way. Because he has learned from his Jane Austen to desire the whole and complete, the ordered and the clean—and because he loves Jane Austen—his argument about *Emma* is from the start determined to end in a vision and restoration of the author-mother-perfect-friend and must take whatever steps will lead to that restoration.

22. Fanny has earlier been more generous in bestowing the signs of her friendship. "[W]ithout loving her, without ever thinking like her, without any sense of obligation for being sought after now when nobody else was to be had; and deriving no higher pleasure from her conversation than occasional amusement, and *that* often at the expense of her judgment," Fanny "went to her every two or three days" (208). Untouched by Mary and unmoved by her in the discussion of Miss Owens, Fanny acts out an indifference acquired for purposes of display; "You know nothing and you care less, as people say," Mary notes. "Never did tone express indifference plainer" (288). But Fanny's well-spoken indifference (payback, perhaps, for the companion who had earlier remained "untouched and inattentive" in the face of "some tender ejaculation of Fanny's" about human and vegetative nature [208–9]) is the studied resolution of an irresistible restlessness: Fanny's visits to Mary and "the sort of intimacy which took place between them" are the product of "a kind of fascination" on Fanny's part (207–8). The hesitations and reluctances of Austen's language (a kind of / sort of relation between women) may name an erotic connection contained and dulled by the interposing figure of Edmund Bertram. For further discussion of Mary and Fanny, see Misty G. Anderson's " 'The Different Sorts of Friendship': Desire in *Mansfield Park*," in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 167–83. Janet Todd allows her discussion of the "strangely threatening" nature of some friendships in Austen to trouble her notion that "social friendship" (which she finds most clearly exemplified in Austen's novels) "is a nurturing tie." See *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 4–5, 246–301.

23. "Homage" in "Talk of the Town," *New Yorker*, 5 November 1979, 41–42. I thank Deidre Lynch for suggesting that I look at this passage, and I thank audiences at the University of Utah and the University of Colorado at Bolder, as well as participants in D. A. Miller's graduate seminar at Columbia University, for their stimulating responses to this essay.

3

Sensibility by the Numbers: Austen's Work as Regency Popular Fiction

BARBARA M. BENEDICT

Introduction

Charlotte Brontë's sneer at Jane Austen still resonates. "And what did I find [in *Pride and Prejudice*]?" she demanded in 1848. "An accurate daguerrotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden." Brontë's contempt for Austen crystallizes the Romantic opposition to Regency fiction thirty years after the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*. Compared to Scott's "big boom" and Brontë's sexual passion, Jane Austen's works were considered by Romantic advocates safely "delicate."[1] These judgments have swayed generations of critics into maintaining that Austen wrote refined novels that pleased conservative readers by steering clear of sentimentalism or rebellion. This pigeonholing of Austen as an author of high literature remains in effect.[2] Yet Austen wrote love stories at a time when novels that portrayed female emotion and the struggle of independent heroines against social convention were the popular rage. Moreover, the Romantic ideal of authorship as a sign of laudable originality was, in fact, only newly emerging, and doing so among a literary elite to which Austen did not belong. Poised between two aesthetics, Austen faced an audience that Brontë did not acknowledge. How did these original readers encounter Austen's work—as "literature" or as "fiction"? Since her novels plumb a popular tradition of love fiction, why did critics categorize her work as highbrow? What, indeed, is the relationship of this highbrow classification to Romantic ideals of authorship?

Scholars have noted Austen's close attention to the eddies of literary fashion in *Northanger Abbey*. But all her novels allude to popular texts. *Pride and Prejudice* condemns Mr. Collins for refusing to read novels. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* mock would-be Romantics' enthusiasm for fashionable literature; *Emma* refers to Mr. Martin's reading of Knox's *Elegant Extracts* and plunders John Almon's *New Foundling Hospital for Wit*; *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* both center on the

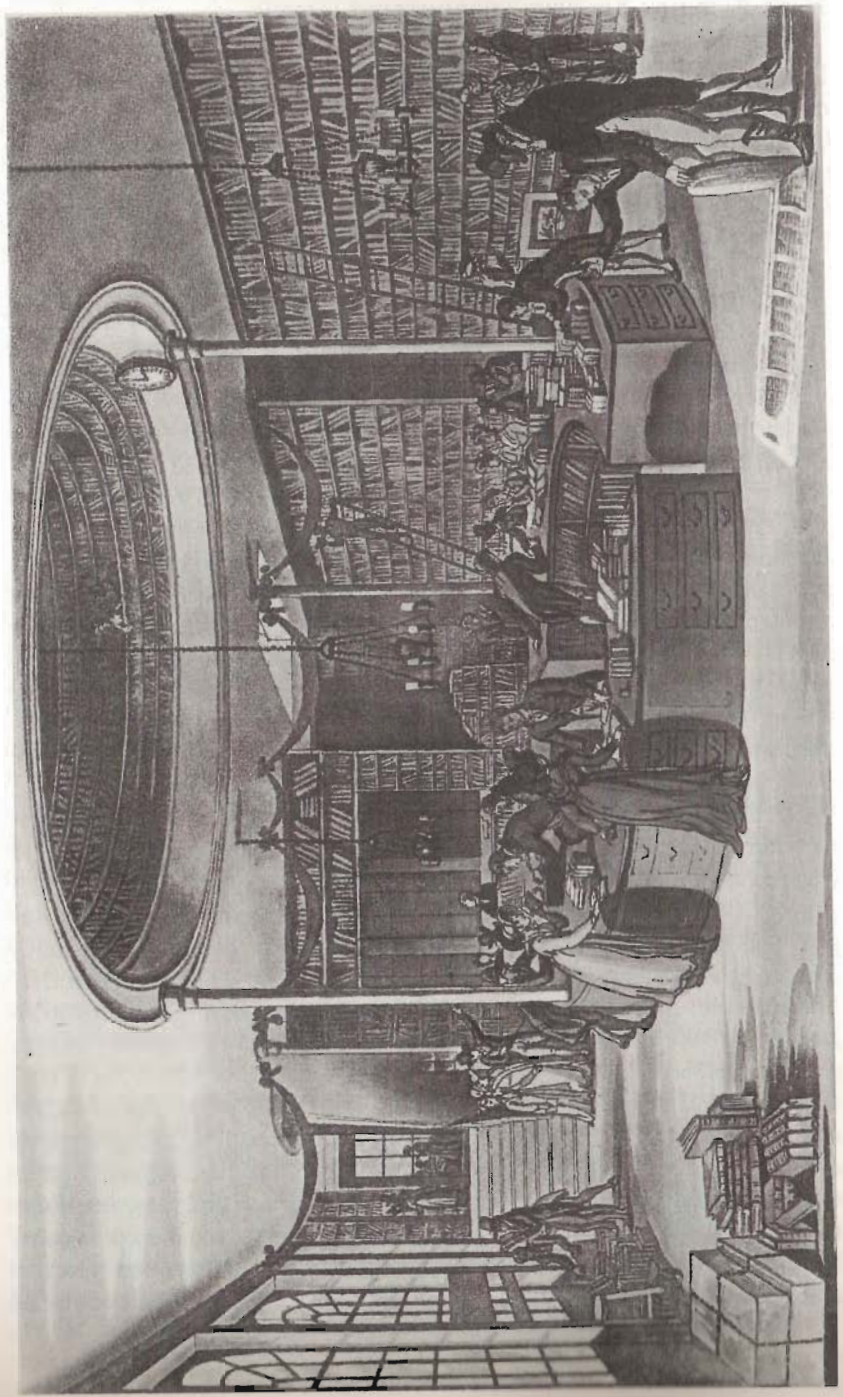
thoughtless use of a trendy text, *Lovers' Vows* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, respectively.[3] Clearly, Austen was interested in the commercial circulation of literature.[4] Indeed, her intertextuality suggests that she conceived of her novels in the context of current fiction, as a part of popular literature, and designed her novels to reach the audiences who were reading contemporary novels. An examination of the venues for the kinds of books Austen was writing, their audiences, what the safely sellable formula of novels seemed to be, and what conditions encouraged the development of this formula clarifies Austen's fictional structure and her early reception, while suggesting why she has been labeled elite. These contexts show that Austen's novels, albeit written originally for her family and informed by high, as well as popular, literature, were constructed and presented to audiences in the mold of circulating fiction: as the episodic adventures of familiar, sympathetic heroines, designed for a rapid read.

