“To the Great Detriment of the Post Office Revenue”

An analysis of Jane Austen’s early narrative development through her use and abandonment of epistolary fiction in ‘Lady Susan’

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For my parents, Tom & Audrey Owen

'The Rice Portrait' by the English C18 miniaturist Ozias Humphrey (1742-1810), possibly of Jane Austen in her early adolescence. The painting is tentatively dated c.1790.

now appears, of the Match, which the conclusion
of your Letter declares your expectation of. — At
present it is not very likely. —

Yrs &c
Cath Vernon.

Conclusion.

This Correspondence, by a meeting be:
:tween some of the Parties & a separation be:
:tween the others, could not, to the great detri:
:ment of the Post office Revenue, be continued
longer. — Very little assistance to the State
could be derived from the Epistolary Intercourse
of Mrs Vernon & her Neice, for the former
soon perceived by the stile of Frederica's Letters
that they were written under her Mother's in:
:spection.

"This Correspondence, by a meeting between some of the Parties & a separation between the others, could not, to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue, be continued longer".

First section of the direct-narrative conclusion to *Lady Susan*, interrupting and terminating the epistolary form used throughout the rest of the novella (p. 151, facsimile of Austen's fair copy).

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Formatting

This thesis has been written in general accordance with the guidelines established by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Fifth Edition), except for the placing of notes, which are situated at the foot of each page for ease of reference.

“Novels in letters were assuredly more popular in the eighteenth century than they have been since; but abandonment of an unfashionable form does not automatically entail artistic advance…”.

(Hugh McKellar, “*Lady Susan*: Sport or Cinderella?” 208).

“A newly born genre never supplants or replaces any already existing genres. Each new genre merely supplements the old ones, merely widens the circle of already existing genres. For every genre has its own predominant sphere of existence, in which it is irreplaceable”.

(Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 271).

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Introduction

"[T]he conventional "take" on why Austen stopped using the epistolary mode... has been shaped by teleological assumptions about the development of narrative forms, the view associated with Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel,* that from the beginning of the 18th c., prose fiction was tending towards the "realist" novel, and Austen's later use of free indirect speech clinches the crucial technological advance towards an illusion of narrative transparency. I think there's a different way to tell the story...". [1]

In *Epistolary Bodies*, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook suggests that not only Ian Watt's seminal work on the novel (1957) but also subsequent work on the same subject such as the influential studies by Michael McKeon or Nancy Armstrong (both 1987) have given support to the notion that epistolary writings are the "imperfect precursors of nineteenth-century works" and "cul-de-sacs of [the] evolutionary model" (Heckendorn Cook, 20), in turn shaping views on the novel itself and limiting critical recognition of the importance of epistolary form within the development of the novel.[2]

Such a view, consequently, is reflected in assessments of Jane Austen's own stylistic development, from the juvenilia through to the mature fiction. It has been common

[1] Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, private correspondence, 23/06/2003.
[2] Heckendorn Cook's point in referring to McKeon and Armstrong is to suggest that even revisionist work produced in the wake of Watt's study nevertheless continues to put forward the idea of a 'discarded image'. However, this notion predates Watt; it was posited at least as early as the 1930s and 1940s by Singer, Lascelles and Black. It is of interest here to note that within Watt's 'triple-rise theory' (the growth of a middle class led to an increase in literacy that, in turn, led to the rise of the novel), put forward in *Rise*, specific comments on the epistolary are very few, and almost entirely in exclusive reference to Richardson (see for example *Rise* 195 and 201). For further discussion of McKeon's work in opposition to that of Watt, see, Heckendorn Cook, 187, n. 28. For further and comparative discussion of the studies by Watt and Mackeon in relation to Austen's own canonicity, see Johnson, "Let me make the novels of a country", 164-166. For an alternative account that, in marked contrast, strongly emphasises the influence of the epistolary novel on later developments of the third-person, direct-narrative novel, see Joe Bray (*Epistolary*). For further discussion in this Introduction, see p.8.

to see this as a progression from what were deemed to be essentially *derivative* forms of writing[3] (however forceful in their literary energy) towards the mature, controlled use of direct narrative and most especially of free indirect style,[4] of which we see Austen as a particular champion, following an unbroken, artistically logical continuum that, breaking with her early use of the letter form in much of the juvenilia writings,[5] moves from lesser to greater narrative effectiveness and control. Thus, with respect to the epistolary mode in the early work, what is initially a highly artificial form (*Amelia Webster*, for example) evolves towards a narrative style that strives, though not always in a sustained way, to create a sense of realism (*The Three Sisters*, for example),[6] suggesting that Austen is experimenting

[3] See Lord David Cecil's belief of their being merely "trifling enough ... squibs and skits of the light literature of the day" (Cecil, 59). For further comment on critical reaction to Austen's juvenilia, see Owen (41, n.3).

