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Austen's Life in Letters

This chapter traces the life recoverable from Austen's letters and discusses the role of letters in the life-writing cycle. It follows a number of themes within Austen's life readable in the letters and then tracks the publication of the novels. The shape of this correspondence as a whole has been altered by the events of the life and by preservation and publication. The first section therefore considers how the distribution and weighting of the surviving letters shape an understanding of Austen's life. The chapter goes on to situate the novels in the life using the letters. Austen is sister, aunt, author, and letter writer adopting and acting out both conventional and unconventional roles.

The letters inform the outline of Austen's life in progress. She lived in Steventon Rectory from 1775 to 1801 having spent brief periods at school in Oxford and Southampton (1783) and in Reading (1785–1786). She also visited family in Kent and friends in Ibthorpe, and stayed in Bath (1797 and 1799). In May 1801, the family relocated permanently to Bath taking up the lease on a house for a few years but visiting the seaside in the summer including Lyme Regis (1804) but also Dawlish (1802). After the death of the Reverend George Austen in January 1805, the Austen women – or as Henry called them 'our dear trio' – were reliant on financial support from Austen's brothers and lived in Bath lodgings in between trips to see family in Kent and in Warwickshire. Having been joined by their friend and sister-in-law Martha Lloyd, in 1806 they united their domestic arrangements with brother Frank Austen and his wife Mary and lived in Southampton. In 1809 the four women were provided with a cottage by Edward Austen Knight in Chawton near Alton where Austen lived until her removal to Winchester for medical treatment in May 1817. There were trips to London to oversee the publication of the four novels that appeared in Austen's lifetime as well as to nurse both Henry and his first wife Eliza.

The reordered modern edition of the letters (Le Faye 2011) has a well-established pattern of its own. As demonstrated chronologically in Figure 1.1, there are 92 letters to Cassandra, 16 to Anna Lefroy, 10 to Caroline Austen, eight to Frank Austen, six to Fanny Knight, five to John Murray, four to Martha Lloyd, three to James Edward Austen-Leigh, and three to librarian James Stanier Clarke. There is one letter each to Alethea Bigg, Anne Sharp, Cassy Esten Austen, Frances Tilson, and Charles Austen all dating from 1817, and three letters to individuals (Catherine Prowting, Charles Haden, and the Countess of Morley) relating to the publication of *Emma*. There is evidence of letters being written to James, Edward, and Henry but none to them from Austen survive. James and Henry were themselves survived by their wives who may have made any final decision about preservation and Henry had a wandering life even after his ordination in 1816. No letters survive to any of the sisters-in-law other than Martha and none to Austen's parents. There is the possibility that the letters to and from Cassandra were shared with them, of course, and that Cassandra had the final say over survival when putting her affairs in order as she reported she was doing to Charles in 1843 (Modert 1990, p. xxi). Austen also names in the surviving letters a number of other correspondents including the other Bigg sisters, her mother's friend Mary Newell Birch, the Cookes in Great Bookham, and the Bullers in Devon.

The modern edition contains 161 letters of which two are poems, one is Austen's will, and one is in backward writing for an eight-year-old niece. Four are scraps with limited or no content probably redistributed for autographs, and one (29–30 November 1812) is a spoof fan letter whose original was rediscovered and sold for £162,000 in Austen's bicentenary year (Le Faye 2017, pp. 26–27). One is in Austen's hand dictated by Henry (20–21 October 1815) and another merely protests at the gift of a turkey (December 1816). Of the other 150 letters there are briefer communications with the 12-year-old Caroline, as well as negotiated epistolary spaces on paper shared with others. Some letters were intentionally shorter and others have been preserved with leaves missing. The greatest concentration by number of letters on one subject and with various correspondents concerns the publication and distribution of *Emma* in late 1815. The physical appearance and layout of the letters has biographical import as does the coding of internal references. The letters reveal factual details but at the same time the medium of the letter with its detailed language and narrative economies supplements our knowledge of Austen's life and methods as an author.

Figure 1.1 charts the distribution of available letters without weighting their length or biographical significance. There are not just four-page bulletins to Cassandra but also the shadows of letters in scraps, and notes with a single purpose. Of the total, 34 were written during Austen's residence at Steventon and 86 during her time at Chawton. It is notable that there are no surviving letters until 1796 and none for 1797. There is only one letter (from Lyme) between May 1801

<i>Year</i>	<i>Letters(no.)</i>	<i>To CEA</i>	<i>To Others</i>
1796	7	7	
1797	0		
1798	9	8	Philadelphia Walter (1)
1799	6	6	
1800	6	5	MLA (1)
1801	10	10	
1802	0		
1803	0		
1804	1	1	
1805	8	5	FWA (3)
1806	0		
1807	3	3	
1808	12	12	
1809	7	4	FWA (2), Crosby (1)
1810	0		
1811	6	6	
1812	2	0	AL (1), MLA (1)
1813	19	15	MLA (1), FWA (3)
1814	20	6	CMCA (1), FWA (1), AL (9), FCK (2), MLA (1)
1815	19	4	JM (5), JSC (2), AL (4), CMCA (2), Countess of Morley (1), C Haden (1)
1816	12	2	JM (1), JSC (1), AL (2), CMCA (3), JEAL (2), C Prowting (1)
1817	13	0	FCK (3), CMCA (4), JEAL (1), CJA (1), A Bigg (1), F Tilson (1), Cassy Esten (1), A Sharp (1)

Key:

AL Anna Lefroy
CEA Cassandra Austen
CJA Charles Austen
CMCA Caroline Austen
FCK Fanny Knight
FWA Frank Austen
JEAL James Edward Austen-Leigh
JM John Murray
JSC James Stanier Clarke
MLA Martha Lloyd Austen

Figure 1.1 Letter chronology by recipient.

and January 1805, and of the eight letters in 1805 three are to Frank about George Austen's death. The 1807–1809 letters from Southampton shared domestic and family news as Austen and Cassandra alternated at Godmersham particularly after the death of Elizabeth Austen, wife of Edward. In April 1809 Austen wrote to the publisher Crosby requesting the return of her manuscript of 'Susan' and there is then a further gap until April 1811 when Austen was in London to proof-read *Sense and Sensibility*. The two surviving 1812 letters are to Anna Lefroy and Martha Lloyd, suggesting that Cassandra stayed at Chawton keeping house while Austen redrafted *Pride and Prejudice* and began *Mansfield Park*. The volume of surviving letters between 1813 and 1817 reflects the adoption of nieces and nephew as correspondents; about one third, 33 of the letters, are to James's children Anna, (James) Edward, and Caroline, and to Edward's eldest daughter Fanny. Eleven letters concerning the publication and dedication of *Emma* constitute more than half of the 20 dated 1815. Austen had gone with Cassandra in May 1816 to take the waters in Cheltenham. The last two letters to Cassandra were written in September that year to Cheltenham when Cassandra was accompanying Mary Lloyd Austen. The more numerous letters of 1817 suggest memorial preservation since these include Austen's last letters to James Edward, Fanny, and Caroline. Anna lived within walking distance. The 1817 letter borrowed by Henry for his 'Biographical Notice' is the only letter to Frances Tilson, a friend from London. Alethea Bigg, Anne Sharp, and even Charles Austen are noted as regular correspondents and yet have preserved only their last letters from Austen written in 1817.

The letters as they now appear have a deducible pattern based on travel and visits; their survival and preservation emerge from other imperatives. Figure 1.2 presents the sequences of letters initially preserved by Cassandra herself as records of her separation from Austen. It is notable that 57 of these letters were received by Cassandra when she herself was away from home. These letters would have had to be transported after the completion of Cassandra's visit even before being considered for preservation between residences in Hampshire and Bath. These letters and other single missives were evidently doubly removed and valued. On 23 August 1796 Austen writes from Cork Street *en route* to Kent when Cassandra is presumed to be at home since there are four subsequent letters to her from Austen (1–18 September 1796) from their brother Edward's first marital home at Rowling. Cassandra was away from home on 8 April 1798 but unusually there are no letters written during this visit during which Austen wrote, from Steventon, her only surviving letter to their half-cousin Philadelphia Walter. From 27 October 1798 to 23 January 1799 Austen was at Steventon having returned from Godmersham where Cassandra remained after the birth of their nephew, Edward's fourth son William. Austen, along with her parents, had travelled back via Dartford, as evidenced by another letter written on the road (24 October 1798).

Year	Letters	JA	CEA
Jan 1796	2	Steventon	Kintbury
Sept 1796	5	London/Rowling	Steventon
Oct 1798–Jan 1799	10	Dartford/Steventon	Rowling
May/June 1799	3	Bath	Steventon
Oct 1800–Feb 1801	11	Steventon/Ibthorpe	Godmersham
May 1801	4	Bath	Ibthorpe/Kintbury
April 1805	2	Bath	Ibthorpe
Jan/Feb 1807	3	Southampton	Godmersham
June 1808	4	Godmersham	Southampton
Oct 1808–Jan 1809	12	Southampton	Godmersham
April 1811	6	London/Chawton	Godmersham
Jan/Feb 1813	3	Chawton	Steventon/Manydown
May 1813	2	London	Chawton
Sept–Nov 1813	9	London/Godmersham	Chawton
Mar 1814	3	London	Chawton
June 1814	2	Chawton	London
Nov/Dec 1815	3	London	Chawton
Sept 1816	2	Chawton	Cheltenham

Figure 1.2 Letter sequences.