These audiences were part of the wide readership that Scott, the Romantic poets, the Brontës, and like-minded artists desired to reach in the early nineteenth century. Austen's fiction, however, scarcely encourages Romantic taste in such readers. In her plots, motifs, and settings, Austen instead makes the most of the overlap between early novels now considered "high," like Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, and new, "common" novels like the anonymous *Harriet and Her Cousin, or Prejudice Removed*, doing so just when middle-class Romantic authors were attempting to forge a profitable difference between them. Moreover, her narrative sophistication and irony suggested a stylistic compatibility between high literature and popular fiction that challenged—indeed, contradicted—Wordsworth's argument (outlined in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*) that a new literary language was required in order to reach the neglected, common audience. By her thematic and generic formulas, her style, and her method of publishing outside the contemporary critical coterie, Austen contradicted the Romantic claim that fine writing required extraordinary experience, extraordinary character, and a revolutionary ideology.[5] Her work seemed to devalue fiction writing, defining it not as the demonstration of original genius or innate talent that the Romantics claimed, but as a craft requiring only basic skill and education. In the Regency and the early Victorian period, Austen could be seen as hostile to the Romantics' attempts to make authorship an elite profession and so to distinguish themselves from the writers-for-pay employed by such publishers as the Minerva Press. By categorizing Austen herself as elite, however, this ambitious, middle-class literary coterie asserted that popular taste ran not to the familiar but to the sensational, which they provided. They thereby sought to consolidate a hold on literary production.

How Regency Readers Encountered Novels

During the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth, however, literary production in fact often entailed the formulaic reproduction not only of content but of form. The venues in which readers encountered novels like Austen's promoted the replication of these formulas: circulating libraries accessed by means of catalogs. These contexts worked to shape fiction and to outline the way to read it. The Regency library was a transitional arena permitting a rich interchange between rival literary ideals. Here, critical hierarchies vanish. Libraries juxtaposed current and classical, entertaining and technical, profiteering and pious texts. In catalogs and on shelves, Austen and Burney stand cheek-by-jowl with "high" and "low" works, genres, and authors; either readers brought their own preferences or prejudices with them, or proprietors directed their taste. Indeed, since books were arranged by format and size, as in the catalogs, in large libraries readers relied on assistants to find, even to choose, their selections (see fig. 1).[6] This jumble elided the emerging distinction between literature as a class commodity and as a popular entertainment. Austen's novels, like many others, finesse these distinctions by combining qualities currently successful in circulating novels—the topic of female education and marriage, attention to social ritual, sensitivity to female conduct and internal consciousness, an elite setting—with qualities borrowed from high literature: parody, moral seriousness, topicality. Depending on their "take," readers could categorize these works as circulating novels, moral fiction, or both.

Circulating libraries also violated cultural hierarchies. By acquiring private libraries, they helped to propel literature into the public arena and became a means for the public to sample the taste of the elite, yet their supply of fiction overwhelmed their supply of the poetry, moral philosophy, and drama that formed the traditional basis of literary collections.[7] This competition between kinds of literature did not escape public notice. For example, in a comic petition published in the *Bath Chronicle* of 25 January 1781, personified books in a circulating library plead with literary proprietors to replace novels with "serious literature."[8] But *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered: With Instructions for Opening and Conducting A Library either upon a large or small Plan* (1797) suggests that of 1,500 books, 1,050 should be novels, and 130 romances, making fiction 80 percent of the holdings. Libraries also advertised for subscribers in the newspapers and allowed visitors use of their rooms if accompanied by members or for a fee, thus blurring the boundaries between selective and general membership.[9] They allowed class mixing—and the exercise of



1. Messrs. Lackington Allen & Co., Temple of the Muses, Finsbury Square, as pictured in *Ackermann's Repository of the Arts*, no. 4 (1 April 1809). Courtesy of the Print Collection, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

social skills not recommended by traditional literature, like flirting. Austen portrays this irony in *Pride and Prejudice* when she shows Lydia Bennet attending to men rather than books at Clarke's (30).

Yet circulating library audiences in the Regency could not escape class consciousness.[10] Libraries' location, contents, fees, and clientele gave them a class stamp. Subscriptions were based on income: the more clients paid, the more books they were permitted to borrow at a time, and the greater their access to new works.[11] The huge 1812 *Catalogue of N.L. Pannier's Foreign and English Circulating Library* in London provides a typical delineation of terms: "1st class: 2 guineas per annum, 10 volumes at a time in town and 15 in the country; 2nd class: 1£. 11s. 6d per annum, 6 volumes at a time in town and 9 in the country; 3rd class: 1£. 4s. per annum, 4 volumes at a time in town and 6 in the country."[12] Moreover, the catalog graciously promises that "[a]ny Lady or Gentlemen [*sic*] to whom it may not be convenient to take Books Quarterly, &c. may be accommodated Weekly or Monthly." By contrast, Harrod's Circulating Library in rural Stamford in 1790 featured over a thousand books, the majority novels. Its twelve-page catalog, which includes *Clarissa*, *Evelina*, *The Excursion*, *Castle of Otranto*, *Emma or Child of Sorrow*, and *Emily Montague*, omits all authorial names, yet devotes a whole page to selling medicines and miscellaneous goods such as boot blacking, musical instruments, and drawing implements.[13] This library serves as a general store for a regular clientele. The still less extensive and expensive Carnavon circulating library of Jones and Parry in 1835 asks only one pound annually.

Location also dictates taste. Whereas Pannier's served a faceless urban clientele, the Carnavon library set out to woo familiar customers by providing "Instructive, Entertaining, and Religious" books, and adding "New Popular Publications . . . as soon as published, according to the patronage."[14] Whereas Pannier's abounds with novels, Jones and Parry's twenty-two-page catalog includes Blair's *Sermons*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Hester Chapone's *Letters*, *Rasselas*, works by Dodd, Doddridge, Franklin, Gregory, and many other religious and philosophical writers, along with plenty of history and three pages of biography.

In addition to prices, content, and location, the character of the proprietor, as Austen notes both in her letters and in *Sanditon*, determined the nature of a library. To entice clients, proprietors published sycophantic notes to the public in their catalogs. York's circulating library proprietor "W. STORRY Cannot suffer the present Opportunity to pass, without briefly expressing his grateful Acknowledgments for the liberal Support he has experienced from the Public; and at the same Time assures them that his utmost Endeavours shall be exerted to render his LIBRARY worthy of their future Patronage and Support."[15] Fisher's catalog is dedicated to subscribers with "sincerest gratitude. . . . He trusts that it will not be improper

for him to say, that if his Library be, in any degree, worthy of general approbation, the public is obliged to his annual subscribers, who enable him to buy so great a variety of new books, on the most important subjects."[16] With such expressions of gratitude, proprietors attempted to kindle a personal relationship with their audiences that would resemble the bonds between old-fashioned booksellers and elite clients in the previous century.[17]

Circulating libraries expanded the uses of literacy. As John Bell explains, different readers subscribe for different reasons:

> There are gentlemen who wish to examine the merits of Books before they purchase them, and others whose convenience will not admit them to purchase many new Books;—*The British Museum* and other Libraries on [*sic*] public institutions, may contain every publication, but then the mode of accommodation to individuals, is on so confined a Plan, as to render it almost useless; and the application to private collections . . . may put friendship to the test. In order, therefore, . . . To facilitate the advantages of Literature—To enable every reader to form a proper judgment of Books before he becomes a purchaser of them . . . I submited [*sic*] the following plan. . . .[18]

Bell recognizes that readers encounter books in different ways, but he interprets these differences as demonstrations of readers' unique tastes and stresses that libraries, like the commissioned booksellers, can cater to individuals by allowing them to vet texts before borrowing or buying them. As a service rendered to a mass audience, however, this practice and venue encouraged all readers to sample books before purchasing them. Reading itself could become an act of casual impressionism acted out in a social milieu, rather than the private act of intellectual commitment that Romantic theory endorsed.

