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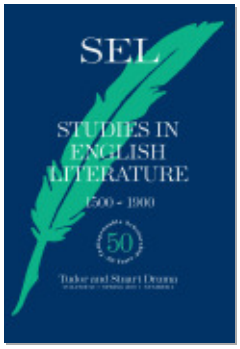

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Austen's Later Subjects

EMILY ROHRBACH

In her 1925 essay on Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf spends some time discussing Austen's early work *The Watsons* and suggests that it, though "in the main [an] inferior story," contains "all the elements of Jane Austen's greatness":

> The turns and twists of the dialogue keep us on the tenterhooks of suspense. Our attention is half upon the present moment, half upon the future. And when, in the end, Emma behaves in such a way as to vindicate our highest hopes of her, we are moved as if we had been made witnesses of a matter of the highest importance. Here, indeed, in this unfinished and in the main inferior story are all the elements of Jane Austen's greatness. It has the permanent quality of literature. Think away the surface animation, the likeness to life, and there remains to provide a deeper pleasure, an exquisite discrimination of human values. Dismiss this too from the mind and one can dwell with extreme satisfaction upon the more abstract art which, in the ball-room scene, so varies the emotions and proportions the parts that it is possible to enjoy it, as one enjoys poetry, for itself.[1]

While the current climate of Austen criticism—with its emphasis on politics, historicism, ideology—would seem to worry about stripping the narrative down to this last level of "the more abstract art" in order simply "to enjoy it . . . for itself," this essay seeks

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first to do precisely that with two of Austen's later novels, but also to suggest, however briefly, that the fruits of an investigation at the level of the "abstract art"—that is, the discovery of a self-reflexivity in Austen's representations of the subjects—can, in fact, further our understanding of the representational depth of recent political reinterpretation.

Of the three novels that Austen composed in the second decade of the nineteenth century, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* posed particular demands for her narrative technique that were quite new. The heroines are neither impertinent nor remarkably self-deluded, and so Austen rejects in them, as A. Walton Litz has said of Fanny Price, "the principle of growth and change which animates most English fiction." And he writes of *Persuasion*, "The drama of self-deception and self-recognition which holds our interest in the earlier novels is almost totally absent . . . and without it the field for irony is greatly reduced."[2] While *Emma*, the novel written in the years between these two, is of course the "drama of self-deception and self-recognition" par excellence, in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, that "surface animation"—to borrow Woolf's words—would seem already dismissed. Austen's putting aside of "the principle of growth and change," I suggest, facilitates her focusing, through these heroines, on the abstract stuff of her art, the very medium of narrative in its spatial and temporal capacities to represent mental life.

Mansfield Park's problems in style and structure have long been observed, often amounting to a critique of the perceived disconnect between the plot's triumph of conventional morality over art and the style in which that triumph is rendered.[3] In this discussion, however, attention to issues of subjectivity comes to rest upon a particular moment in *Mansfield Park* that oddly narrates the novel's own representational limits, specific to spatiality. Austen foregrounds a spatially conceived subjectivity in *Mansfield Park* and then moves to a temporal subjectivity in *Persuasion*—her ultimate, if not last, expression and exploration of narrative temporality.[4] The "historical sequence" of the two novels' composition, then, bears some significance, insofar as the discovery of a limit to the spatial representation of the earlier novel, *Mansfield Park*, points to a particular beyond, which is made the center of *Persuasion*, given full play in the temporal mode foregrounded in Anne Elliot's subjectivity.[5] This aesthetic movement from spatial subjectivity in *Mansfield Park* to temporal subjectivity in *Persuasion* will be plotted—that is to say, illuminated—through a Freudian model, while Jacques Lacan's

reading of Sigmund Freud will provide a theoretical insight to help account for the radical epistemological uncertainties informing *Persuasion*. Each novel is aesthetically self-reflexive in that the heroine's subjectivity appears as an expression of the novel's favored representational mode.