The letters of 17 May to 19 June 1799 were written as a tourist from Bath on a visit for Edward to take the waters.

Between late October 1800 and late January 1801 Cassandra was at Godmersham and Austen at Steventon until the end of November when she was at Ibthorpe but back at Steventon on 3 January. It was on this return that Austen was informed of her parents' decision to move to Bath. A gap in correspondence between 1 December 1800 and 3 January 1801 is assumed to be the result of destroyed letters criticising the move to which Austen had apparently become more resigned in

five letters between 3 and 25 January in which preparations were in an advanced state. In February 1801 Austen was visiting their friends the Bigg sisters at Manydown while Cassandra was in London returning from Godmersham. The four May 1801 letters from Bath are Austen's first as a resident. Cassandra was at Ibthorpe visiting the Lloyds and at Kintbury with the Fowles, brother and sister-in-law of her deceased fiancé Tom. Farewell visits may have made the letters more treasured but at the same time their preservation would have been more difficult among the sparse movables of the two women.

Their peripatetic life may also explain that sizeable gap in letters up to their settling in Southampton. The sisters were together at the death of the Reverend George Austen described in the three January 1805 letters to Frank. The period of the Southampton residence found Cassandra at Godmersham from 7 January to 10 February 1807 and then again from 1 October 1808 to 30 January 1809 at the time of Elizabeth Austen's unexpected death. Austen wrote to Southampton from Godmersham between 15 June and 1 July 1808. In all there are 15 letters over this period, the majority dealing with the aftermath of Edward's becoming a widower.

The period of the Chawton letters begins with three letters from London between 18 and 30 April 1811. In all there are 30 letters from London, and half of these were written to Cassandra. The early 1813 letters report from Chawton on their reading aloud the recently published *Pride and Prejudice*. In May 1813, letters show that Austen was in London and there again in September on her way to Godmersham where she remained until early November. For three letters in March 1814 Austen was again in London with Edward's family at Henry's new reduced home in Henrietta Street and she signalled the publication of *Mansfield Park* in a scrap to Frank on the same visit. In June 1814, it was Cassandra's turn to be in London and Austen at Chawton but 24 August and 17 October are again from London to Chawton with letters also passing to Fanny on her love life in November and to Anna about novel writing from July onwards. For letters between November and December 1815, *Emma* is going through the press superintended from Henry's new Hans Place address where his business is faltering. The two letters of early September 1816 are the last epistolary evidence of the sisters being apart. Austen claims in 8–9 September to have been nursing herself up into 'beautiful' better health for a doctor's visit: 'my Back has given me scarcely any pain for many days. – I have an idea that agitation does it as much harm as fatigue, & that I was ill at the time of your going, from the very circumstance of your going'. This is a tortuous explanation of her inability to cope with Cassandra's absence, and she is pressing for Cassandra's return on the 23rd: 'I shall grudge every half day wasted on the road. If there were but a coach from Hungerford to Chawton'. Perhaps Cassandra returned earlier in response to this letter or she may have destroyed evidence of Austen's deterioration in the letters that must be missing.

Letters have much to offer the logistics of a life. The next section of this chapter explores one chronological segment of Austen's letters using the first year of extant correspondence before moving onto a broader thematic approach. Reading the letters back into the life demands an awareness of the immediacy of the written context tempered by future-proofed knowledge that the 'new' reader now holds. In between these two poles, in the middle of the spectrum, stands the decision-making of the letter-holding survivor, in this case Cassandra.

Jane Austen's chronological life reflected in her letters begins on 9 January 1796 when she is 20 years old wishing her older sister a happy 23rd birthday. She jokingly declares Cassandra and Tom Lefroy 'very near of an age' although Tom is actually three years younger all but a day. When the letter appears in a modern edition, the reader is now familiar with a scenario that was incomplete at the time of Austen's letter. A convenient footnote will provide the information that Lefroy lived to be part of the conversation about his supposed love affair with the novelist. This conversation took place when James Edward Austen-Leigh and his sisters were compiling the *Memoir*. Lefroy died during the same period aged 92 having reportedly confided his 'boyish love' to his namesake and nephew T.E.P. Lefroy (Le Faye 2004, p. 278) who was by then married to the Austen sisters' great-niece Jemima, Anna Lefroy's eldest daughter. The reader will now also find that Cassandra herself was with the Fowles at Kintbury in 1796, staying with the family of her fiancé, also Tom, and will further know that neither of the Austen sisters married anyone. It will also be apparent that if Cassandra did not want future generations to know about Austen's 'profligate and shocking' behaviour with her 'Irish friend' then this letter, along with 14–15 January, would not survive. At the same time it might be that Cassandra was willing to take this risk of information passing to the next generation because a letter would thus be preserved relating to her own hopes of a happy married life that we now know would never be fulfilled. Her Tom is the brother of the Reverend Fulwar Fowle who is rector of Kintbury and married to Eliza née Lloyd, sister of future sisters-in-law Mary and Martha. Herein lies the danger of letters for both writer and recipient, and for the licensed and future unlicensed reader.

On 23 August 1796, Austen writes from Cork Street in London that she has reached 'once more . . . this Scene of Dissipation & vice'. This seems to be a shared joke about warnings against the metropolis by sermon-writers such as James Fordyce whose work will be read aloud to the Bennets by Mr Collins. In the Preface to his much reprinted *Sermons to Young Women* (Fordyce, 1766), Fordyce deplored the 'contagion of vice & folly' (p. viii) in the capital by comparison with the country. In Sermon IV, he warned his readers against 'the man that imprudently pleads for vice' with 'the appearance of honest frankness, drawing you to every scene of dissipation' (p. 98). In Sermon VII, the two concepts are more closely linked: 'that whorl of dissipation, which, like some mighty vortex, has swallowed up in a

manner all conditions and characters . . . How quick the descent from thoughtlessness to vice' (p. 198). Austen counsels her niece (or 'neice' as this is her chosen spelling scorned by Lord Brabourne) against the inclusion of a 'vortex of dissipation' in her own work 18 years later; but only as over-used 'thorough novel slang' by the time of the advice in a letter to Anna (28 September 1814). The August 1796 London stopover is *en route* to Rowling in Kent from which we gain the earliest epistolary knowledge of the Bridges and later Knight families, and of the frequent frustrations for both sisters of having to make travel arrangements at the whim of their brothers. In August 1796, Austen is nonetheless going to Astley's Amphitheatre and cuts short her letter in order to seek out dissipation in the streets of the vice-ridden city.

On 1 September 1796, Austen commends Cassandra as 'the finest comic writer of the present age', reminding her how they joked about dying 'of laughter' at school. The reader of the modern edition knows that the sisters and their cousin Jane Cooper nearly did die of typhus fever in Southampton in 1783. The mirror image, sister alternate of the 'finest comic writer', 'diverted . . . beyond moderation' has been helping to make shirts for Edward and pronounces herself 'the neatest worker of the party'. Time and again there is a surface attention to the promotion of duties that Cassandra would have been decoding and probably performing out loud to her own audience whether her parents or her brother's family. The precarious state of the sisters within that family is announced in the next letter from Rowling (5 September 1796) when Austen asks for advice about tipping a servant five or ten shillings. Her 'Distress' over this, however, straddles with characteristic dashes the news of Richard Harvey's intention to marry a woman called Musgrove: 'but as it is a great secret, & only known to half the Neighbourhood, you must not mention it'. The second half, sides three and four, of this letter does not survive and was not available for the letter edition of 1884 meaning that either Cassandra did not retain this page at the time, lost it in a move, or destroyed it in 1843. It might also be that the paper was reused for something else leaving the scant hope that the two sides might resurface from another archive in the future.

The likelihood that Cassandra chose destruction leaves another gap for speculation since there seems to be another whole letter missing before Austen's next. In 15–16 September 1796 she jokes that Edward, who is due to change his name to Knight in return for an inheritance, is thinking about 'taking the name of Claringbould' if Cassandra can assist with 'five or six Hundred pounds' which of course she cannot. Austen is only just burlesquing the complexity of the inheritance system and its singular propensity to overlook them. The sisters live in a family full of inheritees changing their names for money including Uncle James Leigh-Perrot, Edward and the family of his adoptive parents, and finally James Edward Austen-Leigh. By 18 September 1796 the logistics of Austen's return take up most of her letter almost putting Frank's appointment to the *Triton* into the

shade. Austen is embroiled in a plan to travel home to Steventon with Mary Pearson, Henry's then fiancée and is thwarted by the naval plans of Frank but could be helped by Edward who has his own carriage. Austen has to hope that her father will collect her from Greenwich otherwise she will have 'to walk the Hospitals, Enter at the Temple, or mount Guard at St James' as a medical student, lawyer or soldier; or at worst 'fall a Sacrifice to the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with Small Beer' and so become a prostitute. The extremity of these professions, and the fact that the latter is the only one open to a woman of the time, is deliberately alarming in the context of travel arrangements and sisterly duties.

The chronology of the letters supplies an outline of Austen's life, gaps permitting. Even this first year highlights themes that will resonate in the letters of each year for which epistolary evidence survives. As the following section demonstrates, Austen embellished family news with topics to which she returned again and again especially gender-typed occupation, the act of letter writing, fashion economies and errands, social occasions, income, and dependence. The letters help to trace a themed as well as a chronological approach to the biographical documentation of a life.