Libraries also could be seen as turning authors into suppliers of cheap commodities, and raising booksellers from mediators to managers of literary culture. To the Reverend Edward Mangin, formulaic fiction that panders to the lower and middle classes degrades literature, converting it into merchandise. He blames circulating fiction for freeing the writer to feed the audience's fantasies, and thus promoting an idle greed for pleasure. This commercialization alarms Mangin because, by removing literature from the purview of critics, it seems to leave one of the most influential arenas of cultural production to be regulated by market forces alone. This decentering of cultural creation was, in fact, already over a hundred years old, but in the light of the new Romantic ideal of the spiritual independence of authorship, circulating fiction, simultaneously old-fashioned and newfangled, embodied cultural corruption.[19] Novels were a site not only of public morality but also of commercial and cultural competition.

In attacking circulating libraries' violation of both traditional and emerging, elite literary values, Mangin inadvertently outlines what readers expected when they took out a novel. Circulating libraries marketed novelty—but novelty of a particular, predictable sort. As John Bell explains, libraries traditionally specialized in permanent rather than ephemeral printed materials since "[p]amphlets in general, have been excluded from the Catalogues of Circulating Libraries, with very great propriety, as they are generally of the Mushroom kind, and seldom enjoy a less precarious existence" (preface). In the Regency, however, libraries increasingly featured topical items. At the same time, inflation, and, in particular, the gouging price of 31s. 6d. charged for Scott's three-decker novels, eroded the power of traditional booksellers to purvey fiction and so increased the importance of libraries for readers.[20] In this context, the circulating library became the first arena openly to value the experience of literary novelty over proprietorship. Its customers borrowed rather than bought; the pleasure it afforded was thus unapologetically ephemeral.

At the same time, this novelty was itself formulaic, and the libraries' catalogs underscored this. Organizing readers' responses to circulating library fiction in highly significant ways, these catalogs show which familiar features of novels were valued by their contemporaries. They were themselves formulaic books that both retained their value and required constant updating. In 1817, when the Reverend E. W. Grinfield, M.A., minster of Laura Chapel in Bath attempts "the diffusion of Religious and Useful Knowledge amongst the Labouring Orders, by the means of cheap Circulating Libraries," he suggests that "[t]he first step towards the promotion of such an Institution is the *Publication of a General Catalogue.*"[21] The London-based Earle, whose shilling catalog was published by John Nichols, stresses the importance of the catalog as an object of expenditure and a guide:

> The present Catalogue is printed different from any in London, it being the Practice of most Libraries to make their Catalogues appear as large as possible, for which Purpose, they particularize, and some even give short Accounts of the Books; whereas the one now offered exhibits at one View 90 different Books, except where there is a Collection, containing sundry Things. He trusts his Plan will be approved, as his Aim is to give Subscribers as little Trouble as possible—and it will be found as extensive as any in England. (Overleaf)

As Earle's boast demonstrates, each detail of a catalog conveys essential information to readers, although expensive ones prefer descriptive precision whereas economical ones value quantity. All catalogs, however, remind readers of the bargain circulating libraries provide. Most number each selection in vertical columns, listing the unitalicized title, the number

of volumes, and the reference numeral, often printing at the far right the price of each work for those who might wish to buy it. This detail informs readers of the work's estimated value, serving discreetly to underscore the advantage of borrowing rather than buying the book. Since these values usually rest merely on the size of a book, they remain fairly constant: Mackenzie's short but trendy *Man of Feeling*, for example, as a single volume almost universally commands 2s. 6d., while three-volume novels cost upwards of 9s. Totting up the cost of all the books a reader might peruse in a year certainly evidences the value of a library subscription.

Unlike the auction catalogs that were printed for elite collections, the catalogs for circulating libraries ignore publication dates and often omit authors' names. A sequence of sale catalogs printed in the early nineteenth century suggests that this is a significant difference not merely of practice but of policy, and moreover a difference that echoes the struggle between the Regency reader's appetite for literature's replication and the Romantic idealization of original authorship. In 1801, Turner published a catalog for his library and bookshop using the conventional method of classification by format and alphabet, mixing genres and pricing books by their length and popularity. If within the catalog novels were attributed to specific authors, they sometimes cost more: item #271 *Castle of Athlin and Dunbayne*, attributed to "Mrs. Radcliffe," is valued at 3s. 6d.; also her accredited *The Italian* at three volumes costs 15s.; and her *Sicilian Romance* is 7s. for two volumes.[22] Turner follows these principles in his 1814 sale catalog. In 1817, however, his catalog of books for sale includes a penultimate section invitingly entitled "Novels," while in 1819 he cites several previously overlooked novelists for the first time by name and includes the dates of their editions, including as item #2597 "Mackenzie's Man of Feeling, *n*. bds. 2s.6d. 1815."[23] Interestingly, the brand-new edition of Mackenzie's novel with original boards commands the same price as an old, undated one, presumably in far worse condition. This suggests that novels, no matter how popular, did not accumulate value as classics in exactly the same way that famous editions of poetry and philosophy did. Clearly, the value of this novel lay for most readers in its role as the literary epitome of sentiment.

This practice of dating editions and thus advertising them as collectible objects continues in Turner's sale catalogs for 1823 and 1827. The circulating library catalogs' practice of omitting dates suggests that novelty was so desirable to library proprietors that they preferred not to devalue their stock by admitting damning information that might make a book seem outdated. It also implies, however, that readers were unlikely to care about which edition of a novel they were ordering.[24] Catalogs thus reveal the difference between the elite custom of collecting books as objects and the new reading classes' practice of collecting the experience of reading them.

Significantly, the volumes of a work are numbered individually, but since the listed prices serve for the entire work, any volumes subsequent to the first are not priced. This reveals that whereas for book collectors with vast houses like Austen's Mr. Darcy, who "cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 38), a book's value lies in its entirety, for circulating library readers, mobile, space-short, or penny-pinched, each volume should be worth borrowing on its own merits.[25]

Packaging, like circulating library catalogs, also presented novels as interchangeable rather than unique. Despite their books' touted novelty and transience, the physical arrangement and presentation imposed by libraries gave their volumes a uniformity comparable to that of the books lining the shelves of gentlemen's libraries, where selections were bound in matching covers. Although printers, binders, booksellers, and proprietors altered the presentation of all books during the period from the eighteenth century to the end of the Regency, novels underwent a particularly significant makeover. Printed in octavo or duodecimo, small and portable, they were jacketed in marble, sky-blue, or rose-colored paper that advertised both their function as articles designed for feminized leisure and their similarity. Designed to appeal to the consumer's eye, this packaging imposes an external regularity on the novels constituting the fictional "library" and suggests a parallel internal uniformity of form and quality. Readers are encouraged to expect familiar contents.

