer might have been cast is that of age studies (or ageing studies, as it is sometimes known). Recent work in this area has stressed Austen's keen sense of the varieties of growth and experience, the losses and gains that come with maturity, and the associations of ageism with sexism in her lifetime.⁴⁴ As a precocious child and premature old maid, Austen perhaps merits the description bestowed on Jude Fawley's son, Little Father Time, in *Jude the Obscure* (1895): 'Age masquerading as Juvenility.'⁴⁵ For Edward Said, writing on late style, the boy embodies a 'sense of accelerated decline' alongside 'compensating gestures of recapitulation and inclusiveness.' This uncanny combination well describes the character of Jane Austen's unpublished work, 'a montage of beginnings and endings, an unlikely jamming together of youth and age': Kathryn Sutherland has remarked that her manuscripts 'appear to represent early and later drafts compacted into one' (*JAFM*, vol. 1, p. 44).⁴⁶

43. Juliet McMaster, *Jane Austen, Young Author* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 8–9.

44. See for example Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 75–96; Maggie Lane, *Growing Older with Jane Austen* (London: Robert Hale, 2014). See also Devoney Looser, 'Age and Aging Studies, from Cradle to Grave', *Age Culture Humanities*, 1 (2014), <https://ageculturehumanities.org/WP/age-and-aging-studies-from-cradle-to-grave/>.

45. Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London and New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 342–3.

46. Edward W. Said, *On Late Style* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), pp. 135–6. For a critical appraisal of what is meant by such a style, see Linda and Michael Hutcheon, 'Late Style(s): The Ageism of the Singular', *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, 4 (2012). <https://arcade.stanford.edu/occasion/late-styles-ageism-singular>.

When Charlotte Brontë wanted to criticize Austen's fiction to George Henry Lewes, she argued that it showed the wrong kind of face to its readers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Brontë saw only 'an accurate daguerrotyped portrait of a commonplace face' with 'no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy' (Lewes responded that Brontë had an 'almost contemptuous indifference to the art of truthful portrait painting').⁴⁷ For those who had known Jane Austen personally, disputes about the face of her work had a natural reference to the face of their author. Might one be a likeness or reflection of the other? Austen's niece Anna Lefroy was puzzled to think how all of her aunt's separately attractive features did not quite add up to a woman you could call 'handsome':

A mottled skin, not fair, but perfectly clear & healthy in hue; the fine naturally curling hair, neither light nor dark; the bright hazel eyes to match, & the rather small but well shaped nose. One hardly understands how with all these advantages she could yet fail of being a decidedly handsome woman. (*Memoir*, p. 158)

This appraisal falters into something less than 'decidedly handsome' before it pauses to say as much. 'Mottled skin' that is 'not fair'; hair that is 'neither light nor dark'; a nose that is 'rather small': these are perhaps not unmitigated 'advantages.' Still, it seems to be the failure of her separate, individually attractive facial features to cohere that makes Jane Austen something other than 'a decidedly handsome woman'; something that 'One hardly understands.' It is as if the onlooker, distracted into anatomizing the constituent parts of her face—each of which has its own distinctive appeal—cannot then quite reconcile them into a whole. Austen's face seems to incarnate the irresolution of diversity and unity. That her face was in some sense difficult to summarize—which may be one reason for the many disputed likenesses of her—must have been the impression of more than one member of the Austen family.

James Edward Austen-Leigh, her nephew, had his own qualified praise to bestow:

In person she was very attractive; her figure was rather tall and slender, her step light and firm, and her whole appearance expressive of health and animation. In complexion she was a clear brunette with a rich colour; she had full round cheeks, with mouth and nose small and well formed, bright hazel

47. *The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, pp. 126, 160–61.

eyes, and brown hair forming natural curls close round her face. If not so regularly handsome as her sister, yet her countenance had a peculiar charm of its own to the eyes of most beholders. (*Memoir*, p. 70)

His sister, Caroline Austen, on whom Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* often drew, wrote that:

As to my Aunt's personal appearance, her's was the first face that I can remember thinking pretty, not that I *used* that word to myself, but I know that I looked at her with admiration—Her face was rather *round* than long—she had a *bright*, but not a *pink* colour—a clear brown complexion and very good hazle eyes—She was not, I beleive, an absolute beauty, but before she left Steventon she was established as a very pretty girl, in the opinion of most of her neighbours. [. . .] Her hair, a darkish brown, curled naturally—it was in short curls round her face. (*Memoir*, p. 169)