The family and its 'important nothings' are a dominant ongoing strand for news tied into an oblique commentary to be read by Cassandra. Austen expects Cassandra's agreement when she dubs Charles, younger sibling to both of them, 'our own particular brother' (21 January 1799). He repays them with the topaz crosses that he can ill afford out of his £30 naval earnings on the *Endymion* (26–27 May 1801) and though Austen intends to 'scold' him these gifts were apparently treasured. They can be seen both at Jane Austen's House and in *Mansfield Park* where the gift of an amber cross becomes part of Fanny Price's dilemma in rebuffing Henry Crawford. Topaz was a cheaper alternative to amber. While Fanny has two chains from which she must choose one to wear with the cross for her coming-out ball, the Austen sisters perhaps shared their two slightly differentiated crosses and chains. The real-life crosses are believed to have been retained with the letter in which they are mentioned that was then bequeathed to Charles by Cassandra. A testamentary letter of 1843, however, originally leaves one 'topaz cross and gold chain' to Charles's daughter also Fanny (*C*, p. 664) who married Frank's eldest son Francis that year, uniting the naval brothers. As this marriage was childless and Fanny's elder sister Cassy Esten, Cassandra's executor, died unmarried, the crosses seem to have been passed down with the letter to Charles's granddaughters by his second wife Harriet. The objects were apparently purchased by a young librarian and future scholar/collector Charles Beecher Hogan in the 1920s and having been a wedding present to his wife, were given by him to the Jane Austen Society in 1974 (Harman 2009, pp. 208–209). In 1801 Austen writes more straightforwardly, 'We shall be unbearably fine'.

The crosses represented both affection and a competing offer of a gift from the youngest of the Austen siblings and the neediest other than the disabled George. The 26–27 May 1801 crosses-letter is part of the sequence written on first removal to Bath when the sisters were more dependent than usual on family favours. Jane is staying with the Leigh-Perrots and Cassandra has gone from Ibthorpe to Kintbury to visit the Fowles. James has effectively turned them out of the family home, Frank and their father are visiting Godmersham (21–22 May 1801), and Henry is suffering from a long-running chest complaint (Le Faye 2002, p. 160). Cassandra is waiting to be brought to Bath by the Reverend George Austen on 1 June and Jane adopts some of her breathless Tom Lefroy prose to announce an ‘Airing in [Mr Evelyn’s] very bewitching Phaeton & four’ in a section of 26–27 May upside down between the lines of the original text of page 1. The initial news of the letter composed over two days was spaced out at only 26 lines per page. This journalised information was then effectively overwritten and crowded out by the phaeton and the crosses, announcing the themes of journeying and portable possessions so prevalent in the letters.

At the other extreme of brotherliness, 23 June 1814 succinctly notes ‘Henry at Whites!’ He was celebrating the end of the war at a Burlington House ball costing £10,000 and attended by the Prince Regent (Le Faye 2004, p. 213). ‘Oh! what a Henry’ is Austen’s ostensibly indulgent exclamation but Cassandra would be reading it with long experience. The comment is characteristically sandwiched, and separated, by dashes, between a reported failure by Edward’s Chawton steward to provide their mother with special wood for fire-lighting and a longer sentence, ‘I do not know what to wish as to Miss B, so I will hold my tongue & my wishes’, sharing a brief paragraph with the brief but pungent Henry comments. It is left to Cassandra to know the identity of ‘Miss B’, presumed in the modern edition of the letters to be Frances Burdett, sister of Sir Francis and possible love interest of Henry (Le Faye 2011, p. 438; p. 503; Le Faye 2004, p. 216). Although ‘Miss B’ is part of their epistolary exchanges, Austen leaves some doubt about the exact subject on which her tongue is nominally remaining silent.

The act and actions of letter writing are another constant theme reflecting the advice of the letter manuals as well as Austen’s own particular relationship with her correspondent. In the letters preserved from the period of the Bath move, accommodation and income is a source of concern and letter writing, veiled and satirised by the comparison between their country and city pursuits. In 3–5 January 1801 a query about the future location of their bees in Bath is juxtaposed with the information that the Reverend George Austen has brought in tithes of £600 to maintain his income. By the end of the third page Austen claims to have ‘attained the true art of letter-writing’ by ‘talking as fast as I could the whole of this letter’ which justifies the bees and tithes becoming an upside-down pre-script postscript at the top of page 1. In the next letter Austen suggests two personal economies

relating to letters and millinery as a consequence of their new arrangements. She recommends 'laying out a few kisses in the purchase of a frank' to save money and agrees to delay the purchase of cambric muslin in the next sentence 'with a kind of voluntary reluctance' (8–9 January 1801).

The sharing of letters then features in Austen's next because Mary Lloyd Austen's letter has already reached Steventon with Cassandra's news about the Chilham ball and its franking opportunities. Cassandra has danced with 'stupid' Mr Kemble instead of 'some elegant brother-officer who was struck with your appearance as soon as you entered the room' (14–16 January 1801). This is Austen the 'merciless Sister' oppressing Cassandra with her letter frequency and reading back into the news her own allusion to a potential novel scenario. Austen at the centre passes on other messages and proxy shopping requests from Martha Lloyd, who will write soon, and critiques a letter written by James to Edward filling 'three sides of paper, every line inclining too much towards the North-East, & the very first line of all scratched out'. A joke about James's style is perhaps intended in Austen's next remark that 'this morning he joins his Lady in the fields of Elysium & Ithrop'. He is, of course, about to succeed Austen and Cassandra and their parents at Steventon Rectory and is not being very politic in his succession. The 8–9 January letter mentions possession being taken of the brown mare '& everything else I suppose will be seized by degrees in the same manner'.

After that 'merciless' letter frequency, there is a longer than usual gap between 14–16 January, when Mr Bayle has been valuing the house contents for auction, and 21–22 January. This may suggest editing by Cassandra or it may merely be that another letter from another correspondent stood in. The 21–22 January letter begins with a joke about the material for letters, deriving from the manuals: 'Expect a most agreeable Letter; for not being overburdened with subject – (having nothing at all to say) – I shall have no check to my Genius from beginning to end' although there is news to digest about Frank. Austen comments on her cousin Edward Cooper's 'cheerful & amusing letters' and on his wife Caroline's rapid recovery from lying-in. Her additional comments here reflect Austen's later opinions of Edward's published sermons: 'He dare not write otherwise to me – but perhaps might be obliged to purge himself from the guilt of writing Nonsense by filling his shoes with whole pease for a week afterwards'. His true style may perhaps be gauged from Austen's hope in a letter written after the death of Elizabeth Austen that 'he will not send one of his Letters of cruel comfort to my poor Brother' (15–16 October 1808).

By contrast with the 'Genius' of January, Austen writes 'long sentences upon unpleasant subjects' in 22 May 1801 from Bath when their potential residence in Green Park Buildings must be rejected on account of damp. Despite her report of 'putrifying Houses' of good size and situation, this is the street in which the Austens will be living by 21 January 1805 when Austen writes to tell Frank of

their father's death, marking the degeneration of their status even before the loss of George Austen's income. The marked gap between this and the initial move to Sydney Place in 1801 includes only one letter, 14 September 1804 from Lyme. From their shabby comfort as travellers in cheapish lodgings, Austen tells Cassandra, who is in Weymouth with Henry and Eliza, about letter-reading within the family. Austen describes a 'puzzle' arising from letters including one from Cassandra to Miss Irvine in Bath that addressed the question of Charles's prospects 'with less explicitness & more caution' than a letter from Mrs. Austen to her sister-in-law Jane Leigh-Perrot written 'without restriction'. In survival terms this is the very next letter after the topaz cross purchase and Austen suggests that 'in your place I should not like' their aunt having 'the perusal' of Cassandra's letter to Miss Irvine. The whole provides an early sample of a situation created for another seaside location in *Sanditon* in which a letter 'chain' unravels when only one group of new residents emerges from Diana Parker's epistolary interference. Austen's 'fine sheet of striped paper' in 1804 is both closely written and crossed on the first page. It stands now in stark contrast with 21 January 1805 and the 'melancholy news' of George Austen's death told in half the number of lines per page and with no manipulation or mockery of epistolary conventions. Archival evidence, however, demonstrates that a second letter of 22 January 1805 had to be sent because of Frank's relocation from Dungeness to Portsmouth discovered by means of a letter from him to Cassandra. Austen was forced to write her news again and the modern edition now almost suggests that we unlicensed readers have received the news of George Austen's death before his own son.