Familiar titles reinforce this uniformity and provide readers with the clearest clue to these contents. The subtitular hint "A Novel" rarely appears in catalogs, so titles alone must serve to signal their genre or subgenre. Bell's catalog categorizes books by format (novels never appear in the large formats), and then genre, but whereas volumes in sections like "History and Antiquities," "Divinity," and "Voyages and Travels" are listed by author, the volumes in "Romances, Novels, and other Books of Entertainment" appear only by title. Although Storry's catalog lists its stock alphabetically under the author's name within format divisions, tales and novels as usual appear under their titles—including item #1047 *First Impressions; or, the Portrait* (4 vols., £1) and item #1663 *Musgrove (Eliza)* (2 vols., 6s.) (28, 42). Despite omitting the titles of its three hundred plays as "too tedious to mention," Harrod's lists all its novels by their titles. More scrupulous catalogs distinguish plays from novels by using parenthetical notes like "sent[imental] com[edy]" and "tragedy." Since many early catalogs mix all kinds of works—biography, travels, memoirs, novels, beauties (compendia of choice passages from the work of a particular author), poetry, biography, medicine, drama, periodicals, travels, dictionaries, and pictorial works—readers were expected to infer the genre of a work from its title. This lack of categorical differentiation separates

circulating library catalogs from auction catalogs that categorize literature by genre; the former equate all kinds of reading as equally satisfying.

The similarity of novels' titles further underscores the similarity of their contents. These titles fall into a few, loose categories. Many are names that typecast protagonists, particularly women. While no Austen novel finds its way into Pannier's catalog, something entitled *Susan* appears at 2 vols. for 12s., and under "E" the evidently popular *Eliza Musgrove*, 2 vols., 4s. (#4549, 89; #590, 26). As Austen well knew, women's names, especially fashionable and familiar ones, seemed to survive endless repetition.[26] In *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator regularly plays with the associations of nomenclature, asserting Mr. Morland's respectability "though his name was Richard," explaining Tilney's forgiveness of Catherine as a sign of the sensibility of "a Henry," and tracing Tilney's ability to manufacture a Radcliffean fantasy to his intimate knowledge of "Julias and Louisas" (13, 94, 107). Ebers's 1816 catalog, for example, cites eight novels whose main title is *Julia*, and two more *Juliana* (117). Four *Emma*s, not even including Austen's or another published by Lane, appear here. These familiar names function for readers as a code for types of moralized sensibility.

The repetition of the titles within such lists also supplies readers with a context they could draw on to evaluate new novels. The publication of *First Impressions* may have prevented Austen from using that title, but the concept was already banal. In 1799, Earle's catalog lists as item #1687 "*Love at first sight*, by Gunning," five volumes for 17s. 6d.; as item #1687 "*Love at first sight, or miss Caroline Hamilton*," three volumes for 9s.; and as item #1689 "*Love at first sight, or the gay in a flutter*" for 3s. (39). This titular repetition suggests that originality was not an important criterion for publishers or readers. Ebers's library in 1809 lists, as item #11509, "*First Impressions, or Sketches from Art and Nature, animate and inanimate*, by J.P. Malcolm, Esq." at 16s., as well as #11070, "*Pride of Ancestry*," four volumes for £1.[27] In 1816, Ebers includes as item #5066 *Sense and Sensibility*, 3 volumes for 18s., and as item #4905 "——— and Prejudice, by a Lady, 3 vols. 18s." (169, 164). The latter appears beneath *Pride of Ancestry* at 4 vols. for £1 1s.[28] While such juxtapositions often, if not always, hint at topical echoes, titles only outline subgenre; they do not convey tone. Although readers relied primarily on the main title, since novels often lost their subtitles in catalogs, long repetitive titles added style, as well as emphasis. Many use these secondary clauses further to characterize their protagonists, for example, #5292 *Adultress (the), Aspasia, or the Dangers of vanity*, and *Alphonsine, or Maternal Affection* (5–6). A few titles describe a lurid incident: #169 *Atrocity of a Convent*, 3 vols., 15s. (4), or #95 *Annals of Suicide, or History of Self Murder* 3s. 6d. (3). The utter absence in the catalog of any clue signaling satire, sentimentalism, tragedy, or comedy suggests that for Regency readers, tone may

have been less important than plot and unimportant compared to character, particularly the character of a female heroine.

The titles of Austen's first two published novels announce the novels' allegiance to one particular subgenre: romances about the education of heroines. In titling these books, Austen employs terms that were highly familiar to her audience and would immediately signal the central plots of her novels: "sense," "sensibility," "pride," and "prejudice." Indeed, she prunes away the subtitle that has become so typical of circulating fiction, and so prompts or licenses her publisher Thomas Edwards to exploit the densely packed terms by printing them repeatedly in the text. The first editions of both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* repeat the title on each volume's opening page. *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Printed for the Author, . . . and published by T. Egerton, Whitehall, 1811) prints the title as a running head in each of its three volumes. *Pride and Prejudice* (London: T. Egerton, Military Library, Whitehall, 1813) not only prints the title "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" on its half title page between double rules but includes a full title page that solicits the audience for Austen's previous novel: "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: A Novel. In Three Volumes. By the AUTHOR OF 'SENSE AND SENSIBILITY.' " This both advertises the previous novel and reiterates its thematic category. *Sense and Sensibility* is a fictional exploration of sentimentalism; circulating readers remember this each time they open one of its volumes.

The importance of titles for quickly sending signals to readers was obvious to publishers.[29] The celebrated and successful William Lane of Lane's Circulating Library fused tout and tale in his humorous advertisement *A Tale Addressed to the Novel Readers of the Present Times.* A joking intertextual squib, serving simultaneously as advertisement and parody, this story opens:

> In a sequestered and romantic part of an interior county resided ELLEN, COUNTESS OF CASTLE HOWELL; a lady who united an excellent mind to an elegant person. She was reared, and had received instructions for her conduct through life from the protectress of ANNA, or the WELCH HEIRESS: And though she had a few JUVENILE INDISCRETIONS, yet her guardian angel, hovering around her, prevented her sharing the fate of the innocent AGNES DE COURCY.[30]

Suggesting how women's names and experiences were the topics of novels, Lane explains that "[h]er companions were PAULINE, A VICTIM OF THE HEART, and MADELINE, of the HOUSE OF MONTGOMERY. Her attendants LUCY, with the twins ELLEN AND JULIA, having been reared in the CASTLE OF WOLFENBACH, were, from some ERRORS OF EDUCATION, not the WOMEN THEY SHOULD BE" (3). The seven-page tale concludes by soliciting readers to visit Lane's Press: "The readers who are anxious to inquire earlier [than the year's probation Minerva demands] into the fates, and

attendant circumstances, may be fully gratified by application to her Temple,—where, for the Entertainment, all these MYSTERIES" may be purchased (7). On the back page is the list of "JUST PUBLISHED" novels, including all twenty-six of those mentioned in the tale, and a list of twelve more "IN PRESS." The titles clearly told readers what subgenre of novel—Gothic or sentimental—they were.

The Contextual Influence on Austen's Fiction

This principle of listing books by title alone began to change, however, when Romantic notions of authorship infiltrated libraries. The Reading circulating library established by George Lovejoy in 1832 explains meticulously that "[i]n the second part, from page 183 to 360, *Works of Fiction* are arranged separately in alphabetical order, under the *name* of the Author, and again under the *title* of the Book."[31] In this library, all of Austen's novels appear listed alphabetically under "Austen, Jane," with *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* appearing under "N" (191). In this scholarly system of cataloging, Austen's novels are lifted from the traditional context of circulating fiction and appear as highbrow literature, the product not of a formula but of an individual sensibility. This represents them as Romantic products, texts for elite readers vetted by experienced critics.

