

Introduction: Sharing with Our Neighbors

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[H]er faithful followers . . . do not want to share their pleasure with their neighbours. It is too intimate and too individual.

(Agnes Repplier, 1931)

It is possible to say of Jane Austen, as perhaps we can say of no other writer, that the opinions which are held of her work are almost as interesting, and almost as important to think about, as the work itself.

(Lionel Trilling, 1957)

Whose Austen?

Were Lionel Trilling alive today, he might be forgiven for deciding that there were too many opinions of Austen's work to "think about." At the end of the millennium the evidence for Austen's appeal is plentiful. Through the 1990s opinions of Austen's novels and of Austen herself have been tendered in a staggeringly various array of venues. And denizens of the English literature classroom are far from monopolizing the conversation.

The newspaper article reporting the formation of the Connecticut Chapter of the Jane Austen Society of North America tells interested parties to arrive at the first meeting prepared to vote for their favorite Austen character and then suggests that persons who see themselves as "expert lecturers" had better stay away: "This attracts readers, not academics." The World Wide Web is another place one is likely to encounter a definition of "reading" that, like that of the Connecticut Chapter, challenges the prerogatives customarily claimed by those of us who *assign* it. Multiple discussion groups convene on the Internet in order to trade observations about Austen's characterization and themes as well to keep tabs on the ever-more-numerous adaptations and sequels that replay or prolong her stories. To visit, for example, the particular corner of cyberspace occupied by "the Republic of Pemberley" is quickly to realize that the work of interpreting Great Books and of adjudicating between their acceptable and unacceptable appropriations goes on in forums besides those administered by professional scholars and journalists. And, indeed, as its witty

toponym suggests, this republic—a host site that welcomes the “huddled masses” and adheres unapologetically to a “matriarchal” form of “governance”—may come closer than either the university or the press can to implementing the democratic potential of the eighteenth century’s republic of letters.¹

Visitors to that Pemberley do not suffer from any shortage of topics for conversation. (In this they differ from Elizabeth Bennet and her relations, visitors to the original Pemberley who are somewhat daunted both by its master’s presence and by anxiety over the seeming impropriety of their visit.) Right now, Austen’s admirers have an Austen Boom to discuss—still. Consider—to linger with the electronic media—the numerous interpretations of her work proposed by the recent movie and television adaptations (Patricia Rozema’s film adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, released by Miramax in late 1999, Andrew Davies’s serial *Pride and Prejudice* [A&E/BBC, 1995], Roger Michell’s telefilm version of *Persuasion* [BBC/WGBH, 1995], Ang Lee and Emma Thompson’s film of *Sense and Sensibility* [1995], and three *Emmas*, if one adds Amy Heckerling’s film *Clueless* [1995] to Doug McGrath’s film *Emma* [1996] and the ITV/A&E adaptation of the novel [1996]). And should we opt, following Trilling’s lead, to move on from the works and trace the opinions held about Austen herself, we must now do more than engage the latest biographies (by Claire Tomalin, David Nokes, and Valerie Grosvenor Myer). We must also take into account Stephanie Barron’s putative discovery of a certain “Jane Austen, Detective,” a cross-dressed Regency Sherlock Holmes who has to date exercised her crime-busting skills in three mystery novels: Austen’s reappearance in the guise of a detective, a character type who may be revived repeatedly to investigate case after case in a series that postpones closure indefinitely, in itself testifies to Austenians’ desire to keep talking. Assessment of that talk might appropriately consider the debates spurred in 1997 and 1998 by Helen Fielding’s *The Diary of Bridget Jones*, a modernized *Pride and Prejudice* that made headlines for (as several feminists noted ruefully) the ostensibly postfeminist terms in which it also managed to revive “the marriage plot.” Perhaps an assessment of Austen’s contemporary reception should also acknowledge—although this evidence file is already overflowing—the popular acclaim granted of late to the ostentatiously Austen-inflected Aubrey-Maturin novels. Setting the twenty adventure yarns in his series aboard the ships of the navy in which Austen’s brothers served, Patrick O’Brian transports Austen’s novels of manners into the war zone.

It has been hard to get out of earshot of all of this talk of Jane Austen. Who hasn’t tired lately of all the rip-offs of her good lines? The *Economist* recently gave the headline “Pride and Petroleum” to an article about a possible “match” between Mitsubishi and Volvo; the latter, *if* Austen had

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written about European car companies, “would surely have been her favorite character.”²

And yet at the same time that this talk engrosses growing numbers of readers, and even those who, preferring the cineplex, refrain from reading altogether, there continue (as several contributors to this volume observe) to be a worrying number of propositions about the woman and her works that get to count as gospel truth. The Austenmania manifested nowadays by Hollywood studios, television networks, and the publishers of sequels is motivated, we are often told, by their faith in her broad commercial appeal—their sense, that is, that, ever the well-mannered lady, Jane Austen is “safe.” Where Austen is concerned, not only do these institutions feel sure of getting a return on their monetary investment. There is a matching certainty that she and her works present few interpretive or political challenges, that the culture has already got her number.

However, to scrutinize a little more closely what people do and have done with Austen’s books quickly leads us away from the hackneyed truths (“universally acknowledged”) that make up much of the current Austenian punditry. Committed to such scrutiny, the essays on reception history that are collected here work together, although not always in perfect harmony, in order to interrogate just how much there really is that can “safely” be said about the nature of these works or their influence—or, by extension, about the status of the novel, about the category of women’s writing, about the politics of realism, or even about the relationship between “great books” and greatly liked books.

Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees is generated out of three premises. The contributors to this anthology concur with Lionel Trilling in perceiving something “interesting and important” in the record of adaptations, reviews, rewritings, and appreciations of Austen that have accumulated in the almost 190 years since her publication of *Sense and Sensibility*. The second assumption we make is that there are more productive things to do with this record than to adjudicate between faithful and unfaithful readings. To concentrate on whether the meanings of the novels have been “misrepresented,” by either Austen’s admirers or her detractors, is to defer more interesting if more difficult questions: about the diverse frameworks within which audiences have claimed interpretive authority over those meanings; about the varying motives audiences have had for valuing the novels and for identifying with or repudiating Austen’s example; about the divergent uses to which such alternative Austens have been put in the literary system and the culture at large. For professional literary historians, approaching the reception history with these questions in mind, acknowledging that the cultural Jane Austen has been a crossover phenomenon, and acknowledging that Austenmania straddles the divides between high and low culture, and between the canon and the cineplex, can be hum-

bling experiences. We are reminded that we are far from having exclusive title to the real Jane Austen. Popular appropriations have on occasion preempted academic criticism in recovering aspects of Austen's works that our professional protocols—for instance, our narratives about the novel's "rise" or our habit of slicing up literary history into eighteenth-century, Romantic, and Victorian slices—may occlude from view.³

The third premise informing this collection concerns the prior readings that intervene between contemporary approaches to Austen's texts and the Regency context in which she produced them. This collection argues quite strenuously for the significance of past appropriations of Austen, often discovering, in the past, evidence for a less gentle Jane than the one we have encountered of late. For other decades knew an Austen whose status as a safe subject was less than self-evident. There is a considerable contrast, for example, between the idealization of the country village (Meryton and Highbury) that features prominently in the modes of Austen loving which occupied the late Victorians and the idealization of the great house (Pemberley and Donwell Abbey) that draws audiences into the cinema and then onto National Trust properties a hundred years on.⁴ It is that kind of tension between alternative Austens—between the historical conditions in which these alternatives are produced and between the dominant fictions of Englishness and of home by which each is inflected—that makes inquiry into readerships and their readings productive and politically pertinent. Through acquaintance with earlier reading practices, we learn the limitations of our own. The orientation toward the past that marks this collection should not therefore be condemned as testimony to our nostalgia (a term too readily used to malign Austen's admirers); rather, it evidences our desire to reactivate the past in ways that empower us to revise the future.

As it implements the alliance of cultural studies and cultural history I invoke above, this book unfolds in a roughly chronological way, moving forward from accounts of Austen's earliest readers, to the late nineteenth century, the era of high modernism, and the American 1960s, and then to the two contemporary ways of talking about Jane Austen that are placed in juxtaposition by our concluding chapters: on the one hand, those of television and the cineplex and, on the other, those that also involve our talk, within university literature departments, about empire and postcoloniality. One point *Janeites* makes is that the path which takes us from our early-nineteenth-century starting point to the present conjuncture—a moment when cultural continuity seems challenged both by new modes of global cultural relationships and by new communications technologies that marginalize traditional uses of print—is perhaps less smooth than we have acknowledged. Following that path, we encounter challenges, in the form of issues, particularly those surrounding sexuality and race, that we

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didn't expect to confront, and in the form of company (the belated Decadent Ronald Firbank; servants who use blackmail to take a class revenge on their employers; Scarlett O'Hara) that we didn't think we would keep. Contemporary scholarship has demonstrated just how hard conservatives have had to work at their mythologizing in order to depict Austen's classic novels as products of an era of classicism, "a world that seems to have been the same from everlasting to everlasting, . . . a kind of ideal centre of calm which was conceived, and for a time . . . actually realised by the eighteenth century."⁵ We certainly see ourselves as following the lead of recent feminist and cultural materialist work on Revolutionary-era and Regency history. But there can also be something misguided, and equally wishful, about the historicist privileging of the originary moment of a text's production. Or there can be if that privileging involves the notion that "the values and insights of literary texts are fully actualized at the moment of their creation," if it means proceeding as if two centuries' worth of reproductions of Austen do not themselves count as history.⁶ The very diversity of the representations reported on by this anthology signals our determination to do otherwise. It is now time to put not only Austen herself but also our readings of her back into the fray.

Austen and the Literary Canon; or, The Bard in Petticoats

And fray there is. Calling attention to the "interesting and important" dimensions of her reception history, Lionel Trilling omits (but only initially) reference to its disputatiousness. Yet if we wish to find other things to "say of Jane Austen" that could be said of "no other writer," we might do well to consider the vehemence of the partisanship that her life and works inspire (we are dealing with true love, not mere admiration), and, as the counterpart to such devotion, the equally passionate expressions of acrimony they can provoke (the very writers whom we might reasonably decide to classify as Austen's disciples are capable of switching abruptly from emulation to resentment). We should turn to the contentiousness that surrounds Austen's popularity—and, correspondingly, to the apologetic murmurs that are the background noise to many discussions of her canonicity. Are there any other writers who have seemed so vulnerable to being loved by so many in so wrongheaded a way? Repeatedly over the last 190 years, certain admirers of her novels have seen fit to depreciate the motives and modes of every one else's admiration. Indeed, a customary method of establishing one's credentials as a reader of Austen has been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways. With some regularity, other people's admiration is disrespectful, based on a misreading, or embarrassingly hyperbolic (given the humble pretensions

of its object). The opening that D. W. Harding supplied for “Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen,” the 1940 essay that helped inaugurate the scholarly study of Austen’s novels, exemplifies this attitude toward the Other Reader. Austen’s fate, Harding remarked, had been “to be read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked.” As a professional, his task was to uncover this irony, which had escaped a popular audience. His prerogative was to show that, in contradistinction to that audience, he knew better.⁷

Of late such claims to sophistication are encountered more frequently in the popular media than in scholarly journals. In the journalism occasioned by the recent Austen movies, it is a standard move for the film critic or media pundit to forge an alliance, comparable to the one Harding forges, between Austen and his self. (Often, it does indeed seem to be “his” self.) In column after column, commentators have lambasted what theory-obsessed academics do with the novels or lambasted the white middle-class women (the so-called frilly bonnet brigade) who go to the movies for the costumes and for romance. By such means, Jane has been rescued from undeserving claimants to her hand. According to Louis Menand, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, “Austen is surely the novelist most thoroughly embarrassed by her admirers.” Boyd Tonkin concluded his review of the movie *Emma* with a call to arms: “It’s time to rescue Jane from the Janeites.”⁸