[4] Also termed 'free indirect *speech*' (FIS), the style was first called '*style indirect libre*' in 1912 by Charles Bally (Bray, *Epistolary*, 20). "This technique, which Jane Austen was the first English novelist to use extensively, consists of reporting the thoughts of a character in language that approximates more or less closely to their own idiolect and deleting the introductory tags, such as "he thought" ..., that grammar would normally require in a well-formed sentence... [It] allows the novelist to give the reader intimate access to a character's thoughts without totally surrendering control of the discourse to that character" (Lodge, *The Language of Fiction*, 175). For a more recent discussion by Lodge of FIS, see *Consciousness and the Novel*, 45-50. Interestingly, in this latter work, Lodge (46) dates Austen's use of the device to her post-juvenilia writing, overlooking its incipient use in *Catharine* or, indeed, in *Lady Susan* (see Waldron, 25 and p.110 of this thesis). For further and fuller information, see Banfield. For further information on the development and use of FIS in the European novels of the nineteenth century, see Pascal. For additional general comment on FIS, see Miles, Chapter 3. For a linguistic analysis of the issue, see Leech & Short, pp.322-23; 324-36 and 344-45. See Bray, *Epistolary*, (20-27) for a detailed account of FIS from the perspective of literary stylistics. Significantly, Bray asserts that "one vital and immediate source for free indirect thought in particular has been overlooked: the epistolary novel" (22). Of additional interest is Bray's review of critical opinion that posits FIS in first-person epistolary writing, in contrast to traditional approaches to the style that locate it exclusively within third-person narrative (Bray, *Dramatised Consciousness*, passim; Bray, *Epistolary*, 19-20).

[5] Austen's fully epistolary works are *Amelia Webster, The Three Sisters, Love and Freindship* (sic: see note 43), *Lesley Castle, A Collection of Letters, Scraps, Evelyn* (from the juvenilia) and *Lady Susan*. The ur-forms of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, purportedly written immediately after this initial period (c. 1797-99), and of which it is speculated that they were epistolary, have not survived (see n.12 and comment on p.8 of this thesis; for details of extant MS, see n.36). For dates of juvenilia composition see Chapter Two, n.3.

[6] The early work is a simple burlesque that primarily concerns itself with the riotously comic (however, see n.30 for additional comment); the second text, however, attempts to present a broadly plausible, serious relationship (particularly between Georgiana and Anna), though the specific situation is exaggeratedly drawn. A brief comparison of extracts from the two works supports this suggestion. See for example, Letter the 2nd from *Amelia Webster* (*MW* 47-48):

(Continued on the next page)

with techniques that would most effectively allow her to create such a sense. It is then wholly abandoned in *Catharine*, Austen's first serious, prolonged attempt at "narrative transparency".[7] This would seem to imply that, even at a very early age, her own literary progress had uncovered limitations to the letter form that she found unsatisfactory, precipitating her definitive move towards direct narrative and an *embryonic* free indirect style.[8] The specific motivations for this progression have been much debated and are of central importance to this thesis. Suggestions include Austen's initial use of a popular and readily available model, rejected once she had gained fuller technical resourcefulness (Lascelles 124[9] and Figes 41); her intentional burlesquing of a sentimental and outdated form (Julia Prewitt Brown 50), and her use of the epistolary in order to develop the ironical (even subversive) voices of her mature fiction (Butler, *War of Ideas* 168; Deborah Kaplan, *Female Friendship* 163-78; Epstein, *Female Epistolary Tradition* 399-416: see thesis

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> ...I arrived here last thursday [sic] and met with a hearty reception from my Father, Mother & Sisters. The latter are both fine girls—particularly Maud, who I think would suit you as a Wife well enough. What say you to this? She will have two thousand Pounds & as much more as you can get. If you don't marry her you will mortally offend
>
> GEORGE HERVEY

in contrast to the following fragment from *The three Sisters,* in which Georgiana Stanhope writes (to her friend Anne) about her mother's marriage plans for the daughters:

> "And therefore (said she) If Mary wont have him [the suitor, Mr Watts] Sophy must and if Sophy wont Georgiana *shall.*"... We neither of us attempted to alter my Mother's resolution, which I am sorry to say is generally more strictly kept than rationally formed. As soon as she was gone however I broke silence to assure Sophy that if Mary should refuse Mr Watts I should not expect her to sacrifice her happiness by becoming his Wife from a motive of Generosity to me... (*MW* 61).