As Lane's advertisement shows, however, for Regency writers and readers, circulating novels established their own literary context not through plaudits in critical reviews but through intertextuality. With a tonal flexibility difficult for modern audiences to grasp, these novels yoke self-consciousness and sentimentality. At the start of *Constantia; or, the Distressed Friend*, for example, Charles Easeby remarks to Sir Thomas Trevor, "If Fortune should ever throw us into a Train of Adventures (which you know had like to be the Case at our Departure from *France*) there could not possibly be found two Heroes better adapted to be the subject of a modern Novel. As it is, if I had *Oliver Goldsmith's Chinese* Habit . . . I should describe . . . [an] Allegory. . . ."[32] Novels depended on readers' knowledge of other novels, as Austen recognizes when she refers to Burney and Radcliffe in *Northanger Abbey*, her novel most explicitly addressed to the circulating library public, and when she sprinkles references to texts or heroines' names in vogue throughout her novels. In *Persuasion*, for example, a Louisa Musgrove, whose prototypical name resonates with fictional sensibility, charmingly injured (mainly in the head) by a fall, wins the heartbroken and poetic Captain Benwick. In contrast, the materially injured and bedridden Mrs. Smith exhibits fortitude, although Sir Walter Elliot scoffs, "a mere Mrs. Smith, an every day Mrs. Smith, of all people and of

all names in the world, to be chosen," blithely overlooking his favorite Mrs. Clay's transparent name (158). Such a blend of metafictional satire and sentimental morality was not uncommon.

Moreover, novels themselves incorporated criticism of novels. *Female Sensibility; or, the History of Emma Pomfret*, published by Lane, opens much as *Northanger Abbey* does, by denying its own sentimental premise: "To the Reader: Whoever expects to find, in the following sheets, warm descriptions of Romantic adventures; improbable events . . . pompous acounts of bleeding heroes, and of sceptered tyrants, will be disappointed. This is an artless tale, told in an artless strain. The story is wrote only to the heart; and is plain, simple, and unaffected." Using two passages also quoted in *Northanger Abbey*—Thomson's "Delightful task! . . . To teach the young idea how to shoot," and "A maid in love . . . Sitting like patience on a monument, Smiling at grief"—the author argues that the events in this novel are "natural and familiar, and such as occur every day," and should thus inspire Aristotelian pity, not merely "respect."[33] These texts show that self-conscious theoretical realism used to sanction sentimentalism informs circulating fiction and informs the reader of how to read it.

Just as readers were accustomed to intertextual references and assertions of literary method, so they evidently welcomed direct addresses by the narrator. In *Female Friendship*, the narrator remarks encouragingly, "From what has been said, the readers will naturally expect two marriages;—nor will they be disappointed."[34] Austen uses the same ploy at the end of *Mansfield Park* when she "purposely abstain[s] from dates" to allow her readers to imagine the marriage that completes the novel's action (470). In *Northanger Abbey*, she leaves to the reader the exact chronicle of Henry Tilney's explanation of his father's perfidy to Catherine (247). Dependent on the reader's knowledge of fictional formulas, this technique places novels firmly within the circulating novel tradition, simultaneously flattering the reader, justifying the writer's structure, and demonstrating their bond. Again, the narrator of *Female Friendship* explains, "Having thus dispos'd of my principal personages, I must (after the example of my betters) likewise give some small account of the other characters mentioned in this trifling work" (2:261). In *Mansfield Park*, Austen uses the same formula to finish off the novel: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body . . . to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest" (461). Such outlines of the rules of novelistic structure direct authors how to fulfill the readers' expectations, and readers how to read the fictions.

Other rules concern the presentation of character. Like her fellow writers, Austen herself uses the formula of an opening informational chapter situating her families and heroines in their social context. *Female Friend-*

ship: or the Innocent Sufferer starts, for example, by describing the hero: "Sir Henry Summers was a man by nature formed sensible, open, and compassionate to the distresses of his fellow creatures, which he never looked on without pitying, nor was pity all he bestowed. . . . Yet notwithstanding he was thus endowed with every virtue that can truly form the amiable, generous, honest man; he had, in common with all human kind, his particularities . . ." (1:5). Austen parodies this sentimental formula in her juvenilia. *Jack & Alice: A Novel* begins with the pronouncement "Mr. Johnson was once upon a time about 53; in a twelvemonth afterwards he was 54 . . ." (*Minor Works*, 12). Imitating circulating fiction's practice of generic advertisement by the subtitle "A Novel," this squib runs through its main characters in a series of terse sentences: "Mr & Mrs Jones were both rather tall & very passionate, but were in other respects, good tempered, well behaved People. . . . Miss Simpson was pleasing in her person, in her Manners & in her Disposition; an unbounded ambition was her only fault. Her second sister Sukey was Envious, Spitefull & Malicious. Her person was short, fat & disagreable [*sic*]. Cecilia (the youngest) was perfectly handsome but too affected to be pleasing" (12–13). As Austen's mockery makes clear, this schematic characterization adumbrates the plot to come and relieves the reader from having to evaluate ambiguous characters.

In her mature work, Austen deliberately aims at a surprising plot and at complexity of characterization. Nonetheless, her novels open with this formula, albeit tonally modulated by her reading in high literature. *Emma*, for example, starts by defining the heroine's virtues, clarifying her situation, and hinting at the flaw that will provide the drama:

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.
>
> She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father, and had, in consequence of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period. (5)

Sense and Sensibility begins by defining the Dashwoods' situation; a similar pattern appears in *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*. Only *Pride and Prejudice* opens, after an ironic generality, in medias res and delays the narrative revelation of character. In general, Austen adheres to the formula of defining her characters by their social circumstances, and physical and moral traits.

Unlike the eighteenth-century practice of reading for detachable "beauties," the reading elicited by circulating fiction increasingly concentrates on plot and character development. In Ann Radcliffe's transitional

novels, the two techniques often conflict, as her long, pictorial passages halt the plot and sometimes interfere with the characterization, but later works tend to jettison description in favor of incident.[35] This feature informs the circulating novel's structure. Incidents propel plot. Since libraries lent books by the volume rather than the work, multivolume formats proved most profitable, but readers were more likely to peruse multiple volumes if they were waiting for the resolution of a drama. Although single-, double-, and quadruple-volume works exist, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, the three-decker dominated, partly perhaps because of the notoriety that Scott's novels gained for this format from 1814 through the 1820s. The borrowing terms of libraries reflect and reinforce this formula, often lending customers volumes in multiples of three. Because circulating fiction was lent out this way, the structural device evolved of ending each volume, like an episode in a televised serial, with a "hook."

Earlier epistolary fictions, written, unlike Richardson's *Pamela*, from a retrospective viewpoint, contain no real urgency, since the reader knows from the first sentence the heroine's fate. Mrs. W. Burke's two-volume *Elliott: or, Vicissitudes of Early Life*, for example, contains climaxes, but the volumes are almost interchangeable—this is also true of Frances Brooke's *Julia Mandeville*.[36] The epistolary travelogue *The Portrait*, like Brooke's *Emily Montague*, interlards sentimental descriptions of the love affair of Miss Maria Bellmont and the brother of her epistolary friend Miss Harriot Marchmont with accounts of journeying through Russia.[37] These and similar novelistic devices offer readers select, sentimental beauties—pictorial descriptions or linguistic virtuosities to be lingeringly memorized—that do not culminate in a denouement. Since they proceed rhythmically and episodically, rather than progressively, they evoke and depend on a leisurely, impressionistic kind of reading.

This, however, was increasingly not the kind of reading that circulating novel clients enjoyed, charged as they were by the day. Moreover, novelists writing to appeal to such readers needed to provide a cumulative interest. Rather than supplying beauties to be lingeringly memorized, they designed obsolesence: plots to mesmerize audiences through three volumes and then to release them. Austen employs some the techniques of the earlier fiction while developing new strategies more suited to the new ways of reading. Rather than providing pictorial descriptions or linguistic virtuosity, she creates dramatic scenes. They abound in *Sense and Sensibility*: the moment when Willoughby rescues Marianne; when Elinor and Marianne discover that the gentleman approaching over the hills is Edward, not Willoughby; when Marianne confronts Willoughby at the London ball; and when Willoughby arrives at the stroke of midnight just as Marianne begins to recover in her sickbed above stairs. In her later works, Austen adapts this technique to the new formula of longer chapter, volume, and

work lengths, indicating again her sensitivity to contemporary changes in taste. Moreover, her method of free indirect style, which relinquishes the narrative to the heroine, increases the drama and strengthens the identification with the heroine that readers coveted. These devices lead readers from one volume to the next.