For daily correspondence, however, letter processes such as regularity, epistolary debt, and composition in real time are all subject to Austen's humour and exaggeration. In 8–9 February 1807, she plans to ring 'the Changes of the Glads & Sorrys' but concludes: 'There, I flatter myself I have constructed you a Smartish Letter, considering my want of Materials. But like my dear D^r Johnson I beleive I have dealt more in Notions than Facts'. This is an allusion to Johnson's *Rambler* essay on correspondence (31 August 1751) that formed the basis of advice in the manuals. In 7–9 October 1808, Austen adds to her housekeeping responsibilities in Southampton while Cassandra is at Godmersham by taking 'complete possession of the Letter [from Edward's eldest son Edward] by reading, paying for, & answering it'. In the one surviving letter to Alethea Bigg, Austen literally draws up accounts for her correspondence when she seems to reproach her friend: 'I believe the Epistolary debt is on your side' (24 January 1817). The value of a letter calculated from its appearance is a regular observation. In 24 October 1808, Austen commends Cassandra for sending her 'a great deal of matter, most of it very welcome': 'Your close-written letter makes me quite ashamed of my wide lines'. In 14–15 October 1813, Austen prepares both to get and not to get a frank from MP Mr Lushington and so plans to 'write very close from the first, & even leave room

for the seal in the proper place'. The letter shows this in practice with 43 lines per page. It extends unusually to a fifth page, however, because the letter travels under Mr Lushington's frank after all. Austen is both economising and settling her debts when she tells Cassandra, 'When I have followed up my last with this I shall feel somewhat less unworthy of you than the state of our Correspondence now requires'.

This debt was created by the planning of correspondence and the frugality of information to disseminate. The post seems to be collected less frequently from Godmersham and in 26 June 1808, Austen explains: 'As Fanny writes to Anna by this post, I had intended to keep my Letter for another day but, recollecting that I must keep it two, I have resolved rather to finish & send it now'. As readers of Austen's letters in their re-collected form, we find unintentional humour in Austen's practical considerations at the time that '[t]he two letters will not interfere, I dare say; on the contrary they may throw light on each other'. Five years later, Austen offers an even more complex negotiation for epistolary space. In 26 October 1813 she must write herself into 'a humour for writing' but has the opportunity of the letter's being taken to Cassandra in London by one of their nephews: 'It is throwing a letter away to send it by a visitor, there is never convenient time for reading it – & Visitor can tell most things as well'. The intervention of the visitor will change the nature of the communication particularly as other letters demonstrate her disapproval of the nephews' pastimes. She is very much writing 'a la Godmersham' (15–17 June 1808) if she can say to Cassandra in 1813, 'I had thought with delight of saving you the postage – but Money is Dirt.'

Austen uses her sphere of women's letter writing to pass on these economies of transmission. In 26 March 1817 she commends 11-year-old Caroline's 'pretty hand' but prepares her prophetically for her own epistolary life as a spinster. In her very last letter to her niece, Austen's energies seem almost spent when she calls herself 'a poor Honey', a term she has reserved for women like Edward's sister-in-law Harriet Bridges, who gains consequence from 'her spasms and nervousness' and is 'determined never to be well' (25 September 1813). Austen and Caroline have been exchanging letters through Henry, now curate at Chawton but standing in for James at Steventon and Austen is 'very sorry to think that opportunities for such a nice little economical Correspondence, are likely to fail now'. In fact, by the time of the next clerical substitution in May, Austen will have made her will.

Austen's last letter to Fanny debates logistics involving Henry too. In 23 March 1817, Austen tells the future Lady Knatchbull who can always afford her postage costs or later exchange kisses for franks from her MP husband: 'I have had various plans as to this letter, but at last I have determined that Uncle Henry shall forward it from London. I want to see how Canterbury looks in the direction'. It has been suggested that this route added an extra penny to the postage because there was a

delivery route via Ashford that meant recipients (or their servants) did not have to collect mail from the Faversham post office (Le Faye 2011, p. 465). At the time this letter performed yet another function before taking on the status of treasured last letter. Still visible on the fourth page where the seal would be is a shopping list of which Austen would have approved for one of their shared trips to London. Fanny intended to buy India ink and 'Good Poetry' but also 'Calico&c', long gloves for her sister Louisa, and '1yd. Jac[one]t. mus[lin]' (Le Faye 2011, p. 464).

In defiance of Fanny's future disapproval of her aunts' social standing and refinement (23 August 1869; Le Faye 2004, pp. 279–280), this incorporation seems fitting since Austen's letters are interwoven with further strands of logistical discussion about the sisters' fashion economies and errands. Austen's tone of interest and her animation of various items of clothing into characters in their own right betrays that this was a fraught question for women of the gentry with little money to call their own. Seeking and imagining Cassandra's advice is part of the *raison d'être* for writing both to agree and to disagree as Austen will later do on the subject of novel writing. In 28 December 1798 Austen proposes an application to their father for 'washing & letter expences' in the wake of Frank's celebrated promotion. In 2 June 1799 commissions in Bath result in a sketch of some lace: 'My Cloak is come home, & here follows a pattern of the lace' along with the relative costs if Cassandra's is to be wider at threepence a yard more without going above an outlay of two guineas. Bath's shops provide the opportunity to buy decorative fruit and Austen is also comparing gauzes. The purchase of flat shoes in this letter is suggestive of Austen's above average height. She also announces that she has been given a hat by Elizabeth, in 'a pretty stile' half straw and half purple ribbon but nonetheless donated and representative of the need for contriving on a limited allowance. In 27–28 October 1798 Austen has previously bought Japan ink to begin operations on a hat on which '[y]ou know my principle hopes of happiness depend'. In 18–19 December 1798 Austen acknowledges £10 of her own likely to have been for Christmas but this previews a discussion of the economics of a shared fashion item: 'I took the liberty of asking your Black velvet Bonnet to lend me its cawl, which it very readily did' to improve a cap, After the next ball it will be 'entirely black' but Austen seeks forgiveness for diverging from Cassandra's 'advice as to its ornaments' with a silver band twice round, no bow and a feather in 'Coquelicot', a colour which is 'all the fashion this winter'.

During the same absence, 8–9 January 1799 seems casual in its range of subjects but there is actually a detailed description of a gown 'very much like my blue one' once again approved by Cassandra but with short sleeves, a fuller wrap with apron over, and completed with a band. At the same time, Austen claims to hate describing the fashionable 'Mamalouc cap' lent to her by James's wife leaving Cassandra to guess its appearance while the later mentioned 'Green shoes' and 'white fan' are familiar items. Such objects are in effect substitutes for presence. They are also

associated in the letter with Catherine Knight's decision to give Godmersham to her adopted son Edward in her lifetime. Austen seems to be making a bitter joke out of Mrs. Knight's retention of an income: 'this ought to be known, that her conduct may not be over-rated. – I rather think Edward shews the most Magnanimity of the two, in accepting her Resignation with such Incumbrances'. The letters of this period are particularly anarchic but there is a more poignant post prescript reference in 1 November 1800 to 'M^{rs} Cooper's band' as an accompaniment to 'your favourite gown'. Austen is dressing with her absent sister's approval and in memory of the aunt who rescued them from typhus but the letters written in December this year are missing. The 8–9 January 1801 birthday letter is the first to survive after their parents' decision to relocate to Bath and postpones the acquisition of cambric muslin. Two weeks later in 25 January 1801, however, Austen tells Cassandra rather grumpily 'I write because you will expect to hear from me' and prepares for life in Bath with a lengthy discussion of the same fabric: 'I shall want two new coloured gowns for the summer, for my pink one will not do more than clear me from Steventon'. The 'very pretty yellow and white cloud' is to be bought in Bath but Cassandra is to buy 'plain brown cambric muslin' for morning wear in two different shades 'as it will be always something to say, to dispute which is the prettiest' between dresses worn by Austen and their mother. The lengths are also specified: 'one longer than the other – it is for a tall woman' and differentiated as seven yards for Mrs. Austen and seven and a half yards for Austen herself. In *Sanditon*, Charlotte Heywood's height advantage grants her the role of observer. Walking with Mary Parker, she is 'considerably the tallest of the two' and sees the white ribbons of Clara Brereton's seduction by Sir Edward Denham (*LM*, p. 208). The evidence of Austen's height in 25 January 1801 is clear but the letter itself may have been shortened. The manuscript of Austen's letter is missing, having appeared in Brabourne's *Letters*, so the usually distinctive dispersal of capitalisation and dashes cannot be recovered. Austen's insistence on cambric muslin is curious unless it is being emphasised by her mother or else acting as part of a now lost code. Austen is allotting herself the role of observer, and the prospect of thin conversational topics in Bath is a prophetically depressing commentary on the life to come.

The themes of fashion and dependence continue into Austen's thirties. In 20–22 June 1808 from Godmersham to Southampton Austen announces the receipt of 'a letter from M^{rs} Knight, containing the usual Fee, & all the usual Kindness'. This phraseology perhaps expresses some discomfort at her own gratitude for the 'very agreeable present' paid for by spending 'a day or two' with Edward's adoptive mother once the travel arrangements can be sorted out. Edward has Godmersham and Chawton Manor from the Knights, and Austen will have a pelisse with half her 'fee'. The term is suggestive of the subordination of a paid companion and there is some bitterness in the money's making her

'circumstances quite easy' although in context the acquisition of a pelisse was a significant outlay (Davidson 2017). The association of Godmersham with fabric and opportunism is reinforced in 31 May 1811 when Austen reminds Cassandra about pieces for patchwork, spare fabric being more readily available in the Kent house for projects at Chawton.