Choosing his terms more carefully than Tonkin, Lionel Trilling wrote, in the 1957 essay that is cited in my second epigraph, of how Austen had often been the object of “illicit love,” and how response to her novels had often been “carried outside the proper confines of literature.” The stakes are higher in this comment than in Tonkin’s. It suggests one reason it is worth analyzing carefully the impassioned exercises in mutual reproach that have occupied large sectors of Austen’s audiences. It is not only that Trilling disengages Austen from licit love—from that marriage plot to which so many commentaries have wedded her. Here, anxiety over what other readers do with Austen also seems to shade over into anxiety over Literature—over the viability of that category, that way of cordoning off some texts from others, which was invented in Austen’s lifetime (as Barbara M. Benedict suggests in “Sensibility by the Numbers”), and which is said to be losing currency in our own. If it is possible to read Austen in ways that transgress the boundaries of properly literary reading, it must follow that the location of those limits is far from being apparent or fixed. In this way, the worry that Austen has been afflicted by the wrong sort of popularity seems a backhanded acknowledgment of the tenuousness of the boundaries between elite and popular culture, and between the canonical and the noncanonical.⁹ Indirectly, the guardians of Austen’s reputation who worry about whether a canonical figure can or should have a cult

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audience are admitting that the distinctions which her classic example is supposed to shore up—those between a degraded romance and a normative realism, for instance—may be untenable. “Romance” and “realism” may have little to do with stable categories of writing. They may do no more than index the varying uses to which readers may put a single text.

But it may be Austen herself who has an improper relation to the literary, not just reprehensible readers who love her too much, nor just, conversely, those reprehensible literature professors whose theorizing might pollute the shrine. In their discussions here of the varying ways in which Austen’s legacy was identified by Henry James and E. M. Forster, on the one hand, and by Virginia Woolf and other women modernists, on the other, Clara Tuite and Katie Trumpener each hint at how Austen’s gender can destabilize literary history’s orthodox narratives about tradition and the individual talent. At recurring intervals, Austen has caused trouble for literary history—this despite her reputation as the quintessential good girl. Her problematic femaleness is compounded by her spinsterhood and childlessness. For readers in our post-Freudian century especially, the distance that Austen put between herself and marriage represents a topic of ongoing, almost obsessive fascination. Witness the vile yet venerable hypothesis that the novels represent “a plain and obscure spinster’s written revenge on an uncaring world.”¹⁰ Witness the nervous jokiness with which one critic after another has made a match for Jane or offered to wed her himself (possibly to make his love a licit rather than, as Trilling would have it, an illicit one).¹¹ It is not clear that those who devise these arrangements or make these offers have Austen’s interests at heart. But arguably the matchmakers and suitors *are* safeguarding the interests of Literature. For, as an institution, Literature is also invested in narratives about the legitimate transmission of a patrimony. It is fundamentally troubled by the unattached woman’s lack of a legitimate relation to the official mechanisms of cultural transmission and cultural memory.

It is not only, that is, that multiple attempts have been made to pinpoint Austen’s place in the genealogy of English Literature—casting Austen, as, variously, the “daughter” of Samuel Johnson or “mother” of Henry James. (Such efforts are undermined by the novels’ persistent interest in daughters who lack a patrimony.) The very frequency of those attempts suggests a certain defensiveness. Commentators seem unsure about exactly how a woman *could* claim a space within the cultural heritage. Certainly, it was Austen’s prestige that originally legitimated the respectable, academic study of prose fiction. R. W. Chapman’s 1923 edition of the novels for Clarendon Press was the first to bestow on a novelist the sort of editorial care previously reserved for the English canon’s dramatists and poets. But Austen’s example can also make orthodox ways of accounting for cultural reproduction—our concepts of influence, tradition, literary legitimacy,

and canon; our schemes for segregating the literary from the popular—seem strange and skewed.¹²

So, scrutinizing the designation of Austen as a “prose Shakespeare,” a commonplace since Archbishop Whately and Thomas Babington Macaulay offered accolades to Austen in the early nineteenth century, we might do well to remark the distinction between the kinds of canonicity that a Bard and an Austen can claim—even though the account of the cultural Jane Austen that this anthology proffers has as its inspiration recent cultural studies of Shakespeare’s multiple functions as folk hero, English export industry, cult object and tutelary deity. On the testimony of those studies, there are few signs in Shakespeare’s reception history of any counterpart to the disputatiousness that distinguishes Austen’s. As I have indicated, the popularity or, worse still, the marketability of the novels has represented a problem for some custodians of Austen’s reputation.¹³ As the disputes about how best to like Austen and the ideas about rescuing her suggest, popularity and marketability appear in some way to threaten Austen’s canonicity. Their being greatly liked compromises the novels’ status as Great Books.

In fact, it may be that the complaints against those who read Austen outside the disciplinary and disciplined parameters of the literary tradition are spurred by something more than the perception that the others’ love goes beyond those “proper confines.” The complaints may also draw on the complainants’ private conviction that what the ravening and unwitting fan gets in Austen’s works is in fact Great Books Lite, the output of a lady amateur, not of a “conscious literary artificer.” In their concern over the impropriety and extravagance of the pleasures other readers find in the works, the most zealous defenders of the novels sometimes seem to signal that they might not be so classic after all.¹⁴

Shakespeare fans, we should note, can act like fans, parade through Stratford-upon-Avon every April 23rd sporting sprigs of rosemary, and not put at risk the plays’ claims to be taken seriously. No one, it seems, feels compelled to take this cult audience to task for their excesses and their failure to blush over them. But numerous readers of Austen have enlisted her in projects of cultural intimidation and regulation, making her into the knuckle-rapping schoolmistress of English letters. The novels are not simply *safe* reading, then, but in this guise a kind of boot camp. The roles Austen has been assigned often involve her teaching the reader and/or would-be writer a lesson, about morality, about linguistic propriety, or even about the renunciation of literary ambition. *She* chooses her words carefully. *She* knows her place. (These portraits of Austen as pedagogue are scrutinized by many contributors to this collection—Mary Ann O’Farrell, for instance, when she revisits the George Henry Lewes–Charlotte Brontë debate about Austen’s merits and demerits; Katie Trumpener,

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when she shows us a proprietary Edmund Wilson administering Austen's female fans a lesson in how the "art" that she practiced transcended common feminine concerns with "emotion" and "gossip"; William Galperin, when he traces how the reality effects of Austen's fiction, initially perceived as anarchic and even surreal, were reinvented by the Victorians as a normative, regulatory realism.) When a commentator like D. W. Harding asserts that Austen would be embarrassed by how she is being read, he is intimating just how mortifying it would be for us in our turn should we be exposed as bad pupils to her lessons.¹⁵