That the favored mode in *Mansfield Park* is spatial is perhaps now obvious, given Edward W. Said's discussion of "Jane Austen and Empire" in *Culture and Imperialism*.[6] Said finds Fanny's spatial movement between Portsmouth and Mansfield Park politically charged, for instance, in its correspondence with Sir Thomas's movement between Mansfield Park and the plantations in Antigua. He claims, moreover, that "We must not admit any notion . . . that proposes to show that [William] Wordsworth, Austen, or [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge, because they wrote *before* 1857, actually caused the establishment of formal British governmental rule over India *after* 1857. We should try to discern instead a counterpoint between overt patterns in British writing about Britain and representations of the world beyond the British Isles. The inherent mode for this counterpoint is not temporal but spatial."[7] In *Mansfield Park*, two distinct spatial modes work to create meaning: first, there are the movements of characters across space that most concern Said; and second, there is the use of architectural spaces.

Architectural spaces particularly deliver us into issues of subjectivity not discussed by Said. Descriptions of rooms, for instance, point to the question of Fanny's subject position. When Fanny first arrives at Mansfield, after some debate Mrs. Norris advises Lady Bertram to "'put the child in the little white attic . . . Indeed, I do not see that you could possibly place her any where else.'"[8] Her room in the house is not so much chosen for her clearly belonging there as for her clearly not belonging anywhere else. Fanny is neither immediate family nor servant, precisely. And the question of her room is also that of her subject position—a question literalized in the desire of various characters to locate her spatially: "Edmund, looking around, said, 'But where is Fanny?'" (3:71); "Sir Thomas was at that moment looking round him, and saying 'But where is Fanny?'" (3:177); and the narrator informs us, "'where is Fanny?' became no uncommon question" (3:205)—in fact, a question so recurrent it nearly becomes a linguistic tic of the novel.

Rooms suggest even subtler aspects of Fanny's subjectivity when, with Sir Thomas in Antigua and preparations for the play in progress, Fanny takes over, in addition to the little white attic,

the separate East Room, her added occupation of which suggests not only her expanding social role in the family, but also her experience of self-division brought out by the play. From criticism describing a conservative Austen to that proclaiming in Fanny a revolt on the part of gender, there has been general emphasis on the heroine's unwavering disapproval of *Lovers' Vows*, in contrast with the varying degrees of moral weakness in other characters.[9] But Fanny is evidently enamored enough by the play to have memorized it. When Mary calls on Fanny to rehearse Edmund's part with her, for instance, Fanny protests a little too much: "'I will do my best with the greatest readiness—but I must *read* the part, for I can *say* very little of it'" (3:169). When the actors nearly bludgeon Fanny into filling the part of Cottager's Wife, we learn that Fanny's claim is false: "'And I do believe she can say every word of it,' added Maria, 'for she could put Mrs. Grant right the other day in twenty places. Fanny, I am sure you know the part.' Fanny could not say she did *not*" (3:172). And she eagerly, if also anxiously, anticipates the rehearsal that Sir Thomas interrupts: Fanny is "longing and dreading to see how [Edmund and Mary] would perform" (3:167).[10] Her literal two-room domain taken over during this period thus figuratively coincides with her self-division brought out by the theatrical proceedings. In *Mansfield Park*, these figurative architectural representations of subjectivity always function simultaneously at the level of the literal.

At a certain disorienting moment in *Mansfield Park*, the architectural materials intersect excitingly with the spatial movement of the heroine; it is a moment in which the two spatial representational modes can be observed coming together, even if not to chime. But before turning to that moment, I want to recall a passage in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* in order to suggest, in however limited a demonstration, how this psychoanalytic narrative can provide a way of thinking about these issues of representation in Austen and to offer the passage as the narrative hinge upon which this essay turns from *Mansfield Park* to *Persuasion*. At the close of chapter one, Freud proposes an attempt to represent mental life in spatial terms: "Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity." He soon, however, discovers the limits of this supposition in its failure to accommodate temporal aspects, what he calls "historical sequence": "If we want to represent historical sequence in spatial terms we can only do it by juxtaposition in space . . . Our attempt seems to be an idle game.

