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## Jane Austen, the Prose Shakespeare

DANIEL POLLACK-PELZNER

“We all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions”

—Edmund Bertram to Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*

Learning to talk, in a Jane Austen novel, means learning to talk Shakespeare. In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram has his sons learn elocution by reciting “To be or not to be” and the funeral orations from *Julius Caesar*; in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland trains to be a heroine by memorizing stock quotations from *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*; and the heroine of *Emma* asserts her romantic sophistication by imagining “a Hartfield edition of Shakespeare” that would gloss “The course of true love never did run smooth” in line with the matrimonial straightaway she purports to detect in a suitor’s correspondence (p. 80).<sup>1</sup> Of course, these mis-educations are immediately undercut by circumstances, just as Edmund Bertram’s truth universally acknowledged in *Mansfield Park*—that “we all talk Shakespeare”—is deflated by the “bow of mock gravity” with which Henry Crawford concedes it (p. 391). Defending the propriety of staging a private theatrical, Edmund’s older brother “can conceive no greater harm or danger to any of us in conversing in the elegant written language of some respectable author than in chattering in words of our own” (though *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* are rejected for the Mansfield production). But Tom’s defense of talking in an author’s voice is itself a performance that falls flat: his fellow lead (or prop), Lady Bertram, whose alleged anxiety a play could quell, is revealed to be dozing quite tranquilly in her husband’s absence (pp. 147-8).

These discussions of the propriety and sources of speech arise in a novel, *Mansfield Park*, that repeatedly calls our attention to the shifting distinctions between speaking, reading, and acting. Fanny Price “must *read* the part” that Miss Crawford requests, for she “can *say* very little of it,” and of course she “cannot act” (pp. 198, 171); whereas Edmund distinguishes a general ability to “talk Shakespeare” or “to know him in bits and scraps” from Crawford’s capacity “to read him well aloud,” which “reading brought all his acting” back to Fanny’s mind (pp. 390-1). And Austen presents these discussions in narrative discourse that blurs the boundary between novelistic description and stage direction, as in Crawford’s account of poor reading from the pulpit: “I must confess being not always so attentive as I ought to be—(here was a glance at Fanny) that nineteen times out of twenty I am thinking how such a prayer ought to be read, and longing to have it to read myself—Did you speak?’ stepping eagerly to Fanny, and addressing her in a softened voice” (pp. 393-4). Having this passage to read ourselves, we must articulate a speech about speaking that contains three stage directions (a parenthetical gesture, a reference to another character’s unheard speech, and two participial actions): a mini-performance in prose.

Rather than revive the long debate over whether Austen supports or opposes theatricality, this essay shows the connection between acting Austen and talking Shakespeare, between the ethical concerns over speaking another’s words and the narrative strategies that make reading *Emma* or *Mansfield Park* a kind of closet drama.<sup>ii</sup> The range of modes in which Austen uses Shakespeare—cited as instruction in *Northanger Abbey*, read aloud in *Sense and Sensibility*, reenacted in *Pride and Prejudice*, ironically annotated in *Emma*, recited and dramatized in *Mansfield Park*, and recalled in *Persuasion*—reflects the breadth of her discursive practice. Austen’s representation of Shakespeare mediates her performative categories, illuminating her

theatrical technique as well as the cultures of quotation and drama in which her novels operate—and suggesting a surprising account of the development of interiority in the novel.

This essay opens with an alternative history of free indirect discourse, often seen as one of Austen's chief narrative accomplishments, which shows her connection to early nineteenth-century prose versions of Shakespeare. In their popular early nineteenth-century *Tales from Shakespeare*, Charles and Mary Lamb turned dramatic dialogue and soliloquies into prose narration, employing techniques for rendering a character's thought and idiom in a third-person voice. Austen, heralded as a "prose Shakespeare" by nineteenth-century critics, built on these techniques in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* to fuse her characters' voices with her narrator's. Thus, the style we call free indirect discourse, a signal achievement of novelistic representation, is linked to a means for representing Shakespeare in narrative form; the "prose Shakespeare" was writing Shakespearean prose. Austen's novels also develop an inverse free indirect discourse, the infusion of the narrative voice into characters' speech, when Austen inserts stage directions into dialogue. Scenes in which Fanny Price listens to Henry Crawford read aloud *Henry VIII*, Emma Woodhouse debates the aptness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a precedent for her romantic schemes, and Anne Elliot cites *Twelfth Night* to prove the constancy of women's love offer mini-Shakespearean plays of attention, blending public action with private reflection. Attending to Austen as a "prose Shakespeare" illuminates both her narrative practice and Shakespeare's resonance in nineteenth-century prose, for Shakespearean technique and quotation script Austen's dramas of reading.

## I. Free Indirect Shakespeare

An alternative history of free indirect discourse? In the standard history, developed by Roy Pascal, Dorrit Cohn, Ann Banfield, and Franco Moretti, free indirect discourse emerges as a full-fledged narrative technique at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the novels of Jane Austen.<sup>iii</sup> (Though it will not be until the end of the nineteenth century that French critics give it a name, *style indirect libre*, which some Anglo-American critics adopt as “free indirect discourse” later in the twentieth century.) It flowers along with the nineteenth-century novel, through Flaubert and Henry James, and its antecedents are novelistic: a fleeting passage in Fanny Burney, perhaps, or in Austen’s celebrated fusion of Fielding’s external mode with Richardson’s internal mode; the heritage of the comic epic poem in prose and the epistolary genre combine to create the distinctive voice of the novel: that is, a third-person, past-tense representation of a character’s thought or speech without the introductory tags “she thought that” or “she said that,” affording new possibilities for the dialectic between irony and sympathy in the representation of interiority.

If that is the authorized version, novel-centric with Jane Austen at its origin point, I would like to offer an alternative history that runs instead through the drama, and in particular, through Shakespeare. Shakespeare does make a cameo appearance in the standard history, too. In *Transparent Minds*, her great taxonomy of modes for presenting consciousness in fiction, Dorrit Cohn gives the example of an 1889 German story called *Papa Hamlet*, about a melancholy Shakespearean actor. In *Papa Hamlet*, the narrator expresses this actor’s depression through Hamlet’s speeches, changed from first- to third-person and present to past tense. So Hamlet’s lament, “I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth,” transferred to the situation of this Shakespearean actor, becomes the narrator’s: “He had of late—but wherefore he knew not—lost all his mirth.” Cohn uses this example to define the style she names *narrated*

*monologue*: “a technique,” she says, “for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration.”<sup>iv</sup> (Cohn prefers *narrated monologue* to *free indirect discourse*, because she wants to include the representation of unvoiced speech as well as spoken discourse.) For Cohn, the German prose story about Shakespeare offers a convenient illustration of a narrative technique that already existed prior to *Papa Hamlet*'s composition in 1889: narrated monologue in *Papa Hamlet* is an effect, rather than a cause, of the development of narrative technique. What I would like to propose instead, however, is that earlier nineteenth-century attempts to render Shakespeare in prose actually helped to introduce the techniques that enabled the distinctive narrative voice of the novel. The distinctive narrative style of Charles and Mary Lamb's tremendously popular 1807 *Tales from Shakespeare* suggests that the free indirect discourse we associate with Jane Austen's novels—published several years later—stems from techniques that enabled Shakespeare to be read in narrative form. My goal is not to dethrone Jane Austen from her central place in the history of free indirect discourse, but rather to situate her in an alternative account that can help to explain why, as we will see, she was so often labeled “a prose Shakespeare” by nineteenth-century critics. And in the process, I would like to show how the somewhat loose analogy that some critics have perceived between interiority in Shakespearean soliloquy and in novelistic free indirect discourse actually had a strong connective link at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