Austen's later visits to London in the capacity of author provide opportunities for a greater variety of shopping choices and the means to access them with her own earnings. In 15–16 September 1813 Austen accepts £5 from 'kind, beautiful Edward' regarding it this time as a 'Gift' but she is by now a published author who has 'written herself into £250' (3–6 July 1813). She is writing *Mansfield Park* and considering 'very pretty' poplins with a preference for the more expensive Irish variety (15–16 September). In 5–8 March 1814 she has been indulging 'pretty Caps in the Windows of Cranbourn Alley' for Cassandra's temptation and 'ruining herself in black satin ribbon with a proper perl edge', narrow with loops. In 9 March 1814, a gauze gown is adapted with possibly the same plaited black satin ribbon and is worn with some concern about the suitability of long sleeves. Finishing the letter after a visit to the theatre in her 'Costume of Vine leaves & paste', Austen reports that she has been reassured by Frances Tilson, wife of Henry's partner, that long sleeves are worn in the evenings. She is toying with the seriousness of being on view, dressing up to act the part of an audience member.

There are many such social occasions to be described. After control of dress and portable possessions, the news from balls and dinners, drives and visits is important trading material for the female letter writer. In 12–13 May 1801 Austen talks to the phaeton-owning Mr Evelyn in the Upper Rooms in Bath and observes the 'Adultress' Mary Cassandra Twisleton who 'was highly rouged, & looked rather quietly & contentedly silly than anything else'. Mrs. Badcock's drunken husband is also present. Austen compares the situation for Cassandra as 'shockingly and inhumanly thin for this place' although enough for 'five or six very pretty Basingstoke assemblies' with which they were long familiar before the move. The real value of the occasion, of course, derives from their family relationship with Miss Twisleton who resembles her sister Julia Judith Leigh. Julia was a cousin of the Austens twice over being both wife of James Henry (1765–1823) who was grandson to Mrs. Austen's uncle William (1691–1757) and great granddaughter of William through his daughter Cassandra Leigh Turner. The dispersal of the name Cassandra also comes through this line as illustrated in Figure 1.3. Mrs Austen's grandmother Mary Brydges Leigh was sister-in-law to Cassandra Willoughby Brydges, Duchess of Chandos named after her grandmother Cassandra Ridgway (1605–1675). The Duchess wrote travel journals and family history. After she becomes associated with the family, Cassandras are scattered throughout the Leigh and Austen family trees as shown. Mrs. Austen's aunt Leigh Wight (1695–1778) and cousins Turner (1723–1770) and Cooke (1744–1826) are followed

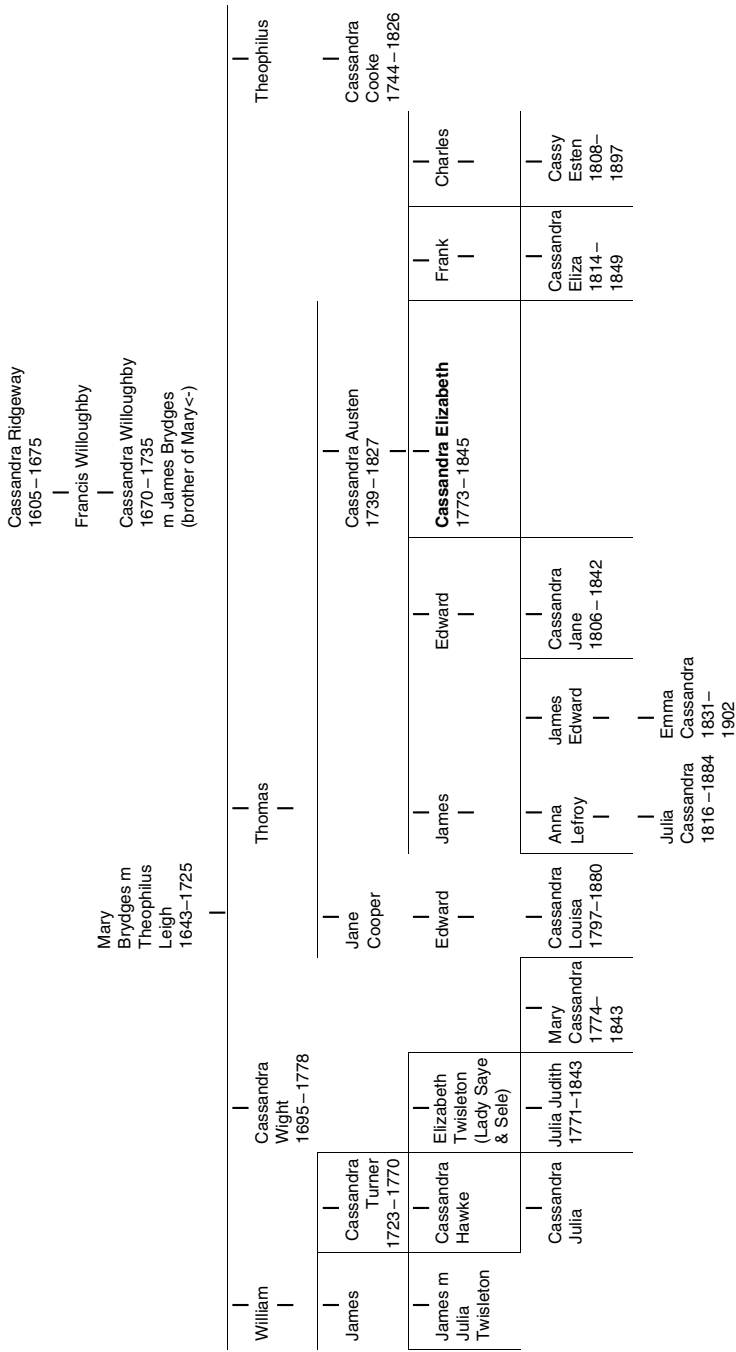


Figure 1.3 Cassandra connections: a selected family tree.

by Mrs. Austen and her daughter. Edward, Frank, and Charles will have daughters called Cassandra as will Mrs. Austen's nephew Edward Cooper. Austen is teasing Cassandra about family resemblance and the recognizability of both a Leigh and an adulteress with whom Cassandra shares a name.

In the longer term, this is a family connection that looms larger through the male line. In 1806 Mrs. Austen and her daughters visit the family seat at Stoneleigh in the company of James Henry Leigh's uncle Thomas, rector of Adlestrop who has inherited a life interest in the estate. Cassandra's godmother Elizabeth Leigh lives at Adlestrop with her brother and when he dies in 1813 Austen writes to Frank that 'the respectable, worthy, clever agreeable M^r Tho. Leigh . . . must have died possessor of one of the finest estates in England & of more worthless Nephews & Neices than any other private Man in the united Kingdoms' (3–6 July). Stoneleigh is destined for James Henry, one of these nephews but as a rector's spinster daughter Austen worries more about the living and the future home of Elizabeth.

There are no Austen letters from the 1806 visit but in much of her correspondence wealth and its responsibilities are treated with ambiguity. The 30 June–1 July 1808 letter is written after hearing a child reading in the Godmersham library 'in warm & happy solitude' continuing a letter but expecting to come home to Southampton to care for the orange wine. Although Austen proposes to 'eat Ice & drink French wine & be above Vulgar Economy' at Godmersham, the letter closes under the address panel: 'Luckily the pleasures of Friendship, of unreserved Conversation, of similarity of Taste & Opinions, will make good amends for the Orange Wine', homemade rather than French. The 'Elegance & Ease & Luxury' of Godmersham seems to come at the price of other comforts. There is enforced sociability and even if Austen was not writing concertedly at this time, solitariness was valued. This letter also refers to the settlement over Stoneleigh that has been drawn up to buy out Uncle James Leigh-Perrot's interests. Mrs. Knight has expressed concern for the Austens' 'Good' and reference to Edward's benefactress prompts Austen to comment: 'Indeed, I do not know where we are to get our Legacy – but we will keep a sharp look out'. In 26 June 1808 Austen has already pronounced a legacy as 'our sovereign good' in promoting a Christmas visit to Kent but this is an edgy comment in part directed at Elizabeth Austen who is casually assuming that the Southampton Austens can afford such a journey. In the same letter Austen must relinquish visits to the Walters and the Cookes *en route* because she is to be transported by Edward and has no 'travelling purse' of her own.

On her last visit to Godmersham in 1813 Austen is relieved that the billiard table draws people away from the library leaving five of them 'snugly talking' (14–15 October) with the prospect of numbers reducing to their, nonetheless large, family party. In 26 October she concludes that she finds 'time in the midst

of Port & Madeira to think of the 14 Bottles of Mead very often', once again prizing homemade liquor over bought, and in 6–7 November her last letter from Kent, she luxuriates in writing in the half hour before breakfast '(very snug, in my own room, lovely morn^g, excellent fire, fancy me)'. In 11–12 October earlier in the same visit she hopes that dining on goose 'will secure a good Sale of my 2^d Edition'. Cassandra knows this is the second edition of *Sense and Sensibility* and can sense Austen's divided energies as sister and author. For Austen, Godmersham seems to be a duplicitous place in the context of dependency and the parallel Chawton life, offering ease without stability, transitory benefits that provide comfort only in the moment.