Jane Austen's brother Henry left this impression of her face:

Her features were separately good. Their assemblage produced an unrivalled expression of that cheerfulness, sensibility, and benevolence, which were her real characteristics. Her complexion was of the finest texture. It might with truth be said, that her eloquent blood spoke through her modest cheek. ('Biographical Notice of the Author' (1817), in *Memoir*, p. 139)

Jane Austen's features, considered individually, were good; considered together, they needed to be summarized in terms other than those of physical attractiveness. One by one, they worked; as a composite, they did not quite amount to the face of a beautiful woman. Was this aspect of her embodied self one reason why Austen excelled at the description of bit-parts, and played games with zeugma, whereby one verb governs two different, incongruous objects, inner and outer? '[I cannot flourish in this east wind] which is quite against my skin & conscience', as she wrote; 'I will not boast of my handwriting; neither that, nor my face have yet recovered their proper beauty' (? late Feb.–early March 1815, *Letters*, p. 302; 27 May 1817, *Letters*, p. 357). The face, as a whole, did not quite add up.⁴⁸ Its inverse or mirror image, as it were, would be that of Muriel Spark's Chief Inspector Mortimer in *Memento Mori* (1959)—someone

48. On discussions of Austen's face see also Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, pp. 110–11.

with individually unattractive features which nevertheless combine to form a beguiling total impression:

At the sides and back of his head his hair grew thick and grey. His eyebrows were thick and black. It would be accurate to say that his nose and lips were thick, his eyes small and his chin receding into his neck. And yet it would be inaccurate to say he was not a handsome man, such being the power of unity when it exists in a face.⁴⁹

One of the valuable things about Cassandra Austen's pencil and watercolour sketch of her sister, probably in her mid-thirties—described by Chapman as a 'disappointing scratch'—is that it depicts a woman whose face somehow lacks 'the power of unity'. This is Jane Austen captured just before the age by which William Hogarth thought that a person's character might be 'written' in his or her face:

It is by the natural and unaffected movements of the muscles, caused by the passions of the mind, that every man's character would in some measure be written in his face, by that time he arrives at forty years of age, were it not for certain accidents which often, tho' not always prevent it. [...] It is strange that nature hath afforded us so many lines and shapes to indicate the deficiencies and blemishes of the mind, whilst there are none at all that point out the perfections of it beyond the appearance of common sense and placidity.⁵⁰

In the only authenticated likeness of her face, Jane Austen is neither decidedly handsome nor decidedly unhandsome, but rather a not entirely coherent mixture of sweet and sour, softness and angularity, the light brown curls and round pinkish cheeks offset by a sharp straight nose and small, thin-lipped, unsmiling mouth.⁵¹ David Piper, echoing Chapman's suggestion that '*the way of destruction*' might have been the best for Austen's early writings, described the portrait as 'a bad job; unfortunately [Cassandra] neglected to tear it up and now it must be preserved forever to salve the consciences of historians'.⁵²

49. Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* [1959] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; repr. 1996), p. 140.

50. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty. Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating ideas of taste* (London: for the author, 1753), pp. 126, 131.

51. R. W. Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 214.

52. David Piper, *Shades: An Essay on English Portrait Silhouettes* (New York: Chilmark Press; Cambridge: Rampant Lions Press, 1970), p. 51.



FIGURE 1. Jane Austen by Cassandra Austen, pencil and watercolour (c. 1810). NPG 3630, National Portrait Gallery, London.

It is a face that, suggesting a certain acerbic vitality as well as stiffness, looks somewhat at odds with itself. One explanation for its slightly pinched or strained aspect—perhaps recalled in that ‘sharp & anxious expression of her face’ that is ascribed to Mrs Robert Watson, and which detracts from her beauty, in ‘The Watsons’ (*JAFM*, vol. 4, p. 139)—could be that Austen often