My chief exhibit for the Shakespearean origins of free indirect discourse is the work of a pair of Jane Austen's contemporaries who also might lay claim to the “prose Shakespeare” title: Charles and Mary Lamb. The brother's reputation has overshadowed his sister's, whose literary career became somewhat eclipsed during her lifetime by her notoriety for murdering her mother

with a kitchen knife—albeit during a period of severe domestic stress—and whose name was supplanted by Charles’s on their joint title page: a prose Shakespeare’s sister. In 1807, a few years before Austen’s novels began appearing, the Lambs were asked to write a collection of *Tales from Shakespeare* for a publication called the Juvenile Library in order to make Shakespeare’s plays more accessible to children. They wrote twenty tales: Charles did six tragedies, and Mary did fourteen comedies, complaining to a friend that Charles had grabbed all the good plays first, though the end product seems to have been something of a collaboration.<sup>v</sup> The result was a great popular success: Lambs’ *Tales from Shakespeare*, really the first sustained adaptation of the plays into narrative prose, have remained in print continuously since 1807. They were responsible for introducing the plays to many young readers, including this one; Lambs’ *Tales* were the first version of Shakespeare I read, though, at the age of nine, I misidentified them as “Shakespeare’s Tales of Lamb,” prompting lots of predictable jokes about “The Merchant of Venison” from my elders.

When critics discuss the Lambs’ *Tales*, they do not usually talk about narrative technique. They talk, quite rightly, about gender. The preface to the *Tales*, which seems to have been written by Charles, sets out a gendered theory of literary maturation. The tales are targeted at “young ladies,” who, unlike their brothers, lack access to their father’s library where they could read the “manly book” of Shakespeare unadulterated. The Lambs hope that a pleasing passage in their adaptation will prompt the delicately nurtured to request an extract from the source itself read aloud by Brother (“carefully selecting what is proper for a young sister’s ear”), and, thereby, girls will progress, more or less, from baby food to adult fare ground up in the food mill to, as it were, the real bacon.<sup>vi</sup> This process of bibliographic socialization is reflected in the adapted tales themselves, which profess, in the preface, to offer examples for teaching virtue. Thus, the

problematic ending to an uneasy play like *Measure for Measure* becomes, in the Lambs' tale, a clear inducement to moral regeneration: in an ending Shakespeare never wrote, "the excellent example of the virtuous Isabel worked such complete reformation among the young ladies of that city, that from that time none ever fell into the transgression of Juliet, the repentant wife of the reformed Claudio" (p. 167). This is the aspect of the *Tales* that has received the most attention: they are usually seen as interesting only to the extent that they engage with nineteenth-century patriarchal norms.<sup>vii</sup>

But on a narrative level, the *Tales from Shakespeare* prove surprisingly rich and complex. That complexity arises from a stylistic component to the Lambs' developmental account: according to the preface, young people can't read dialogue. In contrast to Lewis Carroll's Alice, say, who can't see the use of a book without pictures or conversations, the Lambs imagine that their readers prefer narrative to "he said" and "she said." Although the Lambs try to use as many of Shakespeare's own words as they can, they also attempt, they say, to "turn his words into the narrative form" (p. 7). But how to do it? How to accomplish this transformation from blank verse dialogue to third-person prose? The Lambs do not seem to have a model in mind, a precursor they can follow; their tone is tentative, concerned that they may not always make the turn to narrative successfully; they lament that "the beauty of [Shakespeare's] language is too frequently destroyed by the necessity of changing many of his excellent words ... to make it read something like prose" (p. 7); they also worry that "dialogue has been made use of too frequently for young people not accustomed to the dramatic form of writing" (p. 7). They seem to be groping in the dark, trying to figure out a technique for rendering a character's thought and speech in a narrative voice, while staying as close to the original language as possible.

Let us see the solution they found. Textbook accounts of free indirect discourse frequently offer what we might call the imaginary backformation: a sentence in free indirect discourse from a work of literature, preceded by imagined versions of that sentence in direct discourse and indirect discourse, as an illustration of the hypothetical merging of a character's voice with the narrator's. ("What have I done?" Mary wondered" becomes "Mary wondered what she had done" and then, in the apogee: "What had she done?") The Lambs' *Tales* give us an opportunity to substitute an actual sequence of adaptation for an imagined one, to replace stylistic conjecture with literary history. I offer below an excerpt from Hamlet's soliloquy, "O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt," lamenting his mother's remarriage after the death of his father, to show the Lambs' raw materials. And then I provide the Lambs' transformation of that soliloquy into narration—bearing in mind that young lady readers really ought to start with the Lambs' version, and then, if they feel ready, ask their older brothers to read them Shakespeare's. The first passage, from *Hamlet*:

That it should come to this—

But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two—

So excellent a king, that was to this

Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly! Heaven and earth,

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—  
 Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman—  
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
 With which she followed my poor father's body,  
 Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she—  
 O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason,  
 Would have mourned longer!—married with mine uncle,  
 My father's brother, but no more like my father  
 Than I to Hercules; within a month,  
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
 Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,  
 She married. O, most wicked speed, to post  
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

(I.ii.137-57)<sup>viii</sup>

And the second passage, from the Lambs' tale of *Hamlet*:

what so galled him, and took away all his cheerful spirits, was, that his mother  
 had shown herself so forgetful to his father's memory; and such a father! who had  
 been to her so loving and so gentle a husband! and then she always appeared as  
 loving and obedient a wife to him, and would hang upon him as if her affection  
 grew to him: and now within two months, or as it seemed to young Hamlet, less

than two months, she had married again, married his uncle, her dear husband's brother, in itself a highly improper and unlawful marriage, from the nearness of relationship, but made much more so by the indecent haste with which it was concluded, and the unkingly character of the man whom she had chosen to be the partner of her throne and bed.

(p. 205)

It is no surprise to find a simpler register in the Lambs' version, without classical allusions (no Hyperion, Niobe, or Hercules) or condensed images (forget the shoes, the tears, the sheets), as well as a chastened vocabulary. (Gertrude's violation of what Victorians might call the Deceased Husband's Brother Act is merely "indecent," not "incestuous.") Nor is it remarkable that a text aimed at cultivating the sensibilities of young women would censor Hamlet's most explicit misogyny (Frailty goes unnamed) and self-recrimination (Hamlet is still heroic), or that matrimonial relations ("her dear husband's brother") would replace filial ties ("my father's brother").

What is surprising for a children's book is how subtly the Lambs transform soliloquy into narration. Much of Hamlet's tortured syntax remains: the exclamations ("such a father!"), the self-revising clauses ("within two months, or as it seemed to young Hamlet, less than two months"), the intensifying appositions ("his uncle, her dear husband's brother"), the endless sentence (139 words to Shakespeare's 118). The Lambs' text hovers between the narrator's perspective and the character's; rigidly judgmental adjectives like "improper," "indecent," and "unkingly" register as the narrator's verdicts, but the more intimate intensifiers "so loving and so gentle" come straight out of Hamlet's speech. Beyond the question of these descriptions'

provenance is the confusion of their point of view: when the Lambs write “and such a king!” is the reverence theirs or Hamlet’s? The qualifier “as it seemed to young Hamlet” appears only with reference to the haste of his mother’s remarriage, but its import guides the entire passage. The Lambs changed first-person pronouns to third-person and present tense to past, in keeping with the convention of the omniscient narrator, but they kept the stylistic disruptions that locate us inside Hamlet’s agonized mind.