For further discussion of this epistolary text, and its comparison with *Lady Susan* (in light of Lascelles' comments on both works), see p.125 of this thesis.

[7] The term in this context, in addition to its use by Heckendorn Cook, is also used by Claudia Johnson (private correspondence, 10/07/2003).

[8] See thesis Chapter Two, p.110.

[9] See thesis Chapter One, p.62 & Chapter Two, pp.122-130.

p.226ff.).[10] However, the essential linearity of this progression has not greatly been brought into question.

This is significant, since the temptingly convincing pattern of a gradual break from the epistolary is not, in fact, a wholly accurate description of Austen's early development. For whilst the use of the epistolary plays no part at all in *Catharine*, thus apparently supporting the notion of an artistic progression away from the form, *Catharine* itself was then followed by *Lady Susan*, an almost entirely epistolary work[11] (unquestionably the most compelling, powerful and artistically mature text of Austen's early production) and by the ur-forms of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, known, respectively, as *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions*.[12] If the idea of progression in the early

[10] For further comment, see also Watson, p.82, n.17.

[11] The non-epistolary conclusion may have been added during Austen's much later fair copying and probable revision of the work (two leaves of the extant MS are watermarked 1805 [see, for example, Southam, *Literary Manuscripts*, 45]), which might reasonably account both for the sudden interjection of an authorial voice in opposition to the conventionally epistolary mode used up to this point, as well as for the apparent change in tone, seemingly berating and ironically undermining the ability of the letter form to act as an effective conclusion to the story (nevertheless, we disagree with such a reading of the conclusion: see p.193 of this thesis). Southam does not agree with this dating for the conclusion, however, arguing on somewhat flimsy stylistic grounds ("[it] has *something of the stiffness* we find in 'Catharine'", emphasis added) that it that it must have been added shortly after the novella's composition (*Literary Manuscripts,* 46). For argument in support of a later date of composition for the conclusion, see, amongst others, Lascelles (13-14), Mudrick (140) and Litz (*Study* 41). For recent argument in favour of a later composition for the entire novella, see Marilyn Butler (*Simplicity* 6). One of the points that Butler (*Simplicity* 6) puts forward in support of this is clearly erroneous: she observes that Austen is "unlikely to have copied out a new work called *Lady Susan* at a time when she still hoped to see another novel called *Susan*—the future Northanger Abbey". However, Austen herself never gave the epistolary work a title: this was added by James Edward Austen-Leigh in the *Memoir* of 1871. For further discussion of and references to *Lady Susan*'s non-epistolary closure, see the concluding comments to n.17, Watson, p.82. In this thesis, see Chapter Two, p.183, for further discussion of the consequence of such dating on challenging orthodox critical positions that argue in favour of Austen's 'belief' in the limitation of the epistolary.

[12] See See Mudrick 38 n.2, Favret (241 n. 24) and especially Southam (*Literary Manuscripts* 45-62), who argue for the likelihood of epistolary forerunners to *Sense and Sensitivity* and *Pride and Prejudice*. For counter opinion, see Lascelles 14 and Harding (*Appendix A*), the latter casting serious—and closely argued—doubts on the suppositions made by Southam *et al* for *Sense and Sensibility* (see Chapter One, n.117 for Harding's remarks) though not for *Pride and Prejudice*. For further comment, see thesis, p.14.

writings away from the epistolary towards direct narrative were unerringly correct, that is, if Austen had actually perceived at this stage that the use of the epistolary in itself was less artistically effective, why would she then have returned to this mode after composing *Catharine* to use it again in writing that was far longer and more ambitious than anything she had hitherto attempted? If the results of the style used throughout *Catharine* had been so compelling to her, would it not have been more artistically coherent to attempt further evolution of the stylistic developments of this last juvenilia piece in her subsequent work? Instead, however, she reverts wholeheartedly to the epistolary and maintains this form for nigh on the whole novella.[13] It seems implausible to suggest that Austen carried out this considerable creative task whilst simultaneously chafing at the epistolary's limitations. Such a view might be more sustainable if Austen had given up on the form after having written a more limited portion of the novella; in fact, however, she persisted with it for 41 letters, which makes it reasonable to posit that she found the form to her satisfaction for at least that much of the novella, which is to say, for almost its entirety.[14] And whilst it is true that Austen concludes *Lady Susan* with a direct-narrative closure—giving rise to the most controversial issue in the work[15]—it is also the case that this closure, narratively, is merely

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[13] In discussing shorter works such as *Lady Susan* and *Catharine* (as well as other texts such as *Love and Freindship* and *The Watsons*), we use the term 'novella', *passim*, given that, in our view, it is inadequate on the grounds of their length to designate these texts as novels.