It has only one justification. It shows us how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms."[11] My idea is that Austen arrives at this same representational impasse in *Mansfield Park*. It is most distinctly audible when Fanny returns to Portsmouth after refusing Henry Crawford; entering the parlor of her parents' home, she is for a moment disoriented: "She was then taken into a parlour, so small that her first conviction was of its being only a passage-room to something better, and she stood for a moment expecting to be invited on; but when she saw there was no other door, and that there were signs of habitation before her, she called back her thoughts, reproved herself, and grieved lest they should have been suspected" (3:377–8). The question "Where is Fanny?" indeed becomes an issue for the heroine herself. There is of course a perfectly commonsense explanation for Fanny's mistake; having lived at Mansfield she has become accustomed to its larger proportions and returns to an unfamiliar home. The language of the narrative discourse of this expectation, however, also reads as a kind of summary of the scope of the plot: "her first conviction was of its being only a passage-room to something better." In other words, the Portsmouth of Fanny's youth will finally figure as merely a passage to "something better," her installment as spiritual mistress of Mansfield. But if architectural strategies of representation elsewhere facilitate our sense of her subject position, here they fail to accommodate the "historical sequence" that we imagine would play a part in Fanny's mental life; the "historical sequence" at stake, alluded to in the language but not accommodated by the picture of her home, is the sequence of her childhood at Portsmouth followed by life at Mansfield. (Clearly, there is no larger room, no architectural "something better," attached to the small parlor at Portsmouth that would depict the "historical sequence" so powerfully suggested in the language of free indirect discourse.) Moreover, insofar as this particular "historical sequence" clearly includes a movement across space, the architectural exclusion of the temporal is also a jarring, an apparent mutual exclusiveness, of the two most prominent spatial representational modes.

If plot is the design and intention of a narrative, Fanny is a less-than-active plotter of her life. Said suggestively remarks in reference to Fanny's passivity, "one has the impression that Austen has designs for her that Fanny herself can scarcely comprehend."[12] She does not think of herself in and of time; nor is she represented vividly in those terms. The Sotherton "wilderness" esca-

pade wonderfully dramatizes the relative atemporality of Fanny in her stillness on the bench as the worldly others vigorously swirl around her. The representational jarring thus occurs between the heroine's subjectivity, which appears spatially conceived, represented through architectural materials on the one hand, and her history, which is necessarily to be found in the inherent temporality of a narrative structure on the other. But this would seem merely the honest consequence of rejecting for this novel an overt developmental narrative of the heroine's consciousness.

Claudia L. Johnson has with great subtlety illuminated the political force of Austen's novels. Of *Mansfield Park*, for instance, she has shown how the narrative strategies erode the conservative structure of paternal authority at its center: "if *Mansfield Park* appears to let conservative ideologues have it their way, it is only to give them the chance to show how little, rather than how much, they can do, and so to oblige them to discredit themselves with their own voices."[13] Thus the rather static, spatial depiction of Fanny—whose subjectivity is woven through issues of place and space, in a novel named for an aristocratic place with Sir Thomas at its head (who, as Mary Crawford tells us, "'keeps every body in their place'" and to whom change is largely unwelcome)—appears as a symptom of her position as heroine, reverent of paternal authority, in Austen's "bitter parody of conservative fiction."[14] On the contrary, as Johnson explains, "in *Persuasion*, stately houses and their proprietors are no longer formidable . . . Good characters depart from them without a breach, differ from them without defiance"; the maturer heroine of that novel, moreover, frees Austen "to explore female independence."[15] Through these distinct depictions of paternal authority—Fanny's reverence, Anne's relative independence—one might say that whereas *Mansfield Park* depicts the "present" sad reality, *Persuasion* meditates on the capacity of the present to contain the potentialities of the future. To that end, Roger Sales has argued that Sophia Croft's "partnership with her husband is not so much an accurate account of life on the quarter-deck during the Napoleonic Wars, as a potentially radical proposal about how it ought to be organised in the future."[16] The passage of time, with its attendant emotional, economic, and social flux, is foregrounded in *Persuasion*.