Austen's overarching structure resembles Walter Scott's: a cumulative action segmented into a three-tiered novel, with patches of description and dramatic dialogue, and a climax at the end of each volume. The first volume of *Sense and Sensibility* concludes with the scene in which Elinor learns definitively of Lucy's engagement to Edward, when she views Lucy's miniature portrait of him and recognizes his hair ring. The final sentence—"After sitting with them a few minutes, the Miss Steeles returned to the Park, and Elinor was then at liberty to think and be wretched"—promises readers emotional descriptions as well as complications of plot in the next volume (135). Volume 2 repeats and intensifies this dynamic by recording (ironically) in its final paragraph Lucy's triumph: "Sir John . . . brought home such accounts of the favour [the Miss Steeles] were in, as must be universally striking. Mrs. Dashwood had never been so much pleased with any young women in her life, as she was with them; had given each of them a needle book, made by some emigrant; called Lucy by her christian name; and did not know whether she should ever be able to part with them" (254). In *Mansfield Park*, Austen combines this technique with metafictionality by concluding the first volume when Julia, erupting into a scene that itself depicts a dramatic rehearsal, "with a face all aghast, exlaimed, 'My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment' " (172). With acute irony, Austen not only imitates the dramatic structure of *Lovers' Vows* by concluding a volume with an abrupt pronouncement of disaster; she also imitates its plot. Just as the play turns on the shocking return of the missing protagonists, so the novel announces the sudden return of the absent patriarch. Austen's readers go to the next volume to learn what will happen, not merely to enjoy more dialogue and character.

How Novels Were Read

Dramatic techniques complemented libraries' lending policies. Since novelty was a library's bread-and-butter, especially in London and fashionable watering places like Bath, proprietors urged patrons to read quickly. Turner's insisted that, "New novels must not be kept longer than a week, and new plays and pamphlets not longer than two days."[38] Pannier entreats readers in italics, "*It is requested that the Book lent may be returned immediately it is read.*" Readers competed for new publications. When he tries to

borrow *Vensenshon, or Love's Mazes*, a romance hot off the press, Mangin himself notes that "the proprietor of a circulating library assured me, at the time of lending it, that he gave me the preference over fifteen expectants."[39] The more customers paid, the sooner they got to borrow fresh books.

Rapid reading entailed rough treatment. N. L. Pannier's Circulating Library catalog for 1812 warns grimly on its opening page, "N.B. Ladies and Gentlemen Subscribers are respectfully informed, that if any Book is written in, torn, or otherwise damaged, while in their possession, the same to be made good." Ebers in 1816 inscribed a new rule: "If a Book be written in, torn, or damaged, whilst in the Possession of a Subscriber, that Book, or the Set (if Part of one) to be paid for. *The very great injury caused by persons writing their remarks, and otherwise wilfully damaging, even the most valuable works, has determined the proprietor to introduce this rule*" (original italics; rule 5). Other proprietors complain of notes in the margins and of torn leaves. Even Mangin, fantasizing about the fate of his text, describes the history of a circulating library volume as physically battering: "It will . . . be turned over, thrown down, taken up again, cut open, read, and returned to the shop with the usual and flattering marks of having seen service; viz. a leaf or two torn out, scratches of pins, scoring of thumb-nails, and divers marginal illustrations, executed by means of a crow-quill, or a black-lead pencil."[40] Clearly, readers did not regard these books as valuable possessions worthy of care. Nonetheless, they did comment on the books themselves, suggesting that novels were read as part of a play or as a conversation between anonymous readers. They had an active life in readers' minds.

Although most of Austen's early readers indeed remained both anonymous and silent, the author did record some opinions about *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* that show the ways in which readers compared her novels with others in the popular genre. Most focus on particular characters: " 'We certainly do not think as a *whole*, [*Mansfield Park* is] equal to P. & P.—but it has many & great beauties,' " observes Francis William Austen, but rather than citing passages or scenes, he proceeds to specify his "favourite" personalities (*Minor Works*, 431). While Austen may well have prompted these remarks, they indicate contemporary standards of judgment echoed in the library catalogs and novels' titles that register the Romantic emphasis on character. Three kinds of responses dominate the record: emotional reaction, such as liking or hating; moral responses like admiration; and aesthetic evaluations of technique, signaled by words such as "pleasing," "enjoyable," and "natural." While neither exclusive nor contradictory, these differences in terminology do signal different criteria of value and distinguish distinct groups of readers. Since Austen's family

tend to be well-educated and sophisticated readers, they often employ aesthetic terms. "My Eldest Brother—a warm admirer of it in general.—Delighted with the Portsmouth Scene" (432). "Mrs. James Austen, very much pleased. Enjoyed Mrs. Norris particularly, & the scene at Portsmouth. Thought Henry Crawford's going off with Mrs. Rushworth, very natural" (432). "Cassandra—thought it quite as clever, tho' not so brilliant, as P. & P.—Fond of Fanny.—Delighted much in Mr. Rushworth's stupidity" (432). Such aesthetic evaluations depend on the reader's own experience, for one class's realism is another's romance. Responses from Lady Gordon and Mrs. Pole, written after *Emma* had been published with its dedication to the Prince Regent, stress Austen's technique, differentiating her from other novelists by emphasizing the authenticity of her elitism: "In most novels you are amused for the time with a set of Ideal People whom you never think of afterwards or whom you the least expect to meet in common life, whereas in Miss A——s works, & especially in M P. you actually *live* with them, you fancy yourself one of the family" (435). Lady Gordon contrasts romantic fantasy with novelistic precision. Mrs. Pole more openly compares Austen to circulating library novelists:

> There is a particular satisfaction in reading all Miss A—s works—they are so evidently written by a Gentlewoman—most Novellists fail & betray themselves in attempting to describe familiar scenes in high Life, some little vulgarism escapes & shews that they are not experimentally acquainted with what they describe, but here it is quite different. Everything is natural, & the situations & incidents are told in a manner which clearly evinces the Writer to *belong* to the Society whose Manners she so ably delineates. (435)

These readers indicate that one trademark of the popular novel was a heady setting in high society.[41] Such a setting might feed the social fantasies of common readers, but evidently it offended inhabitants of this society themselves. Austen herself satirizes this feature in her burlesque "Plan of a Novel," which concludes by insisting that "[t]hroughout the whole work, Heroine to be in the most elegant Society & living in high style. The name of the work *not* to be *Emma*—but of the same sort as S & S. and P & P." (*Minor Works*, 430). She jokes that this planned novel's elite signature is to be reinforced by an abstract title, one that privileges the play of concepts and not the experience of the heroine. Here, Austen herself records the contemporary hostility between classes over control of the literary arena.

This difference between conceptual and characterological nomenclature distinguishes Austen's elite audience, including most of her family, from the audience for circulating fiction. Similarly, aesthetic criteria evaluating technique were not the most general standards of evaluation. Austen's

middle-class acquaintance generally employ moral and emotional terms of criticism, focusing on the novel's piety and characters. "Mr. & Mrs. Cooke—very much pleased with [*Mansfield Park*]—particularly with the Manner in which the Clergy are treated.—Mr. Cooke called it 'the most sensible Novel he had ever read.'—Mrs. Cooke wished for a good Matronly Character" (433). Amidst the general moral applause, however, some readers indicated that the three criteria of aesthetic, moral, and emotional pleasure came into conflict: "Miss Sharpe—'I think [*Mansfield Park*] excellent—& of it's good sense & moral Tendency there can be no doubt.—Your Characters are drawn to the Life—so *very, very* natural & just—but as you beg me to be perfectly honest, I must confess I prefer P & P' " (434). Alethea Bigg shares Miss Sharpe's opinion: "I have read M P. & heard it very much talked of, very much praised, I like it myself & think it very good indeed, but as I never say what I do not think, I will add that although it is superior in a great many points in my opinion to the other two Works, I think it has not the Spirit of P & P., except perhaps the *Price* family at Portsmouth, & they are delightful in their way" (434). These responses register the division between the elite criteria of realism and morality and the primary lure of the novel as a genre of romantic fantasy. This division mirrors the social and conceptual divisions that segregated literature from circulating novels.