endured episodes of neuralgia, or excruciating ‘face-ache’.⁵³ Lizzie Knight recalled her aunt walking ‘with head a little to one side, and sometimes a very small cushion pressed against her cheek, if she were suffering from face-ache, as she not unfrequently did in later life.’⁵⁴ Diary entries made by Fanny Knight record (on 18 July 1813) that Austen had ‘a bad face ache’; on 2 August, she observes that her aunt ‘slept here and suffered sadly with her face.’⁵⁵ The following month, Austen wrote to assure her sister that she had had ‘no pain in my face since I left you’ (15–16 Sept. 1813, *Letters*, p. 230). This was evidently a family complaint. In the same letter in which she reported her own recovery from face-ache, Henry Austen, whom his younger sister Jane (at least in early life) resembled,⁵⁶ is said to have been ‘suffering from the pain in the face which he has been subject to before. He caught cold at Matlock, & since his return has been paying a little for past pleasure.—It is nearly removed now,—but he looks thin in the face—either from the pain, or the fatigues of his Tour’ (*Letters*, p. 227). In an earlier letter to Cassandra, Austen wrote that Henry had sent ‘the welcome information of his having had no face-ache since I left them’ (26 June 1808, *Letters*, p. 140). (The term ‘face-ache’, according to the *OED*, is first recorded by the Hampshire naturalist Gilbert White in a journal entry of 1784; it could mean either the agony endured by victims of neuralgia or, in a facetious later use, the agony inflicted on an observer by the sight of a hideous visage).⁵⁷

Like the later examples of Austen’s teenage writing (especially ‘Kitty, or the Bower’), and like those stories summed up as ‘betweenities’, Cassandra’s portrait may capture rival impulses in the originator to produce a likeness and a caricature, a novel and a burlesque. Perhaps the sitter presented herself to the artist as a combination of satire and sentiment. These are not mutually

53. The description of Mrs Robert Watson originally read: ‘the expression of her face, sharp & anxious in general’ (*JAFM*, vol. 4, p. 139).

54. *Fanny Knight’s Diaries: Jane Austen through Her Niece’s Eyes*, ed. Deirdre le Faye ([Winchester]: The Jane Austen Society, 2000), p. 27. See also Annette Upfal, ‘Jane Austen’s Lifelong Health Problems and Final Illness: New Evidence Points to a Fatal Hodgkin’s Disease and Excludes the Widely Accepted Addison’s’, *Medical Humanities*, 31 (2005), 3–11.

55. *Fanny Knight’s Diaries*, p. 27.

56. ‘She is to be Jenny and seems to me as if she would be as like Harry as Cassy is to Neddy.’ See letter from Rev. George Austen to his sister, 17 Dec. 1775, in *Austen Papers 1704–1856*, pp. 32–3.

57. ‘face-ache n. (a) pain in the face, esp. that caused by trigeminal neuralgia; (also) an instance of this; (b) *slang* (chiefly *British*) an ugly or miserable-looking person (frequently as a form of address)’ (*OED*).

exclusive possibilities, and something of their mixed constituents is captured in the verbal portrait of another ‘sweet Sister’ in her mid-thirties, also called Jane, in young Austen’s ‘Collection of Letters’. The correspondent hails the 35-year-old Miss Jane, whom she has known ‘above fifteen Years’ (a key threshold, period of time, and age in these early writings), as charming and physically lovely: ‘in spite of sickness, Sorrow and Time’, she is ‘more blooming than ever I saw a Girl of 17. [. . .] There is something so sweet, so mild in her Countenance, that she seems more than Mortal’ (*TW*, p. 136). The glaring implausibility of Miss Jane’s sweet, mild face defying the years is matched by the cracks that swiftly appear in her sweet, mild conversation. When the letter-writer proves incapable of expressing her adoration and can only stammer out ‘How do you do?’, Miss Jane comes to her aid with a barbed comment: ‘My dear Sophia be not uneasy at having exposed Yourself—I will turn the Conversation without appearing to notice it’ (*TW*, p. 137). In this story, as in Cassandra Austen’s sketch, a face and a character emerge that are at once appealing and disarmingly spiky.

One way of resolving the undecidedness of Cassandra Austen’s version of her sister would be to make it more sentimental—younger, prettier, softer, and sweeter—as in the engraving that was produced for the 1869 frontispiece of Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir*.⁵⁸ Another way of resolving the original sketch would be to make it more satirical—older, uglier, harder, bitchier—in the manner of an eighteenth-century caricature. This would bring it into line with the countenance of Elizabeth I, as depicted by Cassandra in ‘The History of England’, and sharply contrasted with the sweet, red-cheeked image of Mary, Queen of Scots, that sits alongside it—an illustration that has been interpreted as a likeness of the young Jane.⁵⁹ The two monarchs are presented alongside one another, in parallel, as if they might be twin aspects of a single character (no other portraits are paired in this manner in the ‘History of England’).