A far more comprehending heroine than Fanny Price, with an active temporal imagination, is Anne Elliot, heroine of *Persuasion*. If Fanny's alienated subject position is best understood as

an expression of the spatial representational mode, Anne Elliot's is an expression of temporal concerns. Issues of the "historical sequence" of consciousness, to some degree unavailable in *Mansfield Park*, are foregrounded in *Persuasion*, in the complexities of narrative temporality structuring the discourse of Anne's consciousness. *Persuasion* explores the shifting of meanings over time, as in the meaning of Anne's early refusal of Wentworth by the advice of Lady Russell, advice which, while it initially seems misguided and Anne's yielding to it a profound source of regret, Anne finally determines "is good or bad only as the event decides"—that is, in retrospect, she was right in yielding (5:246). The upshot of this vast swing of the evaluative pendulum is to reveal how difficult it is to know the present—how difficult to answer the question of how a present decision or event will figure into the subject's history.

Of particular interest, then, is a pattern of a strange temporality in the discourse of Anne's consciousness, a temporal structure aimed at this very question; that is, her thoughts repeatedly take the shape of imagining the present as a memory from the perspective of a future self. Such a construction clearly signals the loss of a unified subject position in temporal terms. But unlike the more well-known Freudian question of how the past is playing itself out in the present, the issue here is how the present will figure into an imagined future—Anne's is a decidedly *prospective* imagination.

The circumstances eliciting this shape of thought appear to be the extremes either of intense pleasure and happiness or their opposite. The temporal imagination serves, for instance, as a source of consolation for distressing apprehensions when Anne perceives the threat to her father's marital status posed by the "dangerous attractions"—albeit acerbically qualified—of the widowed Mrs. Clay; she decides to warn Elizabeth, in however futile an effort:

> Mrs. Clay had freckles, and a projecting tooth, and a clumsy wrist, which [Sir Walter] was continually making severe remarks upon, in her absence; but she was young, and certainly altogether well-looking, and possessed, in an acute mind and assiduous pleasing manners, infinitely more dangerous attractions than any merely personal might have been. Anne was so impressed by the degree of their danger, that she could not excuse herself from trying to make it perceptible to her sister. She had little hope of success; but Elizabeth, who in the event of such a re-

> verse would be so much more to be pitied than herself, should never, she thought, have reason to reproach her for giving no warning.
>
> (5:34)

Anne's conception of her present effort to advise Elizabeth—if not altogether out of a generous impulse—suggests that if the future realizes her fears, she nevertheless *will have been* a responsible sister. In the hypothetical future circumstance of Mrs. Clay's usurping Elizabeth's role as mistress of the house, the "warning," Anne imagines, will figure for her as a consoling memory—and that very notion functions to console her in the present. In another instance of Anne's distress, weary of Mary's hypochondria and ill-mannered children at Uppercross, she finds "solicitude in anticipating her removal": "Her usefulness to little Charles would always give some sweetness to the memory of her two months visit there, but he was gaining strength apace, and she had nothing else to stay for" (5:93). The two-month visit in Anne's imagination figures already as a memory while she is still suffering it. But what this peculiar relation to the present does, in part, is to alleviate her suffering by dividing her consciousness from her immediate sensations into a speculative future orientation. In distressing circumstances, there is some consolation available in thinking that the present will become the past. Although Johnson has observed, "Here, as in no other novel, we are constantly being pointed backwards . . . in short, to the inconjurable difference time makes"; in light of the prospective pattern outlined here, it would seem we are as constantly being pointed forward.[17]

This peculiar source of consolation, it would seem however, cannot be complete in that it rests upon an uncertain future state of affairs; Anne can imagine and predict how that present moment will look as a past one, but the accuracy of that perspective depends very much upon the context of what unfolds—hence its hypothetical status. And neither of these hypothetical future remembrances is explicitly realized in the narrative that ensues; when Mrs. Clay's plotting becomes apparent, no one—not even Anne—appears to remember her early warning, and Austen never shows us an Anne nourished by the specific memory of her past "usefulness" at Uppercross. These representations become significant less for proving true or untrue in relation to some actual point in the future, than for structuring Anne's relation to the present and, in that respect, serving as consolation.