In the context of her life and letter writing, legacies, dependence, and mead production, it is not surprising that for Austen an income will tell its own story. When she finally gets to be an author, Austen is keen to ensure the believability of the Dashwoods' life in *Sense and Sensibility* as she notes to Cassandra in 25 April 1811 when letters resume from Chawton after the gap since 1809. The Austen women's variously derived income of £450 a year was now very close to that of the women in the novel. Mrs. Dashwood's £500 will not allow for a carriage and leaves the fictional foursome at Barton Cottage prey to Sir John Middleton's sociable schemes. Austen's letters under such strictures demonstrate the calculations of her outlay on things she can and must afford such as bonnet trimmings and postage. She is ironic over the two shillings and three pence (2/3) postage for a letter from Frank (25 September 1813) and in 26 November 1815 a parcel costing two shillings and ten pence (2/10) is carefully calibrated against the cost of replacing stockings and handkerchiefs in the same letter as she corrects the proofs of *Emma*. She gives Cassandra value on their own terms with news of rhubarb (8 September 1816), orange wine, naked Cupids (20 May 1813), Don John, cruelty, and lust (16 September 1813).

As the novels and the life cohere, the next section of this plot of Austen's letters reveals a consistent pattern of self-deprecation and counter-cultural references, alongside the importation of her characters into real life and a relish for profit. The life being lived to the moment in epistolary acts demonstrates how the novels become part of Austen's letter-writing occupation as communicator, sister, and aunt. Henry circulates in the background but periodic letters to Frank also add to the layering of Austen's representation of herself as an author. The more professional correspondence with James Stanier Clarke creates a new personality borrowed from her regular stance and given a creative outlet in 'Plan of a Novel'.

On 5 April 1809 Austen tried to reclaim the manuscript of her novel 'Susan' using the pseudonym 'Mrs Ashton Dennis c/o Southampton Post Office'. She was rebuffed if not threatened by the publisher Crosby (Le Faye 2011, p. 183). Austen's letter and its contents now act as an extraordinary bridge over that gap of 27 months between 30 January 1809 (from Southampton to Godmersham) and

18–20 April 1811 (from Sloane Street to Godmersham). The only other surviving text from this period is a poem dated 26 July 1809, including evidence of the removal to Chawton, whose main concern is the birth of Frank's first son Francis. No other letters survive. In 5 April 1809 Austen describes 'Susan' as a 'work of which I avow myself the Authoress' but her implication that the novel may have been published without her knowledge and her suggestion that the manuscript may have been lost convey feelings of lack of control within this avowal. *Northanger Abbey* can only appear once Austen has used her future profits to buy back the manuscript and, having renamed it, she tells Fanny in 1817 that 'Miss Catherine is put upon the Shelve, and I do not know that she will ever come out' (13 March 1817). When the novel was finally published after Austen's death it was elided with both *Persuasion* and Henry's 'Biographical Notice'.

Between April 1809 and April 1811, however, Austen goes from being 'MAD' with Crosby to correcting the sheets of her first published novel. In 25 April 1811 she 'can no more forget [*Sense and Sensibility*] than a mother can forget her sucking child' aligning the novel with the birth of Frank's second son Henry on 21 April. In brother Henry's absence, Eliza has a role to play in the circulation of the proofs and this is when Austen hopes the 'Incomes' can be altered. According to Cassandra's note on the dates of composition, the original version of the novel entitled 'Elinor and Marianne' was composed in epistolary format in 1795 but was being revised by November 1797 (Sutherland 2005b, p. 17). Income, status, and independence to marry are at the forefront of *Sense and Sensibility* and the alteration was presumably to reflect the worth of income against status by 1811. In 25 April 1811 Austen uses her technique of owning and identifying with her characters. She believes that Mrs. Knight 'will like my Elinor, but cannot build on any thing else'.

In 29–30 November 1812, Austen announces to Martha Lloyd that *Pride and Prejudice* has been sold for £110 rather than the £150 she had hoped for. The novel has a traceable provenance in the letters. Cassandra's posthumous memorandum dates the composition of the original 'First Impressions' to October 1796–August 1797 and Cadell's rejection of the novel occurred in November 1797. The manuscript continued to circulate in private, however, and the very first surviving reference occurs in a birthday letter to Cassandra who has requested a further opportunity to read the manuscript while on her 1798–1799 visit to Godmersham. Austen says, presumably jokingly, she 'does not wonder' at her sister's 'wanting to read first impressions again, so seldom you have gone through it, & that so long ago' (8–9 January 1799). By 11 June 1799, of course, Martha has been suspected of memorising the original to publish it for herself almost 13 years before the revised version goes to press. In this, Austen demonstrates her understanding of both the reading and publishing processes. In 24 January 1813 Austen talks about the 'readers or retainers of Books' in their Chawton circle. On 29 Jan 1813 in a long

letter to Cassandra, Austen describes her 'own darling Child *Pride and Prejudice*' as 'lopt & cropt', and with a second volume apparently shorter than that of *Sense and Sensibility* because there is 'a larger proportion of Narrative'. It has been calculated that *Pride and Prejudice* is shorter overall by 25 pages than *Sense and Sensibility* and that Volume 2, containing more 'Narrative', is in fact 39 pages shorter (Le Faye 2011, p. 420). The volume breaks are significant in the novels overall and both author and publisher would have been alert to this for the purposes of borrowing and 'retaining' by clients of the circulating library.

In 29 January 1813 Elizabeth Bennet is singled out as being 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print' but on 4 February Austen reins in her delight for Cassandra's amusement by claiming the novel too 'light & bright & sparkling'. An essay incorporated into it might satisfy the 'starved notions' of her sister as a literary critic who has participated in manuscript readings of the novel in progress. A printing blunder on suppers brings 'M^{rs} Bennet's old Meryton habits' into the letter as if she were an acquaintance like their Chawton neighbour Miss Benn who has been hearing the novel read aloud. Cassandra is visiting their brother James at Steventon and Mrs. Austen is failing to live up to Austen's realisation of the characters. Austen reflects also on the Chawton Cottage hours that are more unfashionable and economical in candles than those at Godmersham. In 24 May 1813, Austen is more inconsistent in the embodiment of her *Pride and Prejudice* characters. She seeks Elizabeth and her sister Jane on a visit to a London gallery amidst the 'dirt & confusion' of 10 Henrietta Street. She also worries that she is a 'wild Beast' then stays aloof and even disingenuous when an offstage letter from Fanny demands a fictional letter in the style of Miss Darcy: 'I cannot pretend to answer it. Even had I more time, I should not feel at all sure of the sort of Letter that Miss D. would write'.

Away from Fanny's notice, Cassandra is already aware of a new composition in progress. Austen confidently compares a real evening with its fictional counterpart when she numbers the guests around Mrs. Grant's *Mansfield Park* table (24 January 1813) and in 29 January 1813 asks about hedgerows in Northamptonshire where her new novel will be set. In 3–6 July 1813, Austen tells Frank that she has received £140 for *Sense and Sensibility* and so 'written myself into £250.–which only makes me long for more'. This demonstrates the value of more distant, less frequent correspondents who receive overview information that might otherwise have been difficult to recover along with the tone in which this success is expressed. The letter is to Frank as captain of the *Elephant*, and Austen adds in a postscript upside down at the top of the first page to save Frank the cost of postage in the Baltic: 'I have something in hand which I hope on the credit of P&P will sell well tho' not half so entertaining'. Frank's parallel career is a matter of both pride and competitive news-spreading juxtaposed with a parallel women's culture. Austen wants to mention the *Elephant* in her novel and has already done

so expecting his approval. This is an instance where the postscript becomes a pre-script to the actual letter. This apparently mechanical operation in the text is clear in the manuscript version whereas in a printed edition such a section is usually, perhaps necessarily, a postscript even if its location is noted. There is an illustration of this effect in 11 June 1799 that mostly concerns shopping and visiting in Bath where Austen reacts to a letter from Cassandra and thus appears to prioritise her 'quarrel' with their friends the Bigg sisters (Figure 1.4). For Frank, the ships in the letters are discussed in a tone similar to that with which Austen brings her fictional characters into her life but on closer examination this is, of course, a reversal of her usual practice in that the real ships are to be made fictional. In a later scrap of a letter to Frank (21 March 1814) Austen describes her novels as 'in the world' like children being born but another letter related to the novel has childbearing ramifications in real life. In 2 September 1814 Austen is pleased in a postscript that Martha's friends the Deans-Dundases have praised *Mansfield Park*

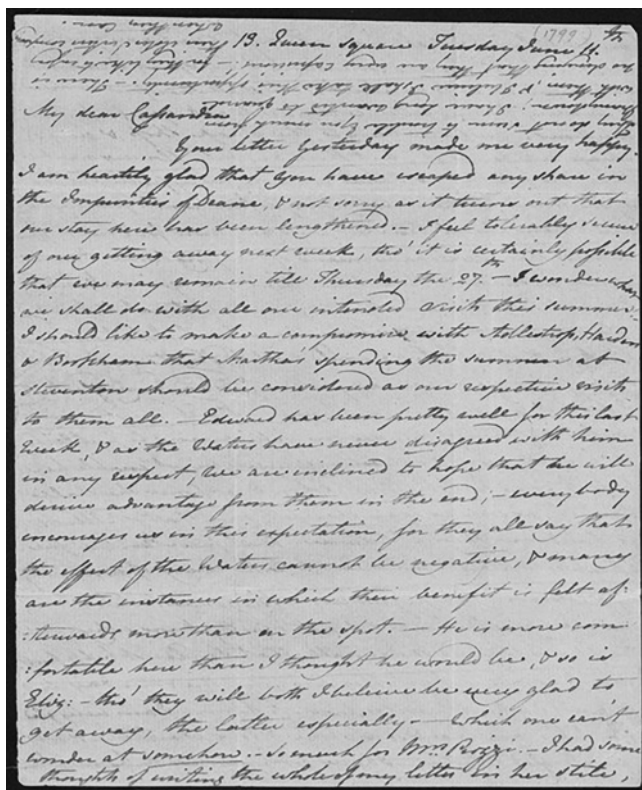


Figure 1.4 Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11 June 1799; detail of inverted postscript at head of letter. National Library of Australia.

but for the modern reader this information now immediately rebounds against our knowledge of the imminent death of Fanny Palmer Austen, wife of Charles, whose initially safe delivery of a child is included in the same postscript.