Cassandra’s view of her sister in or around 1810 contains the potential for both Victorian and Augustan readings of Jane Austen’s face. It marries (to borrow Mary Russell Mitford’s terms) the skittish young ‘butterfly’ to the

58. On the sketch of Austen and its Victorian adaptations, see Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 30–38.

59. On the identification of Cassandra’s medallion portraits with members of the Austen family, see *Jane Austen’s ‘The History of England’ & Cassandra’s Portraits*, ed. Annette Upfal and Christine Alexander (Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2009), pp. xix–xxxvii.



FIGURE 2. Engraving of Jane Austen, after Cassandra Austen, commissioned by James Edward Austen-Leigh for the frontispiece to the *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1869, dated 1870). NPG D13873, National Portrait Gallery, London.



FIGURE 3. Cassandra Austen, medallion portrait of Elizabeth I, in Jane Austen, 'The History of England' (1791), 'Volume the Second'. Add. MS. 59874, British Library, London.



FIGURE 4. Cassandra Austen, medallion portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots, in Jane Austen, 'The History of England' (1791), 'Volume the Second'. Add. MS. 59874, British Library, London.

ferocious middle-aged 'poker'.⁶⁰ The relatedly questioning appraisal of Emma Woodhouse also revolves around the 'handsome', and invites us to consider how such a term does and does not cohere with other items in a list of qualities that 'seemed to unite'—but which might, on further inspection, be under less than perfect management or subject to a less unified impression than they appear to be:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. (*Emma*, vol. 1, ch. 1, p. 3)

Once the state of unity or individual coherence is called into question by 'seemed', a story comes into being.

60. *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford [...] related in a selection from her letters to her friends*, ed. Rev. G. A. L'Estrange, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), vol. 1, pp. 305–6 (3 April 1815). On Mitford's description of Austen, see ch. 3.

In a review of *Camilla: or, A Picture of Youth* (1796), the *British Critic* saw Frances Burney's high-life characters as probable or realistic, while casting her low-life characters as farcical, suggesting that two widely divergent strains of fiction or characterization here co-existed, side by side, in a single work (the same might be said of *Evelina, or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) and the satirical handling of its French and Scottish characters, by comparison with the sentimental treatment of others).⁶¹ More recent biographers and critics of Burney have tended to present the satirical side of her authorial character as one that was rejected as she grew older: her keenly observed playlet *The Witlings* (written and revised 1778–80), suppressed at the wish of Charles Burney and another beloved father-figure, Samuel Crisp, is on this view of things evidence of a direction the novelist might have taken—but did not.⁶² Jane Austen's career has often been interpreted in proximate terms: following the abandonment of an early strain of improbability or satire or caricature, she committed herself to sober, everyday truth to nature. Such is the family reading of her life and writing, portrayed as that aspect of growing up which permitted the novelist to flourish. Even a modern critic such as Margaret Anne Doody, far more sympathetic to young Austen's works than was Caroline Austen or James Edward Austen-Leigh, once construed the early writing as evidence of a choice Austen might have made, had she not been compelled to recognize that the market called for triple-decker novels of sentiment rather than for hectic spoofs. Glossing Chesterton's introduction to the juvenilia, Doody wrote:

That Austen can—and should—be placed on a line which runs from Rabelais to Dickens seems to me right. Or at least, Chesterton's statement points to the line to which Austen *could* have belonged—had the world and the publishers allowed such a thing.⁶³

This is the narrative of a career that changed tack, moved on, or recognized that the satirical impulse must be subdued to the demands of the reading public. But Austen's might also be a career that is understood as a perpetual

61. 'Her characters of a higher stamp are usually drawn with exact propriety and truth; but those either of lower life, or of a ridiculous cast, are, for the most part, strong caricatures. They are related more to farce than to comedy.' ART. XIII. *Camilla: or, A Picture of Youth*, *British Critic, A New Review*, VII–VIII (1796), 527–36 (p. 528).

62. See Frances Burney, *The Witlings and the Woman-Hater*, ed. Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 'Introduction', pp. x–xxxv.