Those who claim custody of the real Austen have had one other approach to opt for when coping with the popularity of the novels—with the idea that people with motives and values unlike "our" own read her too, people who might be, variously, lay readers or working-class readers or Americans. In the past many commentators have chosen to deny the existence of a general audience for the works (a move more difficult to pull off now). That denial has spirited away much conflict. It allays the anxiety provoked when the mass production of the tokens of elite culture threatens to undo their elite cachet. Over the last century and a half much has been invested in the premise that the appreciation of Austen's excellence is a minority taste. Within this scheme, the novels—by someone who was herself, it is stressed, a member of select society—are said to appear tame and commonplace to "the multitude" (this, according to J. E. Austen-Leigh in the *Memoir* of his aunt he published in 1870); the novels' virtues are "of an unobtrusive kind, shunning the glare of popularity" (or so George Henry Lewes concluded in 1859, tacitly reassuring the reader that such modesty was among the authoress's virtues too); unlike Dickens (or so Sheila Kaye-Smith asserted in 1943), Austen "exerts no mass appeal."¹⁶

Introducing the second volume of his invaluable *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (1987), B. C. Southam demonstrates how this refrain has been picked up by one Austen commentator after another. He reveals just how shameless these efforts to turn Austen's works into caviar for the deserving few can be. In the hothouse atmosphere of these commentaries, Austen's popularity is a function of her *not* being popular. Hence Agnes Repplier's half reassuring, half sarcastic assertion that "Jane is not for all markets."¹⁷ One should not, of course, disregard the attractions of hothouse atmospheres. Surveying Austen's reception, we can discern the outlines of a sort of history of homemaking, in which, time after time, a spirit of clubbability is ascribed to the novels and then celebrated for how it knits tight-knit family circles tighter, or for how it sponsors fellowship in tight places—among them, as Claudia L. Johnson suggests here, the tight place of the closet. (Even the nation-state can be scaled down to the dimensions of a snug home, if one imagines, as, for instance, Anne Thackeray

Ritchie did in 1883, all of the English reading Austen together and proving their insidership by getting allusions the French would miss.¹⁸ It is hard to miss, too, the undertone of nationalist self-satisfaction imbedded in the later, apparently depreciatory suggestion that “Miss Austen” may be “one of those writers whom it is impossible to export.”¹⁹

Southam does not explicitly acknowledge the appeal of this home-loving way of loving Austen, but he does not, on the other hand, entirely resist the allure of its compound of togetherness and exclusivity. His introduction proposes that until Austen-Leigh published the *Memoir*, *real* interest in Austen was confined to a discriminating minority.²⁰ But Southam, as he proposes this, seems not to notice how he echoes the self-styled coteries whose claims to exclusivity he analyzes. As Barbara M. Benedict points out in her essay, given the difficulty of ascertaining anything from early-nineteenth-century sales figures, which date from a time when much novel reading was done under the auspices of the circulating library, there is a certain wishfulness to Southam’s conviction that Austen’s works were at first perceived as highbrow literature, and that they were only later commercialized and assimilated to the category of “popular novels.”

Austen’s Popularity; or, Janeite vs. Janeite

Even Southam projects into the past a golden age of a unified readership, an audience at once unswayed by hype about best-sellers and above the snobbish pursuit of cultural capital, who would have read as “we” think Austen’s readers ought to. We might say that Southam is envisioning a time before the “Janeites.” For this is the term that Austen’s audiences have learned to press into service whenever they need to designate the Other Reader in his or her multiple guises, or rather, and more precisely, whenever they need to personify and distance themselves from particular ways of reading, ones they might well indulge in themselves. “Janeite” can conjure up the reader as hobbyist—someone at once overzealous and undersophisticated, who cannot be trusted to discriminate between the true excellence of *Emma* and the ersatz pleasures of *Bridget Jones* or Barbara Pym or a Regency romance, and who is too *nice* in the modern sense of the word, not nice enough in Henry Tilney’s. This figure is soul mate to the avid consumer whose purchases of Austeniana—coffee mugs and Regency writing paper—help sustain, along with additional purchases of potpourri and porcelain from National Trust shops, what is a conspicuously female-centered and female-staffed gift culture (and what is, in addition, a mode of engaging past times that proves endlessly vexatious to the professional historian).²¹ Conversely, “Janeites” designates and accuses in their turn a cohort of cultural purists who, likewise transgressing against

common sense but in their own way, haughtily find fault with all the nice methods of enacting a devotion to Austen. According to this particular, populist fable about the motives that impel *other* people to read Austen, those Janeites-cum-elitists manage to find in the novels' portrait of patrician society an endorsement of their own anachronistic reverence for cultural hierarchies, and of their equally anachronistic, obsequious Anglophilia. (More than other figures in the English literary canon, in fact, Austen seems a lightning rod for the anxieties provoked by that odd, ironic vestige of Britain's imperial past, the fact that English literature is a curricular staple in schoolrooms overseas. In certain contexts, to some observers, Austen loving looks symptomatic of a bad case of cultural cringe: the activity of a not-yet-decolonized mind. Yet Austen's "Englishness" need not be taken as an article of faith. We cannot always count on either her rootedness in English literature's Great Tradition or her usefulness to the heritage cinema that promotes past times and old money—or so the essays here by Mary A. Favret, Susan Fraiman, and Roger Sales argue in diverse ways.)²²

The problem with Southam's assertion that Austen was thought of as a popular novelist only after 1870 is that it obscures the intimate relation between the history of the novel, Austen's chosen genre, and the histories of mass literacy and the commodity form. It distracts us from the instability of the opposition between canonical and popular writing: from how uses of the classic text and passions for tradition shift shape when, as the difference between Bardolatry and Janeitism suggests, we move from one sort of classic text and one sort of tradition to another. To map, as I did above, the myriad locations in which people have discovered the Janeitism they deplore is to remark that instability. A canon-loving insider who, nonetheless, insists on behaving like an outsider, and who through doing so delineates the inconsistencies that are internal to the institution Literature, the Janeite holds the secrets of the literary. And in this capacity the Janeite is a figure who, pace Southam's chronology, has needed to be there all along.²³ The Janeite—s/he who has responded too eagerly to the invitations to alliance that the Austen novels extend—is the necessary negative exemplar in a cultural order that since Austen's lifetime has called on us to love literature but not let our feelings get out of hand. This odd, abjected centrality is one reason Janeites receive star billing in the title to this collection.