The Lambs seem, in other words, to be employing what we would call free indirect discourse if Jane Austen were doing it—an infusion of the character’s language, thought patterns, and outlook into the narrative voice. Continuing the Hamlet mode of looking upon this picture and on this, compare the Lamb passage with a representative paragraph from Austen’s *Mansfield Park* in 1814, a novel where many critics have detected free indirect discourse in its full-fledged form.<sup>ix</sup> This passage comes during the furor of the private theatricals, just after Edmund has told his disapproving cousin Fanny that he will, despite all his reservations, perform opposite the alluring Miss Crawford in the play *Lovers’ Vows*. This is Fanny’s reaction:

He had told her the most extraordinary, the most inconceivable, the most unwelcome news; and she could think of nothing else. To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public! After all that she had heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all Miss Crawford’s doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable.

(pp. 183-4)

Published seven years after Lamb's *Tales* appeared, Austen's passage deploys many of the Lambs' strategies for representing interior reflections. Just as the Lambs turned Hamlet's stage performance into armchair prose ("and such a father! who had been to her so loving and so gentle a husband!"), Austen uses questions and exclamations ("Alas!"), fragments ("Edmund so inconsistent."), and intensifying adverbs and phrases that turn back on each other ("all his objections—objections so just and so public") to situate us inside Fanny's upset, obsessive mind, although the voice of the passage remains ostensibly the narrator's—third person, past tense. Even if Fanny's vehemence stems from her opposition to Edmund's acting, the passage's intensity arises from its incorporation of dramatic techniques. With pronouns changed from third-person to first-person and the tense shifted from past to present, Fanny could be Hamlet, soliloquizing upon a loved one's inconstancy.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, in fact, a novel first drafted several years before the Lambs' *Tales*, Austen had used a soliloquy to represent her heroine's moment of recognition. "How despicably have I acted!" Elizabeth Bennet cries aloud after reflecting on Mr. Darcy's letter, initiating a paragraph of directly quoted solitary speech that concludes emphatically with the first person in the present: "Till this moment, I never knew myself" (p. 230). But by the time she wrote *Mansfield Park*, Austen had developed a more indirect method of voicing a character's point of view. In his introduction to the Cambridge *Mansfield Park*, John Wiltshire suggests that "Shakespeare's influence is to be seen not in specific allusions or quotations, but much deeper, in Austen's transformation of Shakespearean soliloquy into her mode of free indirect discourse"—albeit an influence "not direct, not apparent, not easy to pinpoint."<sup>x</sup> The example of the Lambs'

*Tales* suggests, however, that Austen's mode of free indirect discourse could have arisen from her contemporaries' attempts to transform Shakespeare's soliloquies into narration.

What are the implications of this alternate history? Jane Austen was frequently dubbed a "prose Shakespeare" by nineteenth-century critics, who pointed to her Shakespearean skill in the dramatic presentation of character. Once we start to recover the Lambs' role in developing free indirect discourse, we can see that label, "prose Shakespeare," as more than an honorific association, for prosing Shakespeare turns out to be deeply linked to the representation of character in Austen and other novelists' own prose. Similarly, the dramatic genre appears as more than an analogy for narrative, for the Lambs' techniques for narrating a monologue actually create the toolkit for what Dorrit Cohn would later call "narrated monologue." Instead of locating free indirect discourse, as Franco Moretti does, at the endpoint of a character's socialization by integrating the subjective into the objective, shifting the focus to the reader, as the Lambs do, makes free indirect discourse the starting point for socialization, a mediated form that serves as a precursor to unmediated drama. Bringing Shakespeare and the drama into the history of free indirect discourse also makes it a poly-generic narrative. Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests a useful term, writing rhapsodically in 1845 that "now, literature, philosophy, and thought are Shakespearized."<sup>xi</sup> Instead of seeing the Lambs' *Tales* as *novelizing* Shakespeare, in Bakhtin's familiar formulation, we can see them as *Shakespearizing* the novel: an alternate history of personal, narrative, and generic development, which I would like to call Free Indirect Shakespeare.

## II. Prose Shakespeare

Whether or not Austen encountered the Lambs' *Tales* directly (perhaps by reading them to her nieces), their effect shaped hers. The Lambs created prose Shakespeare, and in the Victorian era, Austen became the "prose Shakespeare." The path, yet again, ran through the Lambs' pasture, for in addition to enabling Austen to develop her free indirect style by representing Shakespeare's soliloquies in prose, Charles Lamb also appears to bear responsibility for inventing the phrase that would define Austen's reputation in the nineteenth century—though he was not speaking of Austen when he introduced it. In his 1808 "Characters of Dramatic Writers Contemporary with Shakspeare," Lamb characterized the Jacobean playwright Thomas Heywood as "a sort of *prose Shakspeare*," skilled at representing "what we see in life," but lacking Shakespeare's poetic capacity for creation beyond natural surfaces. This seems to be the first use of the epithet, which both secured and limited Heywood's reputation; Heywood's plays were actually in verse, but Lamb made them prosaic.<sup>xiii</sup>

To label a dramatic poet a "prose Shakespeare," however, was perhaps no more revisionary than to imagine a novelist in that role, which fell to the Victorian critic G. H. Lewes, though he, too, displaced the attribution. "Miss Austen has been called a prose Shakspeare; and, among others, by Macaulay," he wrote in an 1847 review of recent novels—though Macaulay never actually applied that phrase. In a review six years earlier, Macaulay praised Austen as one of the writers who "have approached nearest to the manner of the great master" in creating "perfectly discriminated characters," an estimation that many others would echo, but it was Lewes who seems to have stuck the "prose Shakespeare" tag to Austen. He stuck with it, as well, even if he could never shake the "sense of incongruity which besets us in the words *prose Shakspeare*"; repeating the phrase in an 1851 review, he confessed that he could not "conceive Shakespeare under prosaic conditions," and, in an 1852 review, granted the alleged Macaulay

label only “if the whole force of the distinction which lies in that epithet *prose* be fairly appreciated.” That distinction meant an absence of “passion, imagination, fancy, and rhythm,” but left a “humble truthfulness” by which Austen could make “her people speak and act as they speak and act in every day life”—an echo of the quality Lamb found in Heywood. Austen’s capacity to endow her characters with dramatic distinctness was, as in Macaulay, the attribute that Lewes thought most rivaled Shakespeare, and in a famous 1859 appraisal, he judged that in her ability to reveal characters through their own speech, “she has never perhaps been surpassed, not even by Shakespeare himself.” (Although Lewes constantly references Macaulay, erroneously, this last judgment is an unattributed echo of the cleric Richard Whately’s 1821 assessment that Austen excels in dramatic presentation, “which she conducts with a regard to character hardly exceeded even by Shakspeare himself.”) By 1900, an essay on English fiction in the *North American Review* could complain that “Someone has called [Austen] a prose Shakespeare, and this remark has been almost as much quoted in the newspapers as Thackeray’s complete man.” Perhaps it was the oddity—both of the phrase itself and of applying it to an author whose fine portraits of landed society seemed to bear little relationship to Shakespeare’s kings, queens, fairies, rustics, and villains—that led so many critics to assume that it must have been “Someone” else who applied the label.<sup>xiii</sup>