Central to these evaluations was comparison. Within Austen's circle, her books were compared to one another: "Miss Lloyd preferred [*Mansfield Park*] altogether to either of the others" (432); "Mrs. Augusta Bramstone—owned that she thought S & S.—and P. & P. downright nonsense, but expected to like M P. better, & having finished the 1st vol.—flattered herself she had got through the worst" (433); "Mrs. Carrick—All who think deeply & feel much will give the Preference to Mansfield Park" (434). Elite readers differentiated her novels from common circulating fiction primarily because they knew the author: after noting Austen's evident experience of high life, Mrs. Pole records the sophisticated speculation about the author, turning Austen's novel into a kind of roman à clef (435). Within the catalogs of circulating libraries, however, comparison worked to reinforce the charms of each composition, rather than to elevate one at the expense of another.[42] Novels trained readers in reading novels, through their intertextuality or their repetitions of tropes that with increasing efficiency induced the desired, sentimental responses. The characteristics of female heroines accumulated in the mind of the reader to form an ideal heroine, a composite Emma—the character parodied in Austen's "Plan of a Novel." This comparative, heroine-centered evaluation reflects the ways novels were presented: as exegeses of female virtue.

Conclusion

Austen structures her fiction according to circulating novels' formulas and strategies. In libraries and their catalogs, these novels become part of a public literary collection featuring tales of love in elite settings, a happy ending in the form of a marriage, and the fulfillment of readerly expectations. In her plots, characterization, organization, and narrative strategies of intertextuality, tonal fluidity, and self-consciousness, Austen underscores her obedience to them. Libraries' practice of lending works by the volume required readers to read quickly. It also encouraged Austen to arrange for her plots to move rapidly to a climax at the end of each volume, while continuing to provide dramatic beauties for her readers to remember after they had returned the book. As Regency libraries simultaneously enforced and transgressed class distinctions through their rules for visitors, advertising, and fee schedules, Austen also gears her novels both to her upper-class audience and to the novel-reading public. Likewise, as these libraries profited from readers' identification with a central character, usually a heroine, so Austen wove her fictions around the ambiguities of such an identification with flawed protagonists. Readers approached Austen's novels expecting to read quickly through all their volumes, closing the last with a sense of identificatory triumph with a familiar character, not with an extraordinary Romantic hero.

Although, as a member of a book-loving family, Austen doubtless wished her readers to buy her books, they were as well adapted to the circulating as to the private library, for she wrote in a practical spirit as a sometime author, rather than as an ideologue. The conventions she borrowed from circulating novels, including intertextuality, tonal ambiguities, and the negotiation of moralism and fantasy, framed her works as both fiction and literature—depending on the reader's own context. To the professional writers forging an authorial identity of unique genius, this very adaptability made Austen an exemplar of a privileged mode of casual authorship. Austen's very lack of ideological rigor allowed her to become known as the author of high literature. Ironically, for Romantic critics and many of their successors, her very marketing strategies for popularity marginalized her as elite.

Notes

References to book catalogs, after an initial documentary endnote, appear parenthetically in the text. My thanks to Deidre Lynch for her help in editing this article.

1. Charlotte Brontë, to George H. Lewes 1848: Southam 1968, 126.

2. Even while acknowledging that her low publication runs cannot be taken to indicate her readership since "many of the copies went to the circulating libraries," and while noting Lewes's observation that she is "very widely read," Southam maintains that, "[p]re-1870, Jane Austen was never thought of as a popular novelist." See Southam 1968, 24, 28. By stressing her refinement, Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice," printed in the 1818 edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, and James Edward Austen-Leigh's 1870 *Memoir of Jane Austen* reinforced this assumption that Austen was an elite author. Influential criticism, especially from the 1970s, focused on Austen's formal irony and thus cemented her status as a highbrow writer. Modern movies that place Austen's work among a host of filmic depictions of love may, in fact, more closely mirror her original context.

3. For an examination of Austen's use of popular sources, see Barbara M. Benedict, "A Source for the Names in Austen's *Persuasion*," *Persuasions* 14 (16 December 1992): 68–69.

4. For examinations of the commercialization of printed culture in the eighteenth century, see particularly Richard D. Altick's groundbreaking *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), esp. 59–77; and Terry Lovell, "Subjective Powers? Consumption, the Reading Public, and Domestic Woman in Early Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Consumption of Culture: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 23–41.

5. Clifford Siskin's recent account of how Austen rejected the magazines as a forum for her fiction and chose John Murray as her publisher seems to me to reinforce the artificial distinction between "high" and "low" literary forms that, in fact, during the Regency seemed very unstable. See *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

6. Hilda M. Hamlyn, *Eighteenth-Century Circulating Libraries in England* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1947), 216, 208–9.

7. In "From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries," James Raven emphasizes the contested division between public and private space, and the anxiety surrounding public libraries in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175–201.

8. Paul Kauffman, "The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., 57 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1967), 6.

9. Hamlyn, *Eighteenth-Century Circulating Libraries*, 218–19.

10. Jan Fergus points out that price limited servants' reading in "Provincial Servants' Reading in the Eighteenth Century," in Raven, Small, and Tadmoor, *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, 202–25.

11. Charlotte A. Stewart-Murphy, *A History of British Circulating Libraries: The Book Labels and Ephemera of the Papantonio Collection* (Newtown, Pa.: Bird and Bull Press, 1992), 14–24.

12. *Catalogue of N. L. Pannier's Foreign and English Circulating Library*, No. 15 Leicester Place, Leicester Square (London, Cavendish Square: Juigné, 1812).

13. *A Catalogue of Harrod's* CIRCULATING LIBRARY, Comprising 700 NOVELS, &c. and 300 Plays (Stamford, 1790).

14. *A Catalogue of the Instructive, Entertaining, and Religious* CIRCULATING LIBRARY, at Jones and Parry's, Booksellers, Stationers, and Print-sellers (Carnavon: For the Proprietors, [1835]), overleaf title page.

15. *A Catalogue of W. Storry's General Circulating Library, Petergate, York.* Containing upwards of Ten Thousands Volumes of Valuable BOOKS, in the different classes of polite literature, which are LENT OUT TO BE READ By the Year, Quarter, or Single Book (Agreeable to the Conditions specified on the following Page), and to which ADDITIONS WILL BE MADE of every NEW BOOK of GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT as soon as published (W. Storry, 1809), overleaf.

16. *A Catalogue of R. Fisher's* CIRCULATING LIBRARY, in the High-Bridge, Newcastle (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1791), overleaf.

17. See Barbara M. Benedict, " 'Service to the Public': William Creech and Sentiment for Sale," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, n.s., 15, nos. 1 and 2 (February and May, 1991): 119–46.

18. *New CATALOGUE OF BELL'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY*, Consisting of about Fifty thousand Volumes (English, Italian, and French) . . . Including all the BOOKS that have been lately published: Which are Lent to Read . . . By John Bell (London, [1778]), preface.

19. Rev. Edward Mangin, M.A., *An Essay on Light Reading, As it may be supposed to influence Moral Conduct and Literary Taste* (London: James Carpenter, 1808). On authorship, see Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

20. Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800–1850* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 130–31.