And much can be learned from the peculiarities and peculiar history of their moniker. These go beyond the odd grammatical convention according to which "Janeite" can be used only in the second person or third. The term, now used almost exclusively about and against *other* people, was used differently a century ago: when literary scholar George Saintsbury coined it, he meant to equip himself with a badge of honor he could jubi-

lantly pin onto his own lapel.²⁴ It is worth noting the contrast with contemporary codes of scholarly conduct, which would warn the career-conscious critic against letting the wrong people know of her desire to, for instance, wear Regency costume and dance at a Jane Austen Literary Ball. Austen is a safe subject, but in the academy Saintsbury's high-camp style of Janeiteism is high-risk behavior.

The term "Janeite" is also one of a kind. Has the given name of any other writer been made into an epithet like this one? "Shakespearean" or "Dickensian" operate differently. Those labels belong to a chillier idiom. Neither intimates, as "Janeite" does, a reading situation in which writer and fan will be on a first-name basis.

Then, too, "Janeite" works, as corresponding terms do not, to highlight the author's gender and to imply that the reader's is the same. The intimacy of the reading situation the epithet evokes is enhanced by the suggestion that Jane and the Janeite share their gender and more: lately, indeed, some of the annoyance critics express when confronting the spectacle of Janeiteism seems motivated by their suspicion that the novels provide cultural spaces where we girls can all be girls together. But it is worth lingering over the fact that it is George Saintsbury who represents the first self-confessed Janeite, and that it is the artillery officers in Rudyard Kipling's 1926 short story who model the most celebrated examples of Janeite zealotry and esprit de corps. These examples pose a challenge to what contemporary common sense would make of "Janeite." They undermine current dogma about the gendering of Austen's appeal. And, in the same way, when Kipling's Janeites take Austen out of the Home Counties and into the trenches, and when, more recently, Patrick O'Brian makes the conversational skills and ways of killing time that her characters hone in drawing rooms into survival skills for Royal Navy officers, they violate what our culture thinks it knows about Austen's relation to public history.

Careless of Austen's safety, Kipling and O'Brian transport her into the theater of war and so exemplify Trilling's assertion that love for Austen is often carried (and carries her and her novels) beyond the proper confines: in this case, outside the private sphere, and beyond the limits of women's writing and domestic fiction. The examination of Austen's readerships and readings that *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* aims to initiate, an examination that ranges widely and does not respect unduly the borders of periodization or the boundaries between academic writing and other ways of talking about Jane Austen, will result in these sorts of displacements. Our common desire in this project is, to reiterate, to make it harder to assign (or consign) Austen to her proper place.

We emphasize accordingly moments when readers' responses to Austen have been shaped by and have shaped their responses to issues of public concern: war, for instance; or the rise of mass literacy in the nineteenth

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century and the appearance onto the cultural stage of new classes of readers and new ways of settling the boundaries between education, government, and popular culture. If that turn to history reveals Austen's audiences, like Austen herself, as a more worldly set, more tough-minded and even pugnacious, than is sometimes rumored, and if it has revealed to us, in addition, the ways in which our own readings of and trysts with Austen are likewise implicated in processes of social contestation, this does not discount the tributes numerous readers have paid to the Austen novel's power to send them *home* from the world. The Austen novel can make itself into our space of privacy, a power that accounts for recurrent references to its "perfect . . . village geography," to its modeling of knowable communities ("chat rooms" that preexist the Internet) and of ordinary, comfortable familiarity. Repeatedly in the history of Austen's audiences, the act of commodity exchange that is the act of reading is converted into something more tender. Arthur Ransome's 1909 verdict on the Austen novel—"it would almost seem to be written in a letter to the reader"²⁵—still rings true. The tricky dimension of writing about the history of Austen's reception is, then, how it tugs the writer in two directions, not only toward the public domain but also toward the spaces of intimacy, where Austen, as the confidante who knows and forgives our hidden desires and dislikes, has allowed our love. What this collection of essays finally proposes, though, is this: even when we turn from Austen's presence in the collective mind to the myriad ways in which involvement with her has given individuals a template for emotional life, we can expect to encounter fracas.

"More Talk of Jane Austen"

It makes sense, accordingly, that the essays which open *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* direct our attention at the outset to what I just described as the risky business of Janeiteism. In "The Divine Miss Jane: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies," Claudia L. Johnson highlights the confirmed bachelorhood and clubbability Kipling ascribed to his Janeites, alongside the high camp of the real-life Oxbridge gentlemen who in the early decades of this century declared themselves Austen's admirers, in order to recover a nonnormative tradition of reading that recent Austen scholars have forgotten. One outcome of the professionalization of novel studies that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s is that now there appears to be little doubt about the kind of congress Austenian reading promotes. But the fact that accounts of her conservative commitment to "the marriage plot" and to so-called adult sexuality remain orthodox in academic discussion has much to do, Johnson argues, with the

evaluative strategies a middle-class professorate used to discipline and displace an older and (as these professors claimed) effete and belletristic model of novel criticism.

Johnson's account of the two cultures of Austenian reading communities, which moves from Wilde and Forster to the quiz-taking, ballroom-dancing Jane Austen societies of today, is paired here with Mary Ann O'Farrell's equally wide-ranging examination of the moments since the nineteenth century when readers have imagined Jane Austen as their friend. O'Farrell's aim in "Jane Austen's Friendship," which reads critics' alliances with Austen (as well as Brontë's flamboyant refusal of such an alliance) against the friendships portrayed in Austen's novels, is to reveal friendship—and constructions of authorship and readership as friendly activities—in less idealized and edgier terms than the culture generally allows. The fact that within friendship's uneasy blend of "complementarity and difference," friends deny their friends' imperfections, or deny their friends the capacity to be different from themselves, can explain why readers fall so hard for Austen or feel so let down by her lapses. As well as allowing us to see the novels in new ways (so that, for instance, their author is not so much a celebrant of the marriage plot as a "poet of irrational dislike"), O'Farrell gives us a language for apprehending the narcissistic elements that subsist within all attachments to Austen, including those studied by the other contributors. Tacitly, she reminds us that, alongside the "influence" and "intertextuality" which scholars describe when chronicling Austen's afterlife, they also need to take account of something more emotion-saturated and riskier, better described as identification.