63. *Catharine and Other Writings*, p. xxxiv.

attempt to adjust the rival claims of satire and sentiment, Gothic and realism, a combination of young and old in which the early quixotic strain is not necessarily rejected or chastened but rather encouraged to live on, alongside other ways of seeing the world. To do justice to Doody, she has herself recently embraced something akin to this view of Austen's works, rejecting her earlier lament for the lost exuberance of a teenage comedian. In 2015, looking back to her 1993 introduction to the adolescent writings, Doody found that her attitude to their author's development had itself developed into something else:

Jane Austen, so it seemed to me, had sacrificed a great deal not only of her original humour and wit but of her vision of the world, in order to please the circulating libraries and get published at last. [...] At that point I had not realized the full magnificence of Austen's achievement. She had not let go of the surreal and fantastic and edgy elements so wonderfully present in the first works. Instead, she combined these elements with the decorum and concerns of the courtship novel. Her daring pretence to be *only* realistic is as good as a masquerade.⁶⁴

Another way to think about the persistence of the early works into the published fictions is to consider Austen's plots. Her novels are often concerned with what it means to relinquish (or try to relinquish) the past, to reject a first love, embrace a new direction or pursue a second thought. First impressions—the original title of *Pride and Prejudice*—are proverbially wrong, but Austen's last completed novel, *Persuasion* (1817), might be read as a cautionary tale of the opposite kind: it suggests that first impressions are the right ones, and not to be easily given up (William Godwin observed that one lesson he had learnt from Mary Wollstonecraft was 'a minute attention to first impressions, and a just appreciation of them').⁶⁵ A marginal note beside the early-but-late passage in *Persuasion*—'Dear, dear Jane! This deserves to be written in letters of gold'⁶⁶—suggests how deep the feeling of and for continuity might run. It also provides a clue to Jane Austen's personal and artistic development:

64. Margaret Anne Doody, *Jane Austen's Names: Riddles, Persons, Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 387–8.

65. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, and William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), *Memoirs*, p. 273.

66. This pencil note in the margin next to the passage beginning 'How eloquent . . .' in Cassandra Austen's copy of *Persuasion*, is thought to be in her hand. See R. W. Chapman, 'Jane

How eloquent could Anne Elliot have been,—how eloquent, at least, were her wishes on the side of early warm attachment, and a cheerful confidence in futurity, against that over-anxious caution which seems to insult exertion and distrust Providence!—She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning. (*Pers*, vol. 1, ch. 4, p. 32)

If Cassandra Austen was indeed the person who wrote the pencil note beside this passage of *Persuasion*, what did she mean by it? The comment about Anne's muted eloquence might be read in terms of a private sisterly relationship in which both older and younger Austen girls had suffered the loss of an 'early warm attachment'. At the time Anne Elliot is described in this way, she has no hope or prospect of reconciliation with Wentworth. So the 'romance' that she has 'learned [. . .] as she grew older' is not that of reciprocated love, but of devotion—perhaps akin to that of Cassandra to her dead fiancé, Tom Fowle—that endures with no prospect of return. As Anne puts it towards the end of the book: 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone' (*Pers*, vol. 2, ch. 11, p. 256). Equally striking is the commitment to authorship that is quietly but forcefully intimated in the passage from chapter 4: both 'sequel' and 'romance' are literary terms, implying that what Anne or her narrator has learnt is in some sense bound up with the life of writing, and that a woman who commits herself to such a life is posing a direct challenge to the conventions of gender, development, and chronology. ('The author' is employed in a similarly ambiguous way, to comic effect, in *NA*, vol. 1, ch. 14, p. 113.)⁶⁷

Romance is the genre with which girls including the Austen sisters might have been expected to 'begin' their experience of literature, even if the results of such early reading were allegedly dire, and even if the realistic novel had, from its beginnings, deployed 'romance' as a catch-all term for everything that the new genre was supposed to have outgrown. It was certainly not meant to be something learned or acquired in maturity. Zak Sitter sums up the progressive or developmental history of the novel as it was understood by many

Austen's Text: Authoritative Manuscript Corrections', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 Feb. 1937, p. 116); *Pers*, pp. 348–9, n. 9.

67. Compare Anna Lefroy's reference to 'installments' as a way of measuring units of breath in her continuation of 'Evelyn' (*TW*, p. 207), and Austen's to 'volumes' in her comment about protracted courtship in a letter to Cassandra (5 Sept. 1796, *Letters*, p. 9).

readers and authors from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, a history that itself involves construing romance as simultaneously early and late:

Romance was at once ‘older than’ and a ‘juvenile’ form of the novel because the history of cultural forms was understood developmentally (or, alternately, providentially), and thus the past could contain only incomplete forms, prefigurations on their way to fulfillment in the present. [. . .] From the beginning, then, romance has served the novel as both adversary and uncanny reminder of its own origins.⁶⁸