More difficult to account for, perhaps, is this temporal structure when it shapes moments of extreme happiness. At the climax of the novel, when Anne has just accepted Wentworth's renewed proposal, the narrative discourse reveals them not embracing their joy straightforwardly, but instead anticipating how this "present hour" will figure into their "future lives": "soon words enough had passed between them to decide their direction towards the comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk, where the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed; and prepare for it all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow" (5:240). A "present hour" is proclaimed, but only insofar as it will figure into their imagined "future lives" as a memory. When Anne returns to the house, moreover, her disposition restrains her from simply soaring in this "high-wrought felicity," for she suspects its transience: "she re-entered the house so happy as to be obliged to find an alloy in some momentary apprehensions of its being impossible to last" (5:245). An active temporal imagination alerts her to a peril in such pure, unbridled happiness, because the "high-wrought felicity" cannot be expected to last, and in *Persuasion*, falls from high places, such as Louisa's literal one, are indeed seen to be perilous. Anne thus subdues her high felicity by hypothetically inscribing it in an imagined future retrospective context.

Imagining future memories often amounts, then, to a temporal strategy in Anne's intellectual effort to avoid self-delusion. After all, the critical capacity of a temporal imagination is an aspect of human beings that potentially elevates us above, for instance, the helpless delusion of John Keats's bees who "think warm days will never cease."[18] But the critical awareness of the present offered in Anne's future retrospective temporality is inherently incomplete in that it includes a future that holds certain uncertainties. The epistemological limitations for the present and for self-identity—based on the uncertainty of the future—are explored psychoanalytically in Lacan's "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." Lacan describes this peculiar temporal structure as the "future anterior": "What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming."[19] The present, from this divided point of view, "should be understood only as an 'anticipated past,' which has yet to arrive," explains Samuel Weber in his magisterial com-

mentary on this sentence in Lacan.[20] This disjunctive temporality occurs in "a subject whose self-consciousness is structured in terms of anticipated belatedness"—as is often the case with Anne; what this means is that the idea of the present includes a sense of the future, a time that will never have fully taken place and thus "will continually prevent the subject from ever becoming self-identical."[21] To that end, inconclusiveness becomes inevitable in critical awareness; in light of Lacan's reading of Freud, then, we can see in this temporal structure of self-understanding an inherent source of epistemological uncertainty in the heroine's subject position.

While Anne's constant effort of critical awareness would seem admirable, Austen's attitude toward it is actually somewhat difficult to register, in that Anne's attempts to know the present apparently lead in the opposite direction; Anne's experience of the present, that is, largely eludes the narrative discourse, which is preoccupied instead with anticipating events, recollecting them, and anticipating recollecting them. When at Mary's home in Uppercross, for instance, Anne and her sister receive only a few moments' notice that Captain Wentworth will be arriving—the first time Anne will have seen him in eight years since her refusal of marriage: "a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over" (5:59). Shifting immediately from anticipation to retrospection, narration of significant present actions often seems to have slipped between a break in sentences and been lost. In another instance of conspicuously absent narration, Wentworth lifts Anne into the Crofts' carriage: "Captain Wentworth, without saying a word, turned to her, and quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage. Yes,—he had done it. She was in the carriage" (5:91). Anticipation gives way directly to recollection. What this temporal structure indicates, then, is Anne's alienated relation to experience.