It took a Shakespearean scholar, however, to turn the epithet back to Heywood, and back to Austen’s own sense of prose. Reviewing the memoir of Austen published by her nephew in 1870, Richard Simpson recalled Lamb’s original essay to note that

Heywood has been called a prose Shakespeare; Miss Austen much more really deserves the title. Within her range her characterization is truly Shakespearian;

but she has scarcely a spark of poetry. Her nephew, who has lately written her biography, gives some lines of hers in memory of Mrs. Lefroy, which only show that in serious poetry her model was Johnson, or Cowper in his more prosaic moods, and that the serious imitation of such a model deprived her of all humour, all delicacy of analysis, all subtlety of thought or language, and led her into affectations and commonplaces which in her novels she would have scornfully criticised. She could, however, write pointed epigrams and tolerable charades; in fact she was just so far a poet as a critic might be expected to be. She even seems to have had an ethical dread of the poetic rapture. At least she makes the latest and more carefully drawn of her heroines declare “that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly.”<sup>xiv</sup>

That heroine is Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, who chides the impassioned Captain Benwick for his dangerous immersion in Byron’s and Scott’s poetry, and recommends instead “a larger allowance of prose in his daily study” in order “to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances” (pp. 108-9). Anne, like Simpson, opposes prose to poetry on ethical grounds as more likely to fashion strong character; poetry could lead to unrestrained emotion.

A less restrained Austen heroine, however, opposes prose to drama. Emma Woodhouse interprets Mr. Elton’s puzzling charade, with its seductive solution, “Courtship,” as a veiled marriage proposal to her friend Harriet, and assures her that “It is a sort of prologue to the play, a

motto to the chapter; and will soon be followed by matter-of-fact prose” (p. 79)—presumably, the straightforward language of a wedding arrangement. One paragraph later, Emma dismisses a rival motto from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that would challenge her vision of courtship unobstructed:

There does seem to be a something in the air of Hartfield which gives love exactly the right direction, and sends it into the very channel where it ought to flow.

The course of true love never did run smooth—

A Hartfield edition of Shakespeare would have a long note on that passage.

(pp. 79-80)

There is a critical tradition of reading Austen’s *Emma* as a sort of “Hartfield edition of Shakespeare,” one where the course of true love is indeed explored through many channels.<sup>xv</sup> In the context of nineteenth-century reviews of Austen, we might expand the concept of a Hartfield edition from a thematic note on romance to a stylistic note on the ways in which “matter-of-fact prose” can follow from Shakespearean prologues and mottos.

For Austen, being a “prose Shakespeare” meant writing both prosaic Shakespeare and Shakespearean prose. The former category has received much more attention; from her earliest reviews, Austen was seen as bringing Shakespeare’s romantic characters and plots down to nineteenth-century earth. Comparing Austen’s characters to Shakespeare’s, Macaulay found hers “common-place”; Lewes thought her characters showed a “humble truthfulness,” Shakespeare

divested of his “winged attributes.” An 1813 review of *Pride and Prejudice* cast the novel as an updated *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which Elizabeth Bennet “is in fact the *Beatrice* of the tale; and falls in love on much the same principles of contrariety”; Richard Simpson, whom we encountered above appraising Austen’s distinctly unpoetic powers of Shakespearean characterization, saw Anne Elliot as “Shakespeare’s Viola translated into an English girl of the nineteenth century”; and more recent critics have cast long-suffering, underestimated Fanny Price as a “Regency Cordelia.”<sup>xvi</sup> But the extent to which not only Austen’s characters but her own prose are indebted to Shakespeare requires more attention.<sup>xvii</sup>

### III. Dramas of Reading

The famous scene in *Mansfield Park* of Henry Crawford reading aloud *Henry VIII* to Fanny, Lady Bertram, and Edmund is due for a re-reading. Many Shakespeareans take Edmund’s remark that “we all talk Shakespeare” or Crawford’s comment that Shakespeare is “part of an Englishman’s constitution” as a stand-alone statement of cultural criticism, an index of Shakespeare’s pervasiveness in Regency culture (pp. 390-1).<sup>xviii</sup> As Edmund says of Shakespeare’s famous passages, the phrases get “quoted by every body,” rather like a bromide from Polonius or a truism from Iago (p. 391).<sup>xix</sup> The recent Cambridge edition of the works of Jane Austen even takes its description of Shakespeare’s centrality as a model for Austen’s own reception: “What Henry Crawford remarks about Shakespeare in *Mansfield Park* has become equally true of its author.”<sup>xx</sup> But the scene in which Edmund’s and Crawford’s remarks occurs is a highly fraught courtship sequence in which Edmund and Crawford both try to coax out Fanny’s sentiments by performing the praise they hope she will bestow. We need to understand the

novel's evaluation of the dramatist in the context of this performance, which is itself a meditation on the relation between reading and acting.

When Crawford takes over the speech of Cardinal Wolsey that Fanny had been reading to Lady Bertram, Fanny initially appears completely indifferent to his performance. But a drama of attention soon ensues, in which Edmund watches Fanny watching Crawford:

Not a look, or an offer of help had Fanny given; not a syllable for or against. All her attention was for her work. She seemed determined to be interested by nothing else. But taste was too strong in her. She could not abstract her mind five minutes; she was forced to listen; his reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading extreme ... It was truly dramatic.—His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her again; nay, perhaps with greater enjoyment, for it came unexpectedly, and with no such drawback as she had been used to suffer in seeing him on the stage with Miss Bertram.

Edmund watched the progress of her attention, and was amused and gratified by seeing how she gradually slackened in the needle-work, which, at the beginning, seemed to occupy her totally: how it fell from her hand while she sat motionless over it—and at last, how the eyes which had appeared so studiously to avoid him throughout the day, were turned and fixed on Crawford, fixed on him for minutes, fixed on him in short till the attraction drew Crawford's upon her, and the book was closed, and the charm was broken. Then, she was shrinking again into herself, and blushing and working as hard as ever; but it had

been enough to give Edmund encouragement for his friend, and as he cordially thanked him, he hoped to be expressing Fanny's secret feelings too.

(pp. 389-90)

Fanny plays the silent role of a turtle in this sequence, slowly emerging from her rigid focus on her work, and then "shrinking again into herself." Yet within this minimal action, both the ethics and the erotics of attention are displayed. Crawford's reading here skirts the ethical qualm that his acting displayed on stage, where saying the words of another allowed him to pursue a clandestine courtship with Miss Bertram. Yet the absence of an ethical restraint on Fanny's attention allows her to explore her own veiled desires: she can fully indulge in the "pleasure a play might give" in Crawford's dramatic rendition, but now "perhaps with greater enjoyment," since she has no rival for Crawford's affection, no one to make her "suffer" as an unwanted onlooker. The "taste" that proved "too strong in her" to keep her from attending to Crawford may have a primarily intellectual cast, but the sensuous origin of aesthetics remains in Fanny's physical response to his reading. Edmund watches her body become "gradually slackened," watches as her needlework "fell from her hand," watches as "the eyes . . . were turned." The impersonality of this definite article (instead of "her eyes") and the passive voice that registers their movement turn Fanny from a purely reflective being into a sensory organ that gets manipulated by the mesmerizing power of Crawford's performance. In the most intense sentence of this passage, those eyes become "fixed on Crawford, fixed on him for minutes, fixed on him," in a driving anaphora that has an almost ecstatic pulse. That Edmund "was amused and gratified by seeing" the "progress of her attention" to this climactic point casts him in a peculiarly voyeuristic light, and his hope "to be expressing Fanny's secret feelings" appears particularly

invasive; Fanny's "blushing" and "shrinking" suggest the embarrassment that this erotic exposure has caused her.