Charlotte Lennox, shoring up her anti-romance credentials as the author of *The Female Quixote* (1752), included in the first number of *The Lady’s Museum* (1760) a translation from the French which argued that: ‘There is a scarcely a young girl who has not read with eagerness a great number of idle romances, and puerile tales, sufficient to corrupt her imagination and cloud her understanding.’⁶⁹ The sequel of such an immersion in ‘unnatural’ plots was, so girls were repeatedly warned, a way of living and thinking that had lost contact with reality and with morality. Read thus, the presentation of Anne’s character in the fourth chapter of *Persuasion* is akin to an anti-conduct book in which the heroine’s early submission to prudence yields to a mature rejection of such dictates in favour of romance. The woman reverts to the teenager. This is not the only such moment in Austen’s fiction. The surface-level interpretation of *Sense and Sensibility* as a work in which Elinor’s prudence is shown to be superior to the conduct of romantic Marianne—who loses her first love, Willoughby, and is hastily married off to Colonel Brandon—is confounded, as Tomalin notes, ‘by Elinor’s acknowledgement to herself that [Willoughby] would have been the right husband for her sister, in spite of his misdemeanours.’⁷⁰ The moral of the story, if there is one, appears not to be that prudence trumps romance, but that sisterly love constitutes a great part of the happiness of life.⁷¹ If we may assume that, as Teresa Michals has recently argued, the

68. Zak Sitter, ‘On Early Style: The Emergence of Realism in Charlotte Brontë’s *Juvenilia*’, in *Charlotte Brontë from the Beginnings: New Essays from the *Juvenilia* to the Major Works*, eds. Judith E. Pike and Lucy Morrison (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 30–43 (p. 33).

69. [Charlotte Lennox], ‘Of the Studies Proper for Women. Translated from the French’, in *The Lady’s Museum. By the author of The Female Quixote*, 2 vols. (London: J. Newbery and J. Coote, 1760–61) vol. 1, no. 1, p. 13.

70. Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, p. 159.

71. The closing words of the novel are: ‘among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost

novel throughout Austen's lifetime was pitched at a mixed-age audience rather than—as tends now to be assumed—at adults, it seems entirely apt to the form that it should freely revert from a grown-up to an adolescent reading of the world and that its emphasis should fall in the end not upon marital bliss but on the lasting affection of siblings.⁷²

This model of progress—from prudence to romance—entirely reverses the trajectory bestowed on Austen's career by her younger relatives, in which spoof romance is represented as passing away in favour of judicious, sober imitation of real life. It also counters the conventional model of female growth, whereby an early exposure to romance will vitiate character. But perhaps Cassandra and Jane Austen continued to imagine, in their sisterly realm, a quite different view of female progress. To judge by the teenage writings, Cassandra was always someone who understood the rules of the game—however nonsensical it might appear to others—as she is shown to do in the early tale that she commands, 'The beautifull Cassandra'. This tiny circular quest narrative, or 'novel in twelve Chapters', is set in central London and may therefore be dated to some point soon after summer 1788, when the Austen sisters travelled with their parents to enjoy what an early letter to Cassandra calls 'this Scene of Dissipation & vice' (23 Aug. 1796, *Letters*, p. 5). The number of chapters may reflect the author's age, since in 1788 Austen was twelve (turning thirteen on 16 December of that year).

'The beautifull Cassandra' might also be subtitled 'the romance of a bonnet', since it is with that alluring accessory that the heroine chances to 'fall in love'—rather than with 'the Viscount of—a young Man, no less celebrated for his Accomplishments & Virtues, than for his Elegance & Beauty' (*TW*, pp. 37–9). The profession of 'a celebrated Milliner' ascribed to 'that worthy Woman', mother of the beautiful Cassandra, has a whiff of impropriety and resistance

within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands' (*S&S*, vol. 3, ch. 14, p. 431).

72. 'The first commercially significant age-specialized publishing appeared with the rise of a distinct market for children's literature in the middle of the eighteenth century. These children's books contrasted with novels intended for a mixed-age audience—not with novels intended for adults. Specialization by age for adults occurred only much later in the history of the novel. Through most of the nineteenth century, the novel's core readership remained mixed-age. If we think of children's literature as emerging out of "adult reading", and as changing "adult" conventions of form and content to make them suitable for children, we reverse the order in which fiction was in fact age-leveled'. Teresa Michals, *Books for Adults, Books for Children: Age and the Novel from Defoe to James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 2.

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