That in the world of *Persuasion* the exigencies of human life, of continuing, appear to necessitate these structures of alienation as the most intelligent response available, the only response with creative potentiality, is the novel's source of its profound sadness, the heart of its narrative desire, the peculiar emotional force of its aesthetic.

There is, however, an interesting exception to this slipping away of the present: it is the scene at Lyme describing the aftermath of Louisa's fall, narrating the state of emergency, and elevating Anne in Wentworth's estimation. It is the only scene in

which the narration of events takes much longer to read than the events themselves would take to happen, as if the present has expanded in the rare urgency of these few pages. And yet, insofar as Anne's experience here is represented, perhaps it is telling that at the center of the scene is a figure of unconsciousness. This is to read the scene as a theatrical performance of the subjectivity of the novel.[22] To that end, a parenthetical aside, substantially at odds with the narrative slowness, functions as a kind of stage note: "(it was all done [if not told] in rapid moments)" (5:110). This dramatic formalist reading of the novel would find thematic sanction in the largely nonlinguistic communication of looks and smirks constantly employed by Wentworth and Anne.[23] What's more, the theatricality entails a startling shift in the usual relationships—between characters as well as between the position of the reader and the heroine—in that Anne is suddenly absorbed into the scene so that we no longer see things sifted primarily through her consciousness. Instead, and astonishingly, the narrative thrill of the crisis aligns Austen's audience, if with anyone, with the "workmen and boatmen . . . collected near them, to be useful if wanted, *at any rate, to enjoy the sight* of a dead young lady, nay, two dead young ladies, for it proved twice as fine as the first report" (5:111, my emphasis). Suddenly freed from Anne's moral point of view, rather than identifying with any of the principal characters, one becomes strangely amused by the spectacle of human circumstances that the scene lays bare. This dynamic offers a hint of what Woolf foresaw taking center stage in Austen's writing after *Persuasion*, had Austen lived to write more: "She would have devised a method, clear and composed as ever, but deeper and more suggestive, for conveying not only what people say, but what they leave unsaid; not only what they are, but what life is. She would have stood farther away from her characters, and seen them more as a group, less as individuals."[24]

Not only this exceptional scene of the present, but also the dominant "future anterior" tilt of the general discourse of *Persuasion* engenders a kind of staging, and does so notably in its peculiar engagement with the larger historical context of the novel. While Lacan's analysis of the "future anterior" explores the limits of self-consciousness, the difficulty of knowing the present specifically with respect to the individual subject, his ascribing to this temporal structure an inherent epistemological uncertainty has something to tell us about *Persuasion*'s larger historical present as well, in that Austen subtly inscribes the entire narra-

tive in a similarly alienated temporality. That is, the characters in *Persuasion* repeatedly refer to the peace of their present times, scrupulously marked as running from late summer 1814 to 1815. "'This peace will be turning all our rich Navy Officers ashore,'" Mr. Shepherd observes early on (5:17). However, the novel closes ominously: "[Wentworth's] profession was all that could ever make [Anne's] friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance" (5:252). What Austen knew when writing the novel in 1815 and 1816, and what her readers too would have known, is that this hypothetical "future war" would almost instantly materialize in Napoleon's return from Elba—that is, in a resurgence of the wars, albeit brief, that were thought to have been quite over.[25] The historical orientation of the novel—at once displayed and concealed—tells us that the supposed peace informing it will have been a false peace, a knowledge that is oddly suspended in the considerable gap between the characters' perceptions of their historical moment and the readers'. The force of this temporal and epistemological gap is to suggest how uncertain knowledge of the present is when it includes a future, which is always yet to come. And Austen's suspension of that knowledge creates a theatrical effect by distancing her audience from the text; that is, the "'reader' or 'audience,' as the provisional 'representative of the other,' as Freud called Flieb, serves to delimit the borders of a stage that will always have been at a remove from the place we occupy [in this case, the place in time] as self-conscious subjects."[26]