It is in this charged context that Edmund's and Crawford's oft-quoted dialogue ensues.

"That play must be a favourite with you," said [Edmund]; "You read as if you knew it well."

"It will be a favourite I believe from this hour," replied Crawford; "—but I do not think I have had a volume of Shakespeare in my hand before, since I was fifteen.—I once saw Henry the 8th acted.—Or I have heard of it from somebody who did—I am not certain which. But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct. No man of any brain can open at a good part of one of his plays, without falling into the flow of his meaning immediately."

"No doubt, one is familiar with Shakespeare in a degree," said Edmund, "from one's earliest years. His celebrated passages are quoted by every body; they are in half the books we open, and we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions; but this is totally distinct from giving his sense as you gave it. To know him in bits and scraps, is common enough; to know him pretty thoroughly, is, perhaps, not uncommon; but to read him well aloud, is no everyday talent."

"Sir, you do me honour;" was Crawford's answer, with a bow of mock gravity.

Both gentlemen had a glance at Fanny, to see if a word of accordant praise could be extorted from her; yet both feeling that it could not be. Her praise had been given in her attention; *that* must content them.

Lady Bertram's admiration was expressed, and strongly too. "It was really like being at a play," said she.—"I wish Sir Thomas had been here."

(pp. 390-1)

Although Fanny is not represented as speaking or acting during this exchange, she is the unstated presence behind the dialogue, and thus the most dramatic moment comes in Edmund and Crawford's shared attempt at scopic gratification, when "Both gentlemen had a glance at Fanny." Their aim, "to see if a word of accordant praise could be extorted from her," suggests a renewed attempt at forceful penetration, and it also implicates their previous compliments, "accordant" with the words they hope to make her yield. Indeed, Crawford's airy (perhaps bluffing) account of familiarity with Shakespeare seems almost prurient, given his conduct at Mansfield Park: "His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct." Touching beauties and gaining instinctive intimacy with them is one of Crawford's specialties, as Maria Bertram later discovers. Lady Bertram's wish for Sir Thomas to witness this performance provides the punch line as usual: had Sir Thomas been there, of course, anything resembling a play would be shut down.

Lady Bertram's remark that the scene she has lazily witnessed is "like being at a play" is, however, true in at least three senses. First, hearing Crawford read Shakespeare for Lady Bertram is like attending a performance of *Henry VIII*; as Fanny's reaction indicates, his reading summons the skill of his acting. Second, Crawford and Edmund's banter for Fanny is itself a

performance of a seduction drama: the “bow of mock gravity” with which Crawford acknowledges Edmund’s praise is both the bow of a skilled reader receiving acclaim and the bow of a rake trying to perform a serious role. And third, the stage directions and implied action in Austen’s narrative representation of the scene create a closet drama for her reading audience.

Much of the critical discussion of theater in Austen has focused either on general qualities of role-playing in her novels—characters staging private theatricals, impersonating roles, trying to elicit reactions from their auditors—or on biographical anecdotes of Austen’s own enthusiasm for the London stage. What needs to be added to this discussion is an account of the actual stage practices that she incorporates in her narrative technique—not merely dramatic entrances and exits, like the return of Sir Thomas from Antigua that forms the curtain call of *Mansfield Park*’s first volume, or the parade of couples strolling in and out of view in the Sotherton park episode—but actual stage directions: explicit, non-narrative indications of how a character speaks or behaves.

A sequence from *Emma* neatly illuminates Austen’s use of play-script techniques in her narrative. Emma’s protégé Harriet has received a letter from her suitor, Mr. Martin, and is seeking Emma’s counsel:

“A better written letter, Harriet, (*returning it,*) than I had expected.”

“Well,” said the still waiting Harriet;—“well—and—and what shall I do?”

“...You must be the best judge of your own happiness. If you prefer Mr. Martin to every other person; if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever been in company with, why should you hesitate? *You blush, Harriet.*—Does any body else occur to you at this moment under such a definition? Harriet,

Harriet, do not deceive yourself; do not be run away with by gratitude and compassion. At this moment whom are you thinking of?"

The symptoms were favourable.—*Instead of answering, Harriet turned away confused, and stood thoughtfully by the fire; and though the letter was still in her hand, it was now mechanically twisted about without regard.*

(pp. 53-5, my emphasis)

Each of the italicized phrases shows a different method of representing physical action. The third is the most conventional, directly narrated action: "Harriet turned away confused." We are familiar with a third-person narrator describing actions so that we can visualize them. Less familiar is the method of the second phrase, action implied by dialogue: "You blush, Harriet." Instead of closing Emma's quotation, noting "Harriet blushed" in the third person, and then resuming Emma's quotation, Austen has Emma become her narrator for a moment, summoning Harriet's blush for our eyes. (And, perhaps, summoning the blush to Harriet's eyes and even cheeks as well; it is not entirely clear whether Emma is observing the response she expects or ordering it as an imperative: "You blush, Harriet.") The same technique frequently occurs in Shakespeare's plays, where characters' dialogue indicates the actions that their interlocutors perform. In the epilogue to *As You Like It*, for example, Rosalind articulates the response she expects to receive from her audience: "And I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women—as I perceive by your simpering none of you hates them—that between you and the women the play may please" (Epilogue lines 12-4, my emphasis). Whether she has heard the men in her audience simpering or provokes them to simper by this line is a question only performance can resolve.

The first italicized phrase may be the most surprising, an actual stage direction inserted into a line of dialogue: “A better written letter, Harriet, (*returning it,*) than I had expected.” If Austen had chosen instead, “‘A better written letter, Harriet,’ said Emma, returning it, ‘than I had expected,’” that would simply be a conventional mode of interlacing dialogue and narration. It is in part the absence of close quotation marks that make the parenthetically recorded gesture so unusual; we can’t imagine Emma saying “returning it,” and yet the phrase pops up in the middle of her speech. Even the second mode above would be less aberrant: “A better written letter, Harriet, than I had expected—you may take it back.” Somehow, in the sentence Austen actually gives us, the voice of the narrator gets infused into Emma’s speaking voice, making her both the first-person utterer of her speech and the third-person commentator upon it. It is a sort of inversion of free indirect discourse: instead of the character’s idiom coloring the narrative voice, the narrative voice pops up in the character’s speech.