Johnson's and O'Farrell's accounts of the modalities of fellowship in novel reading and promoted by novel reading are succeeded by a pair of essays focused on how Austen's contemporaries responded to her. The first, Barbara M. Benedict's "Sensibility by the Numbers: Austen's Work as Regency Popular Fiction," engages the circulating libraries where Regency-period audiences encountered Austen's work and the now-forgotten novels—anonously authored, rapid reads such as *Love at first sight, or the gay in a flutter*—those readers would have found right beside that work. Benedict's interest lies with how Austen seems comfortable in packaging her texts as the products of the formulae of popular fiction and not of a unique sensibility, the Romantics' redefinitions of authorship notwithstanding. Indeed, in various ways, Benedict insists, Austen's practice ran athwart Romantic schemes for distinguishing kinds of writings and audiences, and confidence that her work could fit easily into the category of high literature came late. It depended on new claims about popular audiences and their natural proclivity for the sensational, claims that even-

tually allowed nineteenth-century tastemakers to claim Austen's representations of everyday life as the fulfillment of their own agenda.

In "Austen's Earliest Readers and the Rise of the Janeites," William Galperin is also interested in how critics have used Austen's representations of familiar things to legitimate their own projects—in this case, definitions of the novel's didactic task. If the link, which figures such as Walter Scott and George Henry Lewes helped establish, between a realist aesthetic and projects of social hegemony is now a given, and if literary histories have ascribed to Austen a pivotal role in securing that link, these truths were less self-evident to Regency-period readers such as Annabella Milbanke and Jane Davy. These readers in fact insisted on the novels' *divergence* from the model of probabilistic fiction (fiction that could be trusted to instruct impressionable young women about real life) that had been set in place by the eighteenth-century debate about the novel's superiority to the romance. They commented on the plotlessness of Austen's novels, in which the vivid details seemed to them strangely ungoverned by didactic aims. In this guise, Galperin suggests, these lay readers from the early nineteenth century may be paired with the Janeites as Johnson describes them, as an audience whose ability to wrest an oppositional yield from the fiction (and overlook its marriage plots) counters current orthodoxies not just about Austen but also about the regulatory, policing functions that are said to be enacted by the novel genre itself.

Benedict's and Galperin's studies of Austen's earliest audiences are followed by a trio of essays that take this collection into the twentieth century. These essays address in explicit terms the significance of Austen's legacy and influence, first, for her "queer nephews" (who modeled country-house novels such as *The Portrait of a Lady* and *Howards End* on the works of their foremother even while experiencing such inheritance through the female line as a source of much anxiety); second, for British women novelists in the era of high modernism; and, third, for Americans.

Clara Tuite's essay, "Decadent Austen Entails: Forster, James, Firbank, and the 'Queer Taste' of *Sanditon*," opens by tracing how, in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, Austen, preoccupied like her Mrs. Bennet with "how estates will go," endowed canonical literary culture with the genre which provided that culture with its own ways of plotting the (normally patrilineal) transmission of literary influence and legitimacy between the generations. Tuite also highlights Austen's radical departure from the genre of the country-house novel and its plot of heterosexual reproduction in her last, unfinished work, *Sanditon*. She engages the reception greeting that work when it was published belatedly in 1925, a moment of high Janiteism when Austen was herself being made over as a national trust property and image of England's cultural continuity. For-

ster's iconoclastic response to *Sanditon* indexes the anxiety of influence afflicting Austen's male descendants in the novelistic tradition, nervous about their female-identified genre. His depreciation of Austen also displaces, Tuite suggests, the ambivalence that Forster felt toward his *masculine* predecessors: the Decadents whom, within his review, *Sanditon* seems to predict, both despite and because of its belatedness and "queer taste."

The questions examined by "Decadent Austen Entails" about a woman's place within tradition—and about what it means (as Woolf put it) to think back through our mothers—also preoccupied the British women modernists whom Katie Trumpener studies in "The Virago Jane Austen." Austen's example troubles that idea of a women's literary tradition as much as she anchors the tradition in, for instance, her position as tutelary deity of Virago Press's reprint series of women's fiction. As Trumpener suggests, many early-twentieth-century women worried over the way that Austen-Leigh's story of how his long-suffering aunt wrote in the "common sitting room" was made to stand in, with all its overtones of domestic martyrdom, for the story of women's writing in general. In the wake of the suffrage movement especially, they puzzled over whether their identification with Austen's example and with heroines such as the "creep-mouse" Fanny Price represented a luxury that as modern feminists they could no longer afford. Yet E. M. Delafield and F. M. Mayor nonetheless paid homage to Austen's powers as social critic by rewriting *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* in the novels from the 1920s that Trumpener analyzes at the close of her essay.

"She never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself." Virginia Woolf assesses her Austenian legacy and measures the difference between her time and her fore-mother's by gauging varying degrees of domestic entrapment. With change of place, a transatlantic crossing, the emphasis in this way of construing Austen's situation changes too. As Mary A. Favret reveals in "Free and Happy: Jane Austen in America," since the days of James Fenimore Cooper, citizens of the United States, many of them men, have imagined her lighting out for the territory with them and so cocreating what Richard Poirier memorably called "a world elsewhere." Responding to the emotional detachment that positions Austen as somebody who, like an American, is outside English society but also authorized to have fun with it, they have claimed the English novelist as an ally. Favret meditates on the pliability of the concept of tradition and the geographical portability of an aesthetic package that back at home seemed rather to exemplify home: for W. D. Howells in 1900, by contrast, Austen's realism was a democratic project and accordingly her heirs were to be found in New England, not Old. Favret also emphasizes how often, in these American

commentaries, the new world Austen made was one marked by Jim Crow: how often the ordinariness of the “ordinary” people that Austen’s realism placed in that world was a function of their membership in the white race.