In a longer letter to Frank as captain of the *Elephant*, Austen refers to 'the 3^d' of her novels and thanks Frank and his wife Mary for their support in concealing her identity as author of the other two (25 September 1813). With Henry more effusive and confiding to others she adds that it is 'scarcely the Shadow of a secret now . . . I shall rather try to make all the Money than all the Mystery I can of it'. It may be, however, that the characterisation of Mary Crawford, who has been identified with his wife Eliza, was a warning to Henry to beware the perils of having a sister as an author. Austen later makes great play in her letters at the publication stage of *Mansfield Park* of having Henry read the novel on a coach journey via Cobham, alluding to the practices of dyers 'dipping their own Souls in scarlet sin' (2–3 March 1814). She claims to Cassandra that Henry 'understands' all the characters although this is with particular reference to Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris. In the next letter (5–8 March) she describes Henry in real time 'this moment' guessing if Henry Crawford is to 'be reformed or would forget Fanny in a fortnight'. She reports him significantly as finding the last half of the last volume 'extremely interesting' (9 March).

It is now difficult to discern whether the fictional letters that reveal Mary Crawford's character in this part of the text have struck any chord with him as Cassandra might have been expecting. The sisters would have remembered Eliza's original quest to be a countess through her first marriage and her manipulation of her two cousins James and Henry during their own theatricals at Steventon over Christmas 1787–1788 (Honan 1987, pp. 50–52; Tomalin 1997, pp. 55–58). Mary Crawford's objections to marrying a clergyman, echoing Eliza's similar sentiments, are already well-known in the earlier parts of *Mansfield Park*. Henry Austen, of course, although intended for ordination like James, took on the more dashing profession of soldier and then army-based banker before his marriage to Eliza. '[H]is approbation has not lessened', Austen claimed in 9 March adjacent to a flurry of remarks about going to Covent Garden, failing to go to the Palmers in Keppel Street, lowering the bosom of a gauze gown with long sleeves, and having insufficient 'funds' to pay candle and tea suppliers (Brecknell and Twining respectively) on her mother's behalf. There may be a sense of nervous anticipation over Henry's reaction here but in fact the letters written from London often betray busyness and occupation caused by the need to impose control over the touristic opportunities of a visit in light of the sisters' limitations of pocket. Candles and tea were significant purchases verging on necessities for a genteel existence, and the alteration of existing gowns was an ongoing concern in the quest to achieve respectability. Publishing a daringly unpredictable novel experimenting with social norms and constructed out of the lives of her own brothers was reinforced for Cassandra in the context of the daily round of their dependent spinsters' lives.

When the first edition of *Mansfield Park* is sold out, Austen describes herself as 'very greedy' in a squeezed paragraph that heads the fourth address-panel page of one of the advice letters to Fanny (18–20 November 1814). Austen emphasises that she does not include any particulars of her commission to Henry for a second edition 'as you are much above caring about money' but can at least comprehend '[t]he pleasures of Vanity' arising from praise of the novel. Cassandra would understand both. Henry's serious illness pushed Austen more to the forefront of the publication of her next novel *Emma* and in 17–18 October 1815, she describes publisher John Murray as 'a rogue'. He has offered £450 for *Emma* to include the copyright of *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility* although Austen has already thought of publishing for herself. She tells Cassandra that this apparent business communication is 'an amusing Letter. You shall see it' which we now cannot. Henry Jackson, Henry's future father-in-law from 9 Sloane Terrace who was married to Sarah Papillon seems to have been part of a 'pleasant visit' and, although 'fond of eating', does not like his Chawton in-laws, the Reverend John Papillon and his sister Elizabeth. In the background Henry is 'calomeling' as part of his self-treatment for what would become a very serious illness and, with Austen alarmed at his decline, Cassandra was apparently brought to London by James (Clery 2017, pp. 253–254).

Austen was there until 16 December proofreading *Emma* after nursing Henry and becoming aware of his business problems. She tells Cassandra that Henry has written to Edward and has read out this letter to her; although 'part of it must have amused him I am sure; – one part alas! cannot be very amusing to anybody' (24 November 1815). With the Alton bank branch on the verge of bankruptcy, Henry even has to absent himself from his head office (2 December 1815) making this an extraordinary juxtaposition of what Austen calls her 'affairs' (24 November) with the male world of business. She is nurse, manager of her 'Dirty Linen', published author, and literary celebrity invited to Carlton House. Henry the entrepreneur skulks in the provinces or receives medicine as 'a little aperient' from the much-praised physician Mr Haden who provokes Austen's interest by preferring *Mansfield Park* to *Pride and Prejudice* (26 November 1815). The subject of linen and that parcel costing 2/10 takes up almost as much of 26 November 1815 as any allusion to the novel whose fictional arrowroot reminds Austen of arrowroot for Anna. The whole is a juggling act to save money in the face of novel profits and pending bankruptcy in the usual context of the sisters' necessary economies. At the last Austen expresses delight at the sight of a letter from Charles and wants to send him all her copies of *Emma* including those destined for the Prince Regent and the Countess of Morley. Her professional concerns regain sway but are once more contextualised and complicated by the roles of men.

The letters in which the publication of *Emma* is embedded represent Austen as both author and correspondent. On receiving her advance copy of the novel,

Frances, Countess of Morley entered into the spirit of the Austen sisters' embodiment of fictional characters when she wrote on 27 December 1815, 'I have been most anxiously waiting for an introduction to Emma' (Le Faye 2011, p. 322). It is as if the group of women has been socialising at an assembly, and the tone of other letters suggests that the Countess herself described people in her social circle in terms of characters in Austen's other novels (Jarvis 1986). Although she seems eventually to have preferred *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice* (Jarvis 1986, p. 11), Frances Morley may have met Austen as part of Henry's London acquaintance and so received the honour of an early copy of *Emma* on a personal basis, as referenced in 26 November. In December 1815, her note continues, 'I am already become intimate in the Woodhouse family, & feel that they will not amuse & interest me less than the Bennetts, Bertrams, Norriss & all their admirable predecessors'.

This brief exchange survives and serves to provide a commentary on Austen's authorship and the archive. Austen's reply in a note of three sentences was drafted and the draft retained by Cassandra to bequeath to Charles. This draft was given by J.P. Morgan to Cambridge University Library and has been clearly stamped by them '18 DE 1925' (Modert 1990, F-392) as if to re-date it with this library mark of their ownership. The note of 31 December 1815 actually sent was bequeathed by Alberta Burke to the Pierpont Morgan Library and contains slightly fewer dashes than the draft although the substance of the text is identical. Austen's reply acknowledges Lady Morley's note in its own terms by echoing her concerns about Emma's 'reception in the World'. The suggestion of Austen's 'state of doubt' as to this reception initially appears to reinforce the politeness of her response but her real doubt is set within the two dashes she has characteristically retained from her original draft. The Countess is being admitted to the sisterhood of letters discussed in Chapter 4 when Austen writes that the 'approbation' of her Ladyship has encouraged her 'to beleive that I have not yet – as almost every Writer of Fancy does sooner or later – overwritten myself'. The last five words of this sentence, along with the close, run over onto the reverse of the paper as if by design at least to reach a turn of the page but also to put that concern of exhausting her market out of first sight. For all its formality, this note is both personal and confiding.

Another surviving but now untraceable note accompanied a copy of *Emma* to a very different recipient in Catherine Ann Prowting, a Chawton neighbour and sister of Mrs. Ann-Mary Clement. The Clements and Prowtings often feature in Austen's letters from Chawton and it is likely that the sisters and Captain Clement of the Royal Navy were the people described in Austen's 1817 'last' letter to Frances Tilson (Le Faye 2011, p. 467) although their names were omitted in Henry's 'Biographical Notice' that is the only surviving version of this letter. Austen's 24 January 1813 letter reports to Cassandra that the impoverished Chawton spinster Miss Benn has dined with the Clements and the early 1816 note to Catherine

offers the 'volumes' of *Emma* as a memorial to their 'poor friend' and reading companion who was buried on 3 January that year. There is a sense of shared spinsterhood – 'these volumes would have been at her service' – and Austen acknowledges both their 'habit of reading together' and their enjoyment of 'Works of the same hand'. Catherine is being recognised in the circle of those appreciating Austen's self-deprecation. In 28–29 May 1817 to Tilson, Austen describes the sisters despite their inadequate petticoats, as 'all good humour and obligingness' and in 1816 tells Catherine 'I shall make no other apology for offering you the perusal of [these volumes], only begging that, if not immediately disposed for such light reading, you would keep them as long as you like, as they are not wanted at home'. The literary value of this unwitting survival no longer in manuscript copy is that Miss Benn was a living example of the life Mr Knightley projects in *Emma* for Miss Bates although her 'talking aunt' (*E*, p. 214) characteristics owe more to the 'foolishly minute' Miss Milles (26 October 1813) and Mrs. Digweed 'full of wonder & gratitude' (29 January 1813). In 1818 the unnamed Clements trio in the postscript to Henry's 'Notice' provide a prescript to Austen's two unpublished novels when Henry presents them as subjects of Austen's epistolary style and, hopefully, wearers of more fashionable 'longer petticoats'. It is a correspondence unwittingly continued within the novels that follow in this first edition. Henry Tilney proves himself a master of muslin in *Northanger Abbey* and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* likens his first command the *Asp* to 'an old pelisse' handed down by economising female acquaintances.