These parenthetical intrusions—and there are many in Austen’s novels—suggest a residue of dramatic form, a stage direction that creeps into a text meant for private reading. (We might note as well that as novels like *Emma* incorporated stage directions, so stage directions over the course of the nineteenth century became novelized, leading to the lengthy stage descriptions in Shaw’s texts, which read like narrative excerpts from contemporary novels.) Emma herself acts as a kind of playwright in the sequence quoted above, manipulating the letter as a prop and directing the blushing response she expects Harriet to perform. Henry Crawford, too, feels compelled to script the response of his auditor: Fanny, in the following case, who cannot act on her own. A discussion of reading aloud in *Mansfield Park* also exhibits the three forms of action outlined above:

“Our liturgy,” observed Crawford, “has beauties, which not even a careless, slovenly style of reading can destroy; but it has also redundancies and repetitions, which require good reading not to be felt. For myself, at least, I must confess being not always so attentive as I ought to be—(*here was a glance at Fanny*) that nineteen times out of twenty I am thinking how such a prayer ought to be read, and longing to have it to read myself—Did you speak?” *stepping eagerly to Fanny*, and addressing her in a softened voice; and upon her saying, “No,” he added, “Are you sure you did not speak? *I saw your lips move*. I fancied you might be going to tell me I ought to be more attentive, and not allow my thoughts to wander. Are not you going to tell me so?”

(pp. 393-4, my emphasis)

Just as Crawford takes on all the parts in reading *Henry VIII*, so he acts out Fanny’s part as well, supplying the admonition he imagines she would say, if only she had spoken. The self-reflexivity of this passage is evident: in an argument for the best method of reading, Crawford’s own attention wanders to Fanny’s reaction just as he confesses his inattentiveness in church, and he voices Fanny’s speech just as he states his desire to be able to read the church service himself. Many critics interpret Crawford’s dramatic facility as a sign of his characteristic inconstancy, making him an unsuitable partner for the unwavering Fanny, but we should remember that it is the “variety” of Crawford’s reading that draws Fanny’s attention to him, and even compels her lips to move—if only in disapproval (p. 389).<sup>xxi</sup>

Indirect representation of action through dialogue is, as we have seen, also characteristic of Shakespeare’s texts. Lucas Erne, a notable recent participant in the debate over whether

Shakespeare wrote to be read or performed, has argued that the actions implied by dialogue in longer text versions of the plays show that those versions were meant to be read, with dialogue summoning the gestures that an audience outside a theater could not see; in shorter versions meant to be acted, that dialogue would be cut and replaced with actual stage directions for the actors to perform the gestures.<sup>xxii</sup> Tracing the stage-page debate, Michael Dobson has also shown that printed versions of Shakespeare's plays shifted from seventeenth-century editions that would present scripts as secondary records of stage performances, advertising a version "as it was acted," to eighteenth-century editions that claimed to correct the errors and indelicacies of stage performance with an improved reading text.<sup>xxiii</sup>

These debates were inflamed at exactly the period Austen was writing by, yet again, Charles Lamb, who offered the most famous argument that Shakespeare's texts could only be realized fully by reading them, not by seeing them acted. The inner thoughts and feelings that Shakespeare excelled in depicting, he contended, could not be represented by a histrionic actor strutting and fretting on the stage. And, intriguingly, Lamb associated the problem of dramatic representation of interiority to the problem of novelistic representation:

in Shakespeare above all, how obvious it is, that the form of *speaking*, whether it be in soliloquy or dialogue, is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one, for putting the reader or spectator into possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of mind in a character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at *in that form of composition* by any gift short of intuition. We do here as we do with novels written in the *epistolary form*. How many improprieties, perfect solecisms in letter-writing, do we put up with in "Clarissa"

and other books, for the sake of the delight which that form upon the whole gives us.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Just as the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* linked the novel's means of representing interiority, free indirect discourse, to Shakespearean soliloquy, so Lamb's account of soliloquy in *Shakespeare* connects the playwright's method for depicting "the inner structure and workings of mind in a character" to the novelist's method. Lamb cites Richardson's epistolary form, which was the form in which Austen wrote the first drafts of her early novels; the achievement of her narrative form, as we have seen, was to overcome the artificiality of speaking as a mode of conveying thought by depicting that thought in third-person speech infused with a character's worldview.

#### IV. Patience on a Monument

In Austen's earliest completed novel, *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland's education consists in turning her mind into a collection of beauties—memorable, applicable phrases that come from Pope, Gray, Thompson, and, inevitably, Shakespeare. As a girl, she displayed a typically eighteenth-century female preference for plot over sententiae, choosing books that "were all story and no reflection."<sup>xxv</sup>

But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations

which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful  
lives...

And from Shakspeare she gained a great store of information—amongst  
the rest,...that a young woman in love always looks

—“like Patience on a monument

Smiling at Grief.”

(pp. 7-8)

Of course, Austen presents Catherine’s true training for a heroine as her ability to move beyond the books that have filled her memory when confronting the vicissitudes of her eventful life; she must learn that not every castle she encounters can offer a scene out of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and that not every social miscue signals a plot from gothic romance, no matter how imaginatively her Radcliffe-trained, alliteratively primed mind meditates on “broken promises and broken arches, phaetons and false hangings, Tilneys and trap-doors” (p. 85).<sup>xxvi</sup> Austen also presents a genre objection to Catherine’s training: opposing extract collections to novels, the narrator laments that novelists are scorned by reviewers “while the abilities of...the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens” (p. 31). Learning from Shakespeare about the steadfastness of a young woman in love would seem to be as ineffective as sitting on a monument oneself.

But in Austen’s last completed novel, *Persuasion*, learning how a woman in love behaves is the final stage in both Captain Wentworth’s and Anne Eliot’s training as hero and heroine. The

climactic scene in the Musgroves' apartment that propels Wentworth to reunite with Anne brings together the strands of this essay as it plays out as both a highly dramatic stage-piece and a prose version of Shakespeare. The performative structure of the scene arises from the dynamics of eavesdropping and covert glances that unfold alongside the characters' conversation, like the dramas of observation in *Mansfield Park*. Mrs. Musgrove introduces the topic that will spark Anne's interest, the long engagement of her daughter, in what we would call a stage whisper: "that inconvenient tone of voice which was perfectly audible while it pretended to be a whisper" (p. 250). Thus, the first mini-drama occurs in Anne and Wentworth overhearing Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft's conversation about whether young women should become engaged without knowing if they will have the means to marry:

Anne found an unexpected interest here. She felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill all over her, and at the same moment that her eyes instinctively glanced towards the distant table, Captain Wentworth's pen ceased to move, his head was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look—one quick, conscious look at her.

(p. 251)

The second sentence of this passage is remarkable in its sustained tension and doubled structures. Doubleness is the key note to this sequence: the matrons' conversation has a doubled significance for their silent auditors, who themselves had become engaged without the means to marry, and their own movements are doubled: Anne's thrill of personal investment matches Wentworth's immediate interest as "his head was raised, paused, listening," just as her

instinctive glance meets Wentworth's quick, conscious look. Even the language of the passage doubles over: Anne "felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill," and Wentworth gives "a look—one quick, conscious look at her." Austen gives us a marvelously layered double-take, executed by characters who are just beginning to realize that they may get a second chance.

This drama takes on Shakespearean dimensions when Captain Harville engages Anne in a dialogue about whether men or women are more constant in love. Like Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft's conversation, this one deflects the crux of Anne and Wentworth's courtship onto a parallel relationship: the love trials of Captain Benwick. And it also evokes a famous dialogue from *Twelfth Night* between Orsino and Viola, disguised as his male page Cesario, over women's power to match men's love. This dialogue is deflected as well: although Viola pines for Orsino, she displaces her emotions onto an imagined double: "My father had a daughter loved a man / As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman / I should your lordship" (II.iv.106-8). It is the fate of this double Viola that Viola/Cesario depicts in the simile that became Catherine Morland's tutor:

She never told her love,  
 But let concealment, like a worm i'th' bud,  
 Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,  
 And with a green and yellow melancholy  
 She sat like patience on a monument,  
 Smiling at grief. Was this not love indeed?