But there are other understandings of who is “ordinarily” admitted into the world of Austen’s novels. This volume concludes with two essays that engage Austen’s reception at the present moment. As these essays resituate the novels, first in that strange media interzone where high culture gets televised, then among populations coming to terms with the legacies of the British Empire, the homogeneous social world that Austen’s American commentators found and celebrated in her work ends up appearing rather more troubled than it did before.

In “In Face of All the Servants: Spectators and Spies in Austen,” Roger Sales considers the high profile that retinues of servants have in the recent televisual and filmic adaptations of the novels (the 1995 *Persuasion* primarily). He does so in order to argue for some unexpected effects of the novels’ embrace by the institutions of quality television and the heritage industry. The presence of these gardeners and footmen waiting at table does more than exemplify this century’s investment in making Austen’s high-class settings even classier, and in, more generally, reinventing the past so as to present the stately home as the real home of us all. Sales’s point is that in this case the historical details work against the grain of the idyllic qualities of the adaptations, emphasizing the anxieties of a ruling class whose members were forced to act out their lives before an audience of servants. At the moments when they come to seem not just picturesque extras but interlopers, the servant figures reconnect Austen to a set of Regency-period representations of the dangerous servant.

Sales’s remarks about the class tensions made visible by the TV *Persuasion* resonate with Favret’s suggestion about the strange echoes of *Gone with the Wind* in MGM’s 1940 *Pride and Prejudice*: that these echoes register how Americans could not help but inflect their reading of Austen with an acknowledgment of the Americas’ traumatic history of racial slavery. By wondering about why *Mansfield Park* has so prominent a place both in *Culture and Imperialism* and in the reviews responding to Edward Said’s 1993 book on the inextricable relation between the European aesthetic tradition and European colonialism, Susan Fraiman broaches the question of what Austen’s own relation to such an acknowledgment would be. In “Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism,” Fraiman, arguing for the confluence of abolitionist and feminist discourses in *Mansfield Park*, portrays Austen as a citizen of a larger world than the country neighborhood with which she is usually associated. Said’s attention to how slave labor in distant Antigua sustains the Bertrams in their position of social eminence in their neighborhood also redraws the

boundaries of the novel's world. But Said's historicism grants little in the way of a historical consciousness to Austen herself; in his view, her participation in public issues was unwitting, her complicity in imperialism automatic. Said's refusal to wonder about whether Austen was at home in the stately home—and his readers' readiness to embrace his assertion that she was—suggests something about the gendered logic that informs the project of postcolonial theory as *Culture and Imperialism*, a primer for the field, defines it. To make Austen an emblem of empire is to feminize the imperial powers and resecure the masculinity of the oppressed.

And why do this with Austen? There are intersections between Fraiman's essay and the essay that provides *Janeites* with its starting point: Johnson's discussion of Austen's usefulness for that middle-class professorate who affirmed their expertise by reappropriating Austen from Bloomsbury and from an effete aristocracy—who didn't just professionalize but simultaneously remasculinized novel reading. Apparently one reason that critics, then and now, center their narratives on Austen is that they rely on her to set gender and sexuality straight. (Whether this is because Austen's attitude to such matters is so evident or so opaque—whether this is a case of sparing the critic the work of interpretation or setting the critic an interpretive challenge—is itself open to question.) On the testimony of this anthology, there are, of course, numerous other reasons why Austen particularly must be the heroine (or villainess) of the stories that readers tell about their relations to the literary tradition or to house and home and nation and history, and why they so often adopt the example of her novels in order to do that telling. She is inside the pantheon of Western culture, a major fact, as F. R. Leavis wrote, in the background of other writers, and yet off-center—as the essays that follow emphasize—with respect to the culture's dominant narratives about literary influence and literary periods, about what realism is and does to us, about the relations of classic literature and popular culture. Such anomalousness may also be an aspect of what keeps us reading.

A reader of Austen, Lionel Trilling wrote, “is required to make no mere literary judgment but a decision about his own character and personality, and about his relation to society and all of life.”²⁶ Trilling is right, but—as if he were hyperconscious of the novels' classic status—his tone is portentous. His Austen is the intimidating schoolteacher, a hard taskmistress. In the place of his exhortation to duty, let us substitute Miss Bates's description of a reader's love: “such a pleasure to her—a letter from Jane—that she can never hear it enough!” (157).

Notes

1. Susan M. Braden, "Local Jane-ites: Taking a Turn around the Parlor with Austen," *Shore Line Times*, 21 April 1999, "Second Section: Out & About," 1. The Republic of Pemberley may be visited at www.pemberley.com.

2. "Pride and Petroleum," *Economist*, 30 March 1996, 58.

3. Roger Sales proposes, similarly, that academic critics have something to learn from popular representations of Austen and of the Regency (which counts as a "period" in popular memory, as Regency romances, fashions for "empire-waist" dresses, and interior decoration all suggest, but has no comparable standing for the academic discipline of English studies). See his introduction to *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1994; rev. ed., 1996).

Practitioners of Shakespeare studies have a better track record than Austen scholars do when it comes to coping with the mobility of the figure whom they study. The readiness of many of these scholars to admit that Shakespeare (like Austen) is wont to move off the pedestal or out of the ivory tower in which the institutions of high culture and higher learning place him has made their work a source of inspiration for this volume. Particularly useful accounts of the cultural Shakespeare may be found in Graham Holderness, ed., *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Michael D. Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and his *Big-Time Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

4. For an example of how the Regency country house represents the sort of picture of perfection for which we postmoderns should now read Austen, see Susan Watkins's preface to *Jane Austen in Style*, corrected ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996): "Here we will see *how* the country gentry lived—in an ambience of cultivated politeness. . . . We will also see *where* they lived, the aesthetic perfection of the English country house crowning an almost equally perfect landscape" (7; emphasis in the original). Here, by contrast, is Margaret Oliphant praising the "perfect piece of village geography" that she finds in *Emma*, in her 1870 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* essay "Miss Austen and Miss Mitford": "Highbury, with Ford's shop in the High Street, and Miss Bates's rooms opposite . . . with windows from which you can see all that is going on. . . . And the vicarage lane at one end of the town, . . . where the young vicar from his study can see the good ladies passing. . . . Nothing could be more easy than to make a map of it, with indications where the London road strikes off, and by which turning Frank Churchill, on his tired horse, will come from Richmond. We know it as well as if we had lived there all our lives, and visited Miss Bates every day" (304). See also Constance Hill, *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends* (London and New York: John Lane, 1902), which quotes this passage of Oliphant's at length.