This impending historical turn, effecting a theatrical remove, is obliquely registered in the novel when a painting in a Bath shop window fascinates and amuses Admiral Croft, who describes its apparent absurdity to Anne: "'What queer fellows your fine painters must be, to think that any body would venture their lives in such a shapeless old cockleshell as that. And yet, here are two gentlemen stuck up in it mightily at their ease, and looking about them at the rocks and mountains, as if they were not to be upset the next moment, which they certainly must be'" (5:169). Admiral Croft's ekphrastic discourse not only describes the imminent "upset" of the subjects in the painting, but also suggests Napoleon's imminent threat to the "ease" of the characters of *Persuasion*, a threat to the pervading sense of "peace" which, we imagine, will come to have been unwarranted; the implicit

analogy thus implicates the perceptive Admiral Croft himself by placing him, unwittingly, inside the circumstances of the painting, so that we see him, and the world of the novel generally, as he sees the "two gentlemen"—that is, unaware of their present situation insofar as the future will reveal it to have been. The effect perhaps is to extend the analogy to the readers of the novel—that is, to implicate also Austen's audience.

If self-identity and history were founded instead upon a perfectly contained past—in other words, the present (made) perfect—conclusiveness perhaps would not be so dubious. Characterization in *Emma* develops through a present-perfect conception of self. And the climactic moment of self-discovery, Emma's perception of who she *has been* through her reception of the past, expands the experiential present into slowness, in the way that the scene at Lyme expands in *Persuasion*—even as the narrator notes the dazzling speed of perception. When Emma realizes who she has been in relation to Mr. Knightley—that is, as he is professing his love for her—the "wonderful velocity of thought" is somewhat offset by the relative plodding of the narrative discourse of her consciousness as it undergoes some stress, expanding to accommodate the rapid dovetailing of distinct levels of mental activity:

> While he spoke, Emma's mind was most busy, and, with all the wonderful velocity of thought, *had been* able—and yet without losing a word—to catch and comprehend the exact truth of the whole; to see that Harriet's hopes *had been* entirely groundless, a mistake, a delusion, as complete a delusion as any of her own—that Harriet was nothing; that she was every thing herself; that what she *had been* saying relative to Harriet *had been* all taken as the language of her own feelings; and that her agitation, her doubts, her reluctance, her discouragement, *had been* all received as discouragement from herself.—And not only was there time for these convictions, with all their glow of attendant happiness; there was time also to rejoice that Harriet's secret had not escaped her, and to resolve that it need not and should not.
>
> (4:430–1, my emphasis)

This passage, in its proliferation of present-perfect verbs, exemplifies the discourse of Emma's self-discoveries throughout the novel, the present-perfect conception of self that structures *Emma*.

Weber describes this concept of self in contrast to the "future anterior": it is "the self-realization of an identity that has always already been virtually present to itself."[27] Such a conception allows for the possibility of a self-identical subject of self-consciousness. When Emma finally falls for Mr. Knightley, she realizes her true self through a full reception of her past, and the novel ends in "the *perfect* happiness of the union" (4:484, my emphasis). In *Persuasion*, however, Anne's affection for Wentworth is relatively clear throughout. Wentworth's appreciation of Anne must mature in certain respects, but from the outset, we entertain the question of whether Lady Russell may have been wrong in her persuasion of Anne, simply because Austen presents them in disposition as so well suited for one another. Rather than a final turn of plot making unequivocal what has been latent all along, therefore—as is the case in *Emma*—the historical orientation of the narrative enacts the structure of Anne's consciousness by including in its conception of the present a sense of the future.

Here is the third-to-last sentence of *Persuasion*: "Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection" (5:252). To have ended with that sentence would have been the rough equivalent of the narrative gesture that closes *Emma*: "But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union" (4:484). In contrast, *Persuasion*'s closure is unsettled by its allusion to "the dread of a future war" which we know will come to be realized, however briefly. The impact of that allusion is to make the present of the novel—as the characters perceive it, in its pacific veneer—look very different from any future retrospective: that is, to leave comprehension conspicuously incomplete.