(II.iv.109-14)

It is perhaps worth noting that the more colorful imagery gets elided in the extract version of this speech. The somewhat conventional sonnet metaphor of concealment as a canker and the woman's cheek as a damask rose, dappled pink and white, and the metaphor that seems to blend the garden register with medieval humour theory of melancholy as green and yellow both disappear; what remains is the fixity of "patience on a monument"—an apt image for the inertia that can take over a line of dialogue fixed and memorialized as a useful quotation.

There is a long tradition of reading Anne and Harville's conversation as an echo of Orsino and Viola's, from Richard Simpson through Marianne Novy. Critics have not heard, however, the acoustic echo that triggers the thematic parallel. Viola's claim for the equal strength of female love is introduced by repeated "O" sounds:

ORSINO:                    Make no compare  
                                 Between that love a woman can bear me  
                                 And that I owe Olivia.

VIOLA: Ay, but I know—

ORSINO: What does thou know?

VIOLA: Too well what love women to men may owe.

(II.iv.99-104)

Like a moan of unrequited love, "oh"s swell through the resounding words of this stichomythic quatrain: "no," "owe," "Olivia," "know," "know," "owe." Primed by the sound of this passage, we can hear Anne rhyming with Viola as she agrees that a woman would not soon forget her love: "'No,' replied Anne, in a *low* feeling voice. 'That, I can easily believe'" (p. 252, my

emphasis). Like steadfast Cordelia, Anne's voice is "ever soft, / Gentle, and low" (*King Lear* V.iii.246-47), and it, too, throbs with the "oh"s of enduring love. When Wentworth finally writes her a letter to declare his unwavering affection, he affirms his intimacy in acoustic terms: "You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others," he confides, showing that his ear has been tuned to Anne's low frequencies as well (p. 258).

Given Wentworth's attention to Anne's voice, we might interpret the frequent stage directions that coordinate this sequence less as instructions for the reader's imagination than as indications of what eavesdroppers and onlookers are perceiving. Is it Anne whose eyes follow the parenthetical indication in Harville's acknowledgment that Wentworth is taking over Benwick's romantic mission: "He undertakes it—(looking towards Captain Wentworth) he is writing about it now" (p. 252)? Is it Wentworth who tracks the changes in Harville's countenance and tone towards Anne: "'I am in very good anchorage here,' (smiling at Anne) 'well supplied, and want for nothing.—No hurry for a signal at all.—Well, Miss Elliot,' (lowering his voice) 'as I was saying'" (p. 254)? And is it Wentworth who hears the sudden shift in Anne's own speech on the hardships men face: "'It would be too hard indeed' (with a faltering voice) 'if woman's feelings were to be added to all this'" (p. 254)? These looks, smiles, and changes in tone accumulate with a frequency unmatched in the novel's previous scenes, conveying the heightening drama of the climax, when deflected gestures and words will be replaced by direct communication between the reunited lovers.

But first Anne must overcome the obstacles of literary authority that have defined women's roles in love—the same authorities that defined Catherine Morland's sense of female duty. Anne plays the Wife of Bath to Harville's onslaught of damning extracts, challenging the bias that is veiled in commonplace books.

“But let me observe [said Harville] that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse. If I had such a memory as Benwick, I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on my side the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman’s inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman’s fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men.”

“Perhaps I shall.—Yes, yes, if you please, no references to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.”

(p. 254-55)

If, as Edmund Bertram has suggested, half the books one opens contain passages of Shakespeare, then Shakespeare, too, is implicated in the misogynistic quotations to which Harville alludes. (As a male reader, he could easily open *Hamlet* to see that “Frailty, thy name is woman!”; Anne and Catherine might have only opened Lamb’s *Tales*, which omitted the line.) But Anne’s renunciation of the masculine literary tradition itself echoes Viola’s challenge to Orsino’s dismissal of women’s passion.<sup>xxvii</sup> A woman like Viola, like Anne, who “sat like patience on a monument” would belie both accusations of women’s inconstancy and Harville’s claim that the genre of male-authored, male-compiled extracts emphasizes feminine fickleness alone.

It is left, as we might imagine, to stage directions to meld theatricality with literary authority in this scene. Male control of books is concentrated metonymically in writing

implements in Anne's formulation: "The pen has been in their hands." But just before this exchange, as Anne's voice had faltered in expressing the longevity of women's feelings, a stage diversion occurs:

"We shall never agree upon this question"—Captain Harville was beginning to say, when a slight noise called their attention to Captain Wentworth's hitherto perfectly quiet division of the room. It was nothing more than that his pen had fallen down, but Anne was startled at finding him nearer than she had supposed; and half inclined to suspect that the pen had only fallen, because he had been occupied by them, striving to catch sounds, which yet she did not think he could have caught.

(p. 254)

Anne is right to suspect Wentworth of eavesdropping, as his ensuing letter shows. But her other half-inclination might suspect that Wentworth has dropped his pen in order to clear the room's discursive space for her own low voice. The pen is no longer in male hands; instead, it is Anne's almost inaudible sounds of an alternate literary tradition, a low "but I know," that overcomes the "division of the room." When she speaks, it's so quiet, you can hear a pen drop.

The afterlife of "patience on a monument," however, only deadens its ring. The Shakespearean memorial that Catherine Morland stores in her collection of quotations, with which Julia Mills tries to console Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield*—"Quoted verses respecting self and young Gazelle. Ineffectually. Also referred to Patience on Monument. (Qy. Why on Monument? J. M.)"—and which Hardy's Alec d'Urberville twists in seducing Tess,

whom he finds “sitting like Im-patience on a monument,” is laid to rest in an exchange from P. G. Wodehouse where Bertie Wooster keeps interrupting an unrequited lover’s story:

“Though stunned, I kept—”

“A stiff upper lip?”

“—my feelings to myself. I sat—”

“Like Patience on a monument.”

“—tight, and said nothing that would give her a suspicion of how I felt.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

Viola’s striking image has become simply another English cliché, like “stiff upper lip” (the title of this Wodehouse novel, in fact), that pops into Bertie’s recycling mind, and is only corrected by a third cliché, distinguished by its relatively tame figurative brevity: “sat tight.” Once we all talk Shakespeare, it’s no different from prose.

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### **Abstract**

This essay explores the connection between Shakespearean drama and the novel’s representation of interiority. Jane Austen’s celebrated use of free indirect discourse, I argue, is linked to Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare*, which turned dramatic soliloquies into prose narration, rendering a character’s thought and idiom in a third-person voice. Heralded

as a “prose Shakespeare” by nineteenth-century critics, Austen also developed an inverse free indirect discourse, the infusion of the narrative voice into characters’ speech. Scenes from *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* offer mini-Shakespearean plays of attention, for Shakespearean technique and quotation script Austen’s dramas of reading.

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<sup>i</sup> I have relied on *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*, gen. ed. Janet Todd.

Paraphrased citations refer to *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006); *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006); *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005); *Emma*, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005); *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006).