5. Paul Elmer More, review of *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters: A Family Record* (1913), quoted in Southam 1987, 2:86.

6. I quote from Michael D. Bristol's helpful riposte to these purist arguments: see *Big-Time Shakespeare*, 17.

7. Lionel Trilling, "Emma and the Legend of Jane Austen," reprinted in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking, 1965), 31; D. W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," reprinted in *Jane Austen: A Critical Companion*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 167.

8. Louis Menand, "What Jane Austen Doesn't Tell Us," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 2 (1 February 1996): 15; Boyd Tonkin, "Emma," *New Statesman*, 13 September 1996, 39. I encountered the not-so-quaintly sexist phrase "frilly bonnet brigade" in *Facets Features*, February/March 1997, n.p., which attributes this label for fans of heritage cinema to British theater managers.

9. Compare Judy Simons's observation that "Austenmania both restores and distorts the reputation of the literary classic as a signifier of cultural value": "Classics and Trash: Reading Austen in the 1990s," *Women's Writing* 5, no. 1 (1998): 27–28.

10. I quote John Simon's recent version of the portrait of Austen as an envious spinster: see "Emma without Emma," *National Review*, 14 October 1996, 87. Simon, who takes pains to show that his remarks are authorized by the scholarly tradition, quotes Harding's "Regulated Hatred." His account of Austen might also be compared to the one on offer in Marvin Mudrick's *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

11. For critics offering to marry Austen, see, most recently, Richard A. Blake, "Plain Jane," *America*, 9 March 1996, 21: "Ours will be a tryst for the ages!" John Halperin betrays much anxiety about setting the record straight when, responding to a comment on the paucity of Austen's attachments that is made in Austen-Leigh's *Memoir*, construing "attachment" as a term applicable to heterosexual relations exclusively, he ends the title essay of *Jane Austen's Lovers* with a roll call of the names of the eligible men (a dozen, all told) to whom Austen may have felt "attached" (*Jane Austen's Lovers and Other Studies in Fiction and History from Austen to le Carr* [London: Macmillan, 1988], 24–25). Talk of Jane Austen has provided male commentators with a cultural space for exercising the prerogative defining them as men: the prerogative of doing the asking. The marriage proposal is an abiding feature of the critical tradition, though W. D. Howells admits of Fanny Price that he is "quite willing Edmund Bertram should have her in the end" (*Heroines of Fiction*, 2 vols. [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1901], 1:77).

12. Compare what Brenda R. Silver says about how popular representations of Virginia Woolf disrupt the boundary between high and low culture: "The boundary . . . mapped by Andreas Huyssen in his study of 'Mass Culture as Modernism's Other' that divides modernism, high culture, and maleness . . . on the one side, from women . . . and mass culture on the other, is a boundary that shivers and dissolves when you introduce an actual woman, Virginia Woolf, and not generic 'Woman' or 'the feminine' into the picture" ("Mis-fits: The Monstrous Union of Virginia Woolf and Marilyn Monroe," *Discourse* 16, no. 1 [fall 1993]: 95). Silver draws on Andreas Huyssen's "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," first published in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 188–207.

13. Another, comparable problem, as Judy Simons notes (“Classics and Trash,” 30–31), is Austen’s obvious reluctance to polarize “classics” and “trash” as rigorously as modern scholars would like her to: Austen shamelessly enjoyed novels like Mrs. S. Sykes’s *Margiana or Widdrington Tower* (1808) and Rachel Hunter’s *Lady Macclairn, the Victim of Villainy* (1806) (see *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 10–11 January 1809, 164; 29–31 October 1812, 195). Many women writers, conscious of the gendering of these categories, have been more interested in *collapsing* the boundaries that separate the literary and the popular than in policing them.

14. E. V. Lucas distinguished Austen from “conscious literary artificers” in 1900 as he introduced a new edition of *Pride and Prejudice*: quoted in Southam 1987, 2:28. As Claudia L. Johnson observes in the preface to *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Austen “has been admitted into the canon on terms which cast doubt on her qualifications for entry and which ensure that her continued presence there be regarded as an act of gallantry” (xiv). Some of the hostility to the current Austenmania seems to bear out the continuing relevance of Woolf’s insights into the gender politics of canonization: “This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room” (*A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas*, ed. Morag Shiach [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 96).

15. In thinking about the centrality that the emotion of embarrassment has in the literary system, I have been aided by Joseph Litvak’s *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), and Mary Ann O’Farrell’s discussion of Austen in *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

16. J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, appendix to Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 361; George Henry Lewes, “The Novels of Jane Austen,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 86 (July 1859), anthologized Southam 1968, 150; Sheila Kaye-Smith in Sheila Kaye-Smith and G. B. Stern, *Talking of Jane Austen* (London: Cassell, 1943; published in the U. S. as *Speaking of Jane Austen*), 5.

17. Agnes Repplier, review of *Jane Austen* by R. Brimley Johnson, *Commonweal*, 13 May 1931, in Southam 1987, 2:214. The continuation of this passage supplies me with my first epigraph.

18. Here is Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s opening to her discussion of Regency-period women writers, *A Book of Sibyls* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1883): “Not long ago, a party of friends were sitting at luncheon in a suburb of London, when one of them happened to make some reference to Maple Grove and Selina, and to ask in what county of England Maple Grove was situated. Everybody had a theory” (v). If you, embarrassed reader, don’t know to consult your copy of *Emma*, there to be reminded that Maple Grove is the name of the former stomping grounds of Augusta Elton, and that Selina is the name of Mrs. E.’s well-to-do sister, then you are like the touring Frenchman who has found his hapless way into this cozy company of initiates.

For Janeite fellowship and friendship, see Mary Ann O’Farrell’s and Claudia L. Johnson’s essays in this volume. Laura Fairchild Brodie has also discussed the ways

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24. Saintsbury declared himself a “Janite” in his 1894 introduction to a new edition of *Pride and Prejudice*. On the history of “Janeites,” see Lorraine Hanaway, “‘Janeite’ at 100,” *Persuasions* 16 (December 1994): 28–29.

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

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