[14] Part of the discussion in "*Lady Susan*: a Re-evaluation of Jane Austen's Epistolary Novel" (Alexander & Owen, In Press [Spring 2006]), and the terms in which this is expressed, is based on the arguments presented here. It should be emphasised, however, that the article is concerned monographically with *Lady Susan* and, in marked contrast to this thesis, does not assess the reasons for Austen's eventual abandonment of the epistolary beyond briefly challenging the notion of formal inadequacy. A version of this article was given as a joint paper at the 2005 AGM of the Jane Austen Society of North America, Milwaukee (October 2005).

[15] See especially Chapter Two, pp.183-196, for fuller discussion.

a tying together of strands;[16] the literary attainments that this thesis argues for *Lady Susan* are achieved wholly through the use of the epistolary mode.

Southam is the main critical voice directly and extendedly addressing the issue of Austen's regression to the letter form.[17] He asserts that this was instigated by her failed attempts at direct narrative in *Catharine*, opting in its stead for "the less demanding form of the correspondence novel" (*Literary Manuscripts* 46). This thesis will argue that such a view is overly dismissive and simplistic as regards the epistolary, taking insufficiently into account Austen's considerable stylistic advancement in *Lady Susan* with respect to *Catharine*. It will also—consequently—put forward the view that there is a need, in accordance with more recent criticism,[18] to challenge the conventional marginalisation of *Lady Susan* in order to reach a closer understanding of Austen's stylistic development and the manner in which this was achieved.

Therefore, positing that her reversion to the epistolary shows that Austen had not yet found direct-narrative form to be the entirely effective stylistic vehicle she appeared to

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[16] Its significance beyond the purely narrative, however, is far greater. For many critics, this narrative switch indicates Austen's frustration with the limitations and conventions of the correspondence novel. Indeed, there are those, such as McMaster, who see nothing less than the demise of the form itself in Austen's direct-narrative conclusion, "a farewell alike to the epistolary mode that had dominated the eighteenth-century novel and Austen's own fictions, and to the energy-driven personnel who had dominated them" ("Juvenilia", 184), an issue that is discussed, *passim*, in this thesis.

[17] Other critics, such as Waldron (25), recognise the 'regression', but tend not to focus greatly on its significance, merely pointing out that the letter-form was unsuitable to Austen's increasingly complex narrative needs. However, Litz calls the novella 'a cautious retreat' in comparison to *Catharine*, in his preface to the facsimile edition of *Jane Austen's 'Lady Susan'*, 1989.

[18] See the concluding remarks to section 1.4 (thesis, p.78).

be seeking,[19] this thesis will make the following three hypotheses: first, that in spite of the undeniable achievements of *Catharine*, Austen in fact attained greater artistic maturity and technical effectiveness through further experimentation with the epistolary in *Lady Susan*, the latter novella solving a range of stylistic and formal problems that Austen had been unable to resolve in *Catharine*. Second, in consequence, the thesis will advance the hypothesis that the use of the epistolary after *Catharine* is not a regression to a technically inferior form brought on by a failed stylistic experiment with a more 'demanding' mode, but rather a determined insistence on a form that—at this stage in Austen's development—was better able to accommodate her growingly complex artistic concerns, particularly as these relate to incipient authorial control or 'voice'; the establishment of a moral framework within which plot and character can be developed; insight into character and, more generally, a sense of plausible realism.[20] Finally, as the conclusion to these three positions, the thesis posits as a third hypothesis that Austen's abandonment of epistolary fiction is not primarily the result of the purported formal limitations of this mode, but corresponds instead to factors such as the political connotations of epistolary literature in the 1790s within the then-current climate of repression; to the manner in which correspondence novels, by the mid-to-late 1790s had begun to reflect outmoded literary styles; and, of still greater importance, to Austen's sensitivity towards commercial criteria—amongst which there is the increased inclination for third-person narrative in contemporary literary taste and a clear preference for simple, straightforward anti-

[19] See, for example, Waldron, 22-24.
[20] For a discussion of the development of realism in the eighteenth-century novel in relation to the Enlightenment, see Richetti (1-8).

Jacobinism in popular literature—affecting publication at the close of the eighteenth century.

In Heckendorn Cook's terms, then, this thesis will argue for a 'different way to tell the story', positing the centrality of the epistolary mode in Austen's stylistic development. For, as McKellar (208) suggests, perseverance with the use of an earlier form does not, *ipso facto*, preclude artistic advance.