<sup>ii</sup> For an analysis of the opposition to theater in *Mansfield Park*, see Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley CA: Univ. of California Press, 1981). Another influential account redefines theatricality to show how Austen inadvertently employs it: Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley CA: Univ. of California Press, 1992). Two contemporary works that share a title also share the ambition of showing Austen’s unapologetic embrace of the theater: Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002); Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002). And one more recent work argues that theatricality provides the conditions for interiority in *Mansfield Park*: Emily Allen, *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Columbus OH: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2003).

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<sup>iii</sup> For this version, see Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1977); Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978); Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1983); Joe Bray, “The Source of ‘Dramatized Consciousness’: Richardson, Austen, and Stylistic Influence,” *Style* 35, 1 (2001): 18-33; Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso), 2005.

<sup>iv</sup> Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>v</sup> Susan J. Wolfson, “Explaining to Her Sisters: Mary Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare,” *Women’s Re-Visions of Shakespeare: On the Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H. D., George Eliot, and Others*, ed. Marianne Novy (Urbana IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 16-40.

<sup>vi</sup> Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*, 1807 (London: Galley Press, 1985), p. 8. All parenthetical citations refer to this edition—the one, in keeping with Lambs’ emphasis on child development, that my grandmother gave me.

<sup>vii</sup> Wolfson provides the best feminist account of the Lambs’ tales. For an analysis of the Lambs’ strategies of genre and gender more oriented toward narrative technique, see Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 77-90.

<sup>viii</sup> All Shakespeare citations refer to Stephen Greenblatt, et al, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Norton, 2008).

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<sup>ix</sup> See, for example, Louise Flavin, "Mansfield Park: Free Indirect Discourse and the Psychological Novel," *Studies in the Novel* 19, 2 (1987): 137-59.

<sup>x</sup> John Wiltshire, "Introduction," *Mansfield Park*, by Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), p. lvii.

<sup>xi</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Shakespeare, or the Poet," 1845, *Representative Men, The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 4, ed. Douglas Emory Wilson (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), p. 117.

<sup>xii</sup> Charles Lamb, "Characters of Dramatic Writers Contemporary with Shakspeare," 1808, *The Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb*, ed. Brander Matthews (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1891), p. 207.

<sup>xiii</sup> [G. H. Lewes], "Unsigned review of *The Fair Carew*," *The Leader* (22 November 1851); [Lewes], "Recent Novels: French and English," *Fraser's Magazine* 36 (December 1847); [Lewes], "The Lady Novelists," *Westminster Review* 58 (July 1852); [Lewes], "The Novels of Jane Austen," *Blackwood's Magazine* 86 (July 1859); [Thomas Babington Macaulay], "Review of 'The Diary and Letters of Mme D'Arblay'," *Edinburgh Review* 76 (January 1843); [Richard Whately], "Unsigned review of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*," *Quarterly Review* 24 (January 1821); George Moore, "Some Characteristics of English Fiction," *North American Review* 170 (1900).

<sup>xiv</sup> [Richard Simpson], "Review of 'Memoir of Jane Austen'," *North British Review* 52 (April 1870).

<sup>xv</sup> Marianne Novy suggests that Austen's ironic attitude toward Shakespearean romantic comedy is itself Shakespearean: "the novel [*Emma*] endorses her [*Emma's*] words, in one sense, and mocks them in another, just as it endorses the Shakespeare line against her, in one sense, and

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mocks it in another sense, as Shakespeare's comic plotting also mocks it." See Marianne Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare: Responses of George Eliot and Other Women Novelists* (Athens GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 27. See also Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 169-87; John Wiltshire, "'The Hartfield Edition': Jane Austen and Shakespeare," *Persuasions* 21 (1999): 212-23; Joann Ryan Morse, "The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth: Shakespearian Comedy in Emma," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal Online* 26, 1 (2005).

<sup>xvi</sup> [Macaulay], "Review of 'The Diary and Letters of Mme d'Arblay'"; [Lewes], "Unsigned Review of *the Fair Carew*"; [], "Review of 'Pride and Prejudice,'" *Critical Review* 4th series.3 (March 1813); [Simpson], "Review of 'Memoir of Jane Austen'"; Clara Calvo, "Rewriting Lear's Untender Daughter: Fanny Price as a Regency Cordelia in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*," *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005): 83-94; Susan Allen Ford, "'Intimate by Instinct': *Mansfield Park* and the Comedy of King Lear," *Persuasions* 24 (2002): 177-97; Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Vintage, 1997), p. 321. Penny Gay elaborates the parallels between Elizabeth Bennet and Shakespeare's Beatrice in *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>xvii</sup> James Wood argues that Shakespeare is "the essential progenitor of the English novel" because of his ability to represent the drift of characters' rambling thoughts; see James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp. 17, 31-41.

<sup>xviii</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989); John Wiltshire, "An Englishwoman's Constitution: Jane Austen and Shakespeare," *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 58-76. See also Marcia McClintock Folsom, "Part of an Englishwoman's Constitution: The Presence of Shakespeare in *Mansfield Park*," *Persuasions* 28 (2006): 65-80.

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<sup>xix</sup> For an analysis of the process by which Shakespeare's characters' lines become decontextualized as Shakespearean wisdom, see Marjorie B. Garber, *Profiling Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Garber also notes the cultural afterlife and novelistic context of Crawford's and Edmund's phrases in *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), pp. 30-1.

<sup>xx</sup> Janet Todd, "General Editor's Preface," *Mansfield Park*, by Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), p. ix. Todd revises the pronouns in Crawford's speech to substitute Austen for Shakespeare: "she 'is a part of an Englishman's constitution. [Her] thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere, one is intimate with [her] by instinct.'" "

<sup>xxi</sup> For an analysis of Crawford's reading in the context of Romantic accounts of Shakespeare's genius, see Susan Harlan, "'Talking' and Reading Shakespeare in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*," *Wordsworth Circle* 39, 1-2 (2008): 43-6.

<sup>xxii</sup> Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare on the Page and the Stage," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 235-49.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Charles Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakspeare Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Representation," 1811, *The Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb*, p. 169.

<sup>xxv</sup> Price also discusses Catherine Morland's maturation as a change in reading habits on pp. 79 and 91-2. For the shift in conventionally gendered division of reading labor from the eighteenth- to the nineteenth-century, as men and women swapped preferences for extracts and stories, see Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, p. 7.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> The latter phrase itself, curiously enough, became a memorable quotation in Rudyard Kipling's short story of Austen-infatuated World War One veterans, "The Janeites," where rough soldiers are initiated into the elite fraternity of Austen worshippers through the "Password of the First Degree, which was Tilniz an' trap-doors" Rudyard Kipling, *The Janeites* (New York: Illustrated Magazine Co., 1924). Among the gender-reversals Kipling's playful text performs is the swapping of gendered reading habits, as service men here become the compilers of serviceable extracts.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Novy casts Anne's response in a cultural light, suggesting the exceptionality of Austen's use of Shakespeare in this scene: "While many of Austen's allusions to Shakespeare's comedies associate her female characters with mockery of romanticism, Anne takes a romantic stance, emphasizing women's emotionality, at the same time that she protests the male dominance of literary tradition." See Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare*, p. 30.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Jeremy Tambling, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 567, Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Scott Elledge, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), p. 45, P. G. Wodehouse, *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (New York: Scribner, 1962), p. 50.