The countess and the spinster were acknowledged by Austen as readers in the context of a shared and recognisable women's culture. During the same period, in the aftermath of the dedication of *Emma* to the Prince Regent, Austen was engaged in another very different correspondence. No description of her visit to Carlton House survives, perhaps because Cassandra was with Austen in London tending to Henry, but the ongoing correspondence with the Prince's librarian does. Austen was willing to reason with the reverend as a published author but James Stanier Clarke has no place within any sisterhood.

In 11 December 1815, Austen wrote to Clarke of *Emma*: 'I am very strongly haunted by the idea that to those Readers who have preferred P&P. it will appear inferior in Wit, & to those who have preferred MP. very inferior in good Sense'. Austen has been trying to make a polite response to his requests for a novel based on his own experience and concludes, for now, 'I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress'. In this boasted vanity of unlearnedness, Clarke has been honoured with a response worthy of a regular correspondent but on 21 December he proves he has misread the letter when he presses his point, offering books of sermons and the use of his 'Cell' at 37 Golden Square (Le Faye 2011, p. 321). He has actually, however, only read a few pages of *Emma* and when he

commends the novel again in March 1816, he proposes that Austen's next 'Volumes' should be 'any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg' (Le Faye 2011, p. 325). She is to dedicate her work to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Cobourg who is coincidentally Clarke's new employer and about to marry the Prince Regent's daughter.

The first two paragraphs of Austen's reply to this letter, ominously dated 1 April 1816, are textbook, letter-manual fare even though Austen might reasonably have been feeling like Mr Bennet enduring the correspondence of a Mr Collins. Austen acknowledges in her third and final paragraph the 'Profit or Popularity' of such a 'Romance' but vows to continue with her own 'pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages'. Her 11 December 1815 letter has pointed out her lack of reading and education in the classics, and in April she becomes more serious in her refusal, insisting, 'I could no more write a Romance than an Epic Poem'. Austen fears that writing a romance even to save her life would make her laugh and so result in being hanged 'if it were indispensable for me to keep it up & never relax into laughing at myself or other people'. Cassandra would remember their school-day claims of dying of laughter transferred to Lydia Bennet; Clarke has already shown himself to be impervious. Seriousness returns after this brief glimpse of her less considered but more characteristic response and Austen insists on her 'own style' and her 'own Way' even if she may never succeed again. The 1 April letter, now owned by the Jane Austen's House Museum, survives only as a draft that may never have been sent (Sutherland 2018, p. 117) although *Family Record* treats it as if it were (Le Faye 2004, pp. 227–228). The draft could have been a response for family reading and consumption only; particularly as Clarke's suggestions find their way into her 'Plan of a Novel' which has descended through Charles Austen's family but is now separated from the letter in New York in the Pierpoint Morgan. The 11 December 1815 letter was signed 'Your obligd & faith Hum. Servt. JA'. On 1 April, however, Austen closes 'Your very much obliged & very sincere friend' and signs herself with an almost masculine 'J. Austen'. The use of the word 'sincere' and her formal signature are testament to her seriousness in this tersely firm attempt to deter her unwanted correspondent with this plain-speaking defence against Clarke's proposal. Clarke may never have received it and her true reply may indeed be 'Plan of a Novel' but Cassandra retained the draft in her archive. It appeared in both the *Memoir* and *Life and Letters* before benefiting Charles Austen's granddaughters when it was sold on in the 1920s.

On the same 1 April, Austen was in professional mode for her reply to John Murray that was a letter of two very distinct halves. Austen initially thanks Murray for sending her Scott's anonymous *Quarterly Review* article. She appears hurt by the omission of *Mansfield Park* from the review and this is reiterated by her description of herself in the third person: 'The Authoress of *Emma* has no reason I think to complain of her treatment in it'. She is icily disappointed that the

binding of her latest novel seems to have been prioritised over the text since she tells Murray about the Prince Regent's thanks for his 'handsome copy' of *Emma*: 'Whatever he may think of my share of the Work, Yours seems to have been quite right'. The second paragraph of this letter indicates, however, the stark realities of Henry's business collapse that Austen terms this 'late sad Event in Henrietta S^b'. In practical terms letters must in future be sent to Chawton and parcels by Collier's Southampton Coach. She has lost the convenience of transmission through the banking network and will have to pay for subsequent communications but must not lose touch with the future profits of her work, however humbling the admission. It is a letter about her lived experience of authorship and the fragility of her hold over her life.

With Cassandra at home during the last nine months of that life, epistolary sources of authorship revert to nieces and nephew, and in 14 March 1817 Austen tells Caroline, 'I have just rec^d nearly twenty pounds myself on the 2^d edition of S&S which gives me this fine flow of Literary Ardour'. This is obliquely a message for Caroline's brother James Edward who is applying for an Oxford scholarship in philology (*Report* 1852, p. 111) available under the terms of his relationship with the Craven family through his mother but unavailable through gender to either Austen or Caroline. Austen has her profit and Caroline is at the same time 'bearing Criticism' of a story being read by her aunt. Austen suggests that as 'sisters in letters' they can all manage without the patronage of an Oxford college since it is not through 'the Craven exhibition' but through his novel that James Edward 'will find his true fame & his true wealth'. Meanwhile, in 20–21 February 1817 to Fanny, Austen elides praise of *Emma* with women's sociable support of male endeavour: 'I have contributed the marking to Uncle H.'s shirts, & now they are a complete memorial of the tender regard of many.' Henry is now curate at Chawton under John Papillon and about to become Austen's memorialist. To his shirts Austen has added a kind of signature in Henry's name although ominously she has not made a major contribution because of her progressing illness. In the ongoing women's counter culture, this is reminiscent of the juxtaposition of Cassandra as a comic writer with Austen's neat sewing for Charles back in 1 September 1796.

Fanny is also told in 13 March 1817 of a 'something ready for Publication . . . about the length of Catherine' and 10 days later, in 23–25 March, Austen admits to her niece that Henry knows this. She offers Fanny the information to give her niece a sense of control while scolding her for teasing Mr Wildman by withholding knowledge of her (Austen's) authorship. In the revised last chapter of this new novel *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot will take her gender-based stance against Captain Harville in Wentworth's hearing and their conversation echoes Austen's phrasing in the letter to Fanny. Anne tells Harville hers is not a very enviable privilege, 'you need not covet it' (*P*, p. 256) and in her letter Austen tells Fanny of her novel called 'The Elliots', 'You will not like it, so you need not be impatient'. Austen has already

described herself on the cover page of 23–25 March as being made ‘sick & wicked’ by ‘pictures of perfection’ and a single sentence immediately following at the top of the second page of the letter adds, ‘You may perhaps like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me’. Austen then launches into a description of her symptoms and apparent recovery or remission, creating a curious sense that writing Anne Elliot has cured her of the sickness that makes her ‘black & white & every wrong colour’. Only five weeks later she drafts her informal but binding will (Le Faye 2011, p. 355). Austen can confide the existence of a new novel in her last letter to Fanny but as an aunt she uses authorship to postpone the sad inevitability of her death.

Letter survival has weighted our understanding and appreciation of Austen’s life to the years of her publication and aunthood, with half the number of extant letters overall dating from the last four and a half years of her 41-year life. In using the letters as life evidence it should be noted that the pattern of the Austen sisters’ lives must have dictated not just the writing of the letters but their later preservation. Cassandra lived the rest of her life at Chawton and the letters written to her were then inherited in the form in which she had been keeping them for 35 years. The preservation pattern of these letters might have been dictated by a need to suppress certain information as suspected by family and biographers since. Surely, however, the removal from Steventon had already limited the preservation of material from earlier years for reasons of storage capacity. There is evidence that the letters dating back to 1796 were kept in the sequences shown in Figure 1.2. At her death in 1845, Cassandra left 11 to their brother Charles and four to their niece Caroline. The 79 letters bequeathed to Fanny were discovered by Lord Brabourne (1884a, pp. x–xi) tied up in yearly divisions. In 1884, the letters that were once reminders of family business and substitutes for presence were about to be recopied with revised agendas that would translate them from mementoes into collectibles.

This story of the letters is part of Austen’s story. The history of dispersal and re-collection has also contributed to the life of the author, and the next chapter explores the impact of the letters’ immediate afterlife in early biographical works by the family. The new audiences of the *Memoir*, *Letters*, and *Life and Letters* were taught to read not like Cassandra but as consumers and owners of Victorian family history.