At the outset of this essay, I quoted Virginia Woolf's suggestion that in reading Austen's narrative, "Our attention is half upon the present moment, half upon the future." Mary Lascelles has further observed the absence of "anything quite like [Austen's] use of anticipation in previous English fiction. Now, of course, it is a commonplace."[28] To that end, in his book *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks suggests that a sense of wonderment about the present based on an unfolding temporal context is the heart of all narrative desire: "Plot as a logic of narrative would hence seem to be analogous to the syntax of meanings that are temporally unfolded and recovered, meanings that cannot otherwise be created or understood . . . Temporality is a problem, and an irre-

ducible factor of any narrative statement, in a way that location is not . . . Perhaps we would do best to speak of the *anticipation of retrospection* as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic" (Brooks's emphasis).[29] The discourse of Anne's consciousness suggests that hers is a narrative view of life, its meanings "temporally unfolded" to her, as an active reader of its "strange logic." And Anne's subjectivity—closer than Fanny's spatial subjectivity to articulating the structures of narrative understanding—facilitates Austen's most subtle and self-reflexive exploration of the meanings available to us through narratives. Anne's subjectivity appears as an expression of narrative temporality itself, in a temporal structure that thematically serves as a regulating emotional force in the present that it attempts to know.

NOTES

[1] Virginia Woolf, "Jane Austen," in *The Common Reader, First and Second Series Combined in One Volume* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948), pp. 191–206, 197–8.

[2] A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 129, 155.

[3] See Litz, pp. 129–31; and Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 246–9.

[4] At the time of her death, Austen was working on a novel entitled *Sanditon*, a fragmentary draft of which survives.

[5] Sigmund Freud, qtd. from a passage (discussed later in this essay) in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), p. 17.

[6] Edward W. Said, "Jane Austen and Empire," in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), pp. 80–97.

[7] Said, p. 81.

[8] Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3d edn., 6 vols. (1932–34; rprt. Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 3:9–10; subsequent references to Austen's novels are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by volume and page number.

[9] See Leroy W. Smith, *Jane Austen and the Drama of Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 116; Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 55–64; and Butler, pp. 229–36.

[10] Given these instances, it would be difficult to accept without qualification Butler's appositive of "Fanny, the detached bystander" (p. 230).

[11] Freud, pp. 17–8.

[12] Said, p. 85.

[13] Claudia L. Johnson, "*Mansfield Park*: Confusions of Guilt and Revolutions of Mind," in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 94–120, 120.

[14] Johnson, "*Mansfield Park*," p. 96.

[15] Johnson, "*Persuasion*: The 'Unfeudal Tone of the Present Day,'" in *Jane Austen*, pp. 144–66, 165, 146.

[16] Roger Sales, "*Persuasion*: The War and the Peace," in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 171–99, 181.

[17] Johnson, "*Persuasion*," p. 147.

[18] John Keats, "To Autumn," in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 476–7, 476, line 10.

[19] Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 30–113, 86.

[20] Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Michael Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p. 17.

[21] Weber, pp. 10, 9.

[22] This dramatic formalist reading of the subjectivity of the novel owes something to David Wagenknecht's discussion of the "window scene" in "The Turn of the Screw"; see esp. pp. 432–9 of his essay "Here's Looking at You, Peter Quint: 'The Turn of the Screw,' Freud's 'Dora,' and the Aesthetics of Hysteria," *AI* 55, 4 (Fall 1998): 423–58.

[23] See Duckworth, pp. 204–8, in which he describes "a new mode of communication . . . in *Persuasion*"; other commentaries on this issue include Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), p. 235; Janis Stout, *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion* (Charlottesville and London: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 60; and Tara Ghoshal Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 105–6.

[24] Woolf, p. 206.

[25] I am indebted to Julia Brown for drawing my attention to this aspect of historical context (and doubtless for a great many other insights to Austen's novels).

[26] Weber, p. 10.

[27] Weber, p. 8.

[28] Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), p. 191.

[29] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), pp. 21–3.