21. Rev. E. W. Grinfield, M.A., minister of Laura Chapel, *REFLECTIONS* on The Influence of Infidelity and Profaneness upon Public Liberty; Being the Substance of Two Discourses, Preached at Laura Chapel, Bath, To which is Subjoined A Plan for the Formation of National Circulating Libraries, for the use of the Lower Orders of Society (Bath: Meyler and Son, the booksellers of Bath and Bristol, Messrs. Rivington et al., 1817), 31.

22. *Catalogue of Turner's Circulating Library. Market-Place, Beverley. Containing Many valuable Books, which are lent out to read by Subscription, or by the single Volume, agreeably to the Conditions on the following pages* (Beverley: M. Turner, 1801), 15–16.

23. *APPENDIX* to M. Turner's *CATALOGUE* of New and Second-hand Books for 1819: A Catalogue of Books, (Ancient and Modern) which will be sold for ready money, at the prices affixed. By M. Turner, Bookseller, Stationer, and Printer. Old Books bought or exchanged for New ones (Beverley: M. Turner, 1817), 11.

24. See, for example, "*A Catalogue of a Collection of Miscellaneous Literature*: consisting of Works Relating to the British Colonial Possessions, Classics, Antiquities, History, Bibliography, &c. in various languages, being principally Additions to that part of the Stock of Messrs. Ogle, Duncan, and Co." On Sale for Ready Money by Howell and Stewart (295 Holborn, London, 1828), which specifies

"Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison, 8 vols. 12mo, *neat* 18s. ib. 1776" (46). See also *Catalogue of a Very Valuable Collection of Books and Prints*, The Property of The Rev. W. Hildyard of Beverley (Beverley: J. Kemp, 1832), which includes "*the original Edition*" of *Tom Jones* (3) and "Scott's Novels and Tales, 35 vols. *beautifully bound in red morocco, gilt extra, gilt edges and plates*" (11). There were, however, ways of discovering from a circulating library catalog how old a book might be. Although the catalogs are organized alphabetically, the reference numbers in circulating library catalogs designate the order in which the book was purchased by the library. Thus although readers might know from proprietors, assistants, or other readers whether a book was new, they might also calculate its novelty from its catalog number, since higher numbers would indicate recent acquisitions.

25. Caroline Bingley also attempts to define herself as elite by mourning the smallness of her father's book collection (*Pride and Prejudice*, 38); see my argument that ways of reading define social identity in "Jane Austen and the Culture of Circulating Libraries: The Construction of Female Literacy," in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century "Women's Fiction" and Social Engagement*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

26. In " 'We shall . . . call it Waterloo Crescent': Jane Austen's Art of Naming," Susannah Fullerton emphasizes Austen's restricted use of names as a "structural means of portraying her world," indebted to her own experience, but this ignores the contemporary literary context (*Persuasions* 19 [16 December 1997]: 106).

27. "*A Catalogue of Ebers's New Circulating Library* 23 Old Bond-Street, Two Doors from Burlington-Gardens; consisting of ALL THE MOST APPROVED AUTHORS IN EVERY BRANCH OF LITERATURE, Ancient and Modern" (London: Reyell, Sons, and Wales, 1809), 82, 183.

28. *Catalogue of Ebers's British and Foreign Circulating Library* 27 Old Bond Street, consisting of The Most Approved Authors, Ancient and Modern (London: Whittingham and Rowland, 1816), 169.

29. Hamlyn, *Eighteenth-Century Circulating Libraries*, 204. She also observes that "[a] later innovation was a system of classes of subscription. . . . Lane's proposals of 1798 include five classes of subscription. . . . Although terms were in general rising, in London there was evidently no *controlled price*. In Bath, however, the libraries seem to have had an arrangement between themselves, a rise from 3s to 4s a quarter took place in the early 1770's, and from 1s. 6d to 2s a month at about the same time," probably because of their heavy reliance on visitors (211).

30. [William Lane], *A Tale Addressed to the Novel Readers of the Present Times* (London: Minerva Office, W. Lane, n.d. [1795]), 1.

31. "*A Catalogue of the books in the general subscription circulating library at Reading*, first established by Mr. George Lovejoy, in 1832; purchased by Miss Langley in 1884. And since then much enlarged and greatly extended" (Reading: Miss Langley, 1887), preface.

32. *Constantia; or, the Distressed Friend. A Novel* (London: W. Johnston, 1770), 15. Later, Sophia records a witty conversation concerning novels: Lady Modish remarks, "And we are to have a new *Paris* Edition of Captain *Whim*, neatly bound and gilt. We ought to have him lettered too, replied I—or I shall never be able to distinguish him from the Works of other Authors, I mean the Taylors . . ." (12).

33. *Female Sensibility; or, the History of Emma Pomfret. A Novel.* Founded on Facts (London: W. Lane, 1783), preface, 58.

34. *Female Friendship: or the Innocent Sufferer. A Novel*, 2 vols. (Dublin: J. Williams, J. Porter, and T. Walker, 1770), 2:260. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

35. See Barbara M. Benedict, "Pictures of Conformity: Sentiment and Structure in Ann Radcliffe's Style," *Philological Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (summer 1989): 363–77.

36. [Mrs. W. Burke], *Elliott; or, Vicissitudes of Early Life*, 2 vols., By a lady (London: British Library, etc., 1800).

37. *The Portrait. A Novel.* In Two Volumes (London: Printed for T. Hookham, At his Circulating Library, New Bond-Street, 1783).

38. *Catalogue of Turner's Circulating Library.* Market-Place, Beverley. Containing Many valuable Books, which are lent out to read by Subscription, or by the single Volume, agreeably to the Conditions on the following pages (Beverley: M. Turner, 1801), iv.

39. Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading*, 85–86.

40. Ibid., 3.

41. See, for example, *The Tyranny of Love; or Memoirs of the Marchioness D'Aremberg* (London: C. Elliot, [1800]).

42. In *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), I argue that this readerly dynamic of comparative evaluation also organizes responses to literature in the anthology.

4

Austen's Earliest Readers and the Rise of the Janeites

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THE INITIAL RESPONSE to Jane Austen's fiction is perhaps best understood in the context of debates about the novel and its functions that antedate the publication of Austen's writings by nearly half a century, and in the course of which realistic practice, chiefly as a regulatory apparatus, emerged as an aesthetic desideratum for fiction, especially women's fiction. The debate was nicely, if lopsidedly, framed by Frances Burney in the preface to her first and most successful novel *Evelina* (1778), where, in the course of defending the novel as a respectable and worthy genre, Burney simultaneously concurred with the genre's severest critics in proposing to rescue the novel from its current depravity. Although asserting that the novel's reputation cannot be reckoned independently of the legitimating efforts of Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Rousseau, and Johnson, Burney insists at the same time that both the fate of the novel and its much-needed recuperation rest with novelists like herself: novelists writing chiefly for women, whose responsibility it was to retrieve the genre from "the fantastic regions of Romance."[1] In place of the "Marvellous," which has had a deleterious effect on young women who, in reading novels, are imbued with foolish expectations that may likely lead to "injury," Burney urges both novelists and novels to seek "aid from sober Probability" (8). Burney, for her part, has already sought this aid, so that in the pages that follow, the contagion to which the novel has become tantamount has been stanched for the moment by characters "drawn . . . from nature" and by the novelist's depiction of "manners of the times" (7). For unlike "history" per se, which was commonly regarded as a genre devoted to accounts of the extraordinary in life, it will be the function of Evelina's "history" (a term used somewhat cheekily by Burney) to approximate and inculcate truth rather than fantasy.

Burney may have been among the first female writers to urge the claim of probability as a representational desideratum. But she was scarcely the last. Writing just seven years later in 1785, Clara Reeve took the bolder tack of describing and privileging the novel as a genre distinct from ro-