Before continuing, however, the treatment of two other issues important to this thesis—though in different ways and to a very different extent—requires a certain justification at this initial stage of argument. The first of these is our position taken throughout with respect to the *Wattsian* model of novelistic development; the second is the emphasis placed here on *Lady Susan*, an approach that calls for explanation both in itself as well as for the slighter emphasis we give to the consideration of the other juvenilia epistolary texts.

As we have already implied (thesis, p.1 and n.2), the view of the rise of the novel associated with Watt[21] is not one that is universally accepted; there are a number of

[21] "Ian Watt's influential account of the emergence of the novel connects it with the growth of the middle classes in the eighteenth century (which creates a readership anxious to read of itself and its values). His thesis is a materialist one, that social and historical factors generated aesthetic response. In particular, he isolates three key areas in which we see the influence of contexts: (a) The growth of economic/possessive individualism, and with it the new mercantile capitalist values of investment and capital accumulation; (b) related to this, the rise of materialistic philosophical individualism, with its new emphasis on the individual (rather than social groups) as the essential social unit [deriving from Locke]; (c) the new demand for (Continued on the next page)

contrasting accounts challenging it.[22] Yet, in spite of these alternative accounts, many of which address aspects and forms of the novel and of its history that Watt considers insufficiently or not at all, his ideas still remain central to all related critical discussion. As Jan Fergus[23] observes:

> Watt's views have influenced debate on the novel since *The Rise of the Novel* was issued in 1957. Feminist critics have been successful in drawing attention to the works of women novelists whose contributions to and interventions in the genre are excluded from Watt's story. Cultural critics have further enlarged the field of discussion, pointing out that novels were read against other forms that often were more widely popular, like chapbooks or periodical essays or journalism. Some critics have even reversed Watt's premise, arguing... that the novel does not reflect social change; instead it enables [it]. But because critics continue to challenge Watt, his account circulates still.[24]

However, this thesis is not—except incidentally—a study of the epistolary mode within the history of the novel and is therefore not primarily concerned with a detailed analysis of Watt's ideas, nor indeed, of those from any other critic writing on this question. Nevertheless, in the sense that our findings argue closely for a re-evaluation of the letter form within Jane Austen's stylistic development, and in light of the fact that *Lady Susan* is often taken figuratively to be the death knoll of epistolary writing[25]—a position

education/moral training associated with middle class values. The middle classes existed as a readership, and required reading material" (Dover, Web). See also n.2.

[22] In addition to those critics already mentioned, see also Terry Castle (*Masquerade*), Lennard Davis, Catherine Gallagher, Jane Spencer, Margaret Anne Doody (*True Story*) and J. Paul Hunter, who all put forward accounts of the novel's origins differing from that of Watt.

[23] *Women Readers: A Case Study* (155).

[24] For further related comment, see also Ros Ballaster, *Women and the Rise of the Novel*, particularly pp.198-202. For bibliographical reference to works that either support or challenge Watt, as well as for alternative accounts of novelistic development, see *The "Rise" of the Novel: Annotated Bibliography* (Web).

[25] For example, see McMaster's comments, n.16.

that we dispute throughout—we necessarily support the consequential re-assessment of the Wattsian account, inasmuch as such an account marginalises the role of the novel-in-letters within its version of the rise of the novel and gives instead an exclusive centrality to the third-person narrative.

As regards the focus on *Lady Susan* in this thesis, there are two principal justifications. The first of these, concerning the novel itself, is the fact that it has frequently been seen by Austen critics as symbolising the movement—within the history of the novel—away from the older epistolary mode and towards what is taken to be the more evolved form of third-person narrative.[26] And it is, of course, certain that nothing at once extant and epistolary survives Austen's shift of narrative style after *Lady Susan*. Paraphrasing Litz's views on *Love and Freindship* and the Novel of Sensibility,[27] we might say, then, that the terminated epistolary section of *Lady Susan* has been deemed to exactly capture the changing mood of literary taste, synechdocally expressing a broader rejection of the form's once-popular use. In light of this, any attempt to challenge critical opinion regarding Austen's relationship to epistolary form must therefore inevitably concentrate itself principally on the ways in which and reasons for which *Lady Susan*—for obvious reasons, incomparably more so than any of her other early epistolary texts[28]—has been perceived to embody Austen's 'realisation' of the superiority of direct narrative for her burgeoning literary requirements. Such a view evidently does not coincide with the position

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[26] See, for example, the views of Lascelles (13-14), Litz (*Artistic Development* 44-45), Southam (*Literary Manuscripts* 45-50) or McMaster ("Juvenilia", 184).
[27] See thesis, p.139.
[28] None of the juvenilia epistolary works is terminated by a direct-narrative conclusion.

argued by this thesis; we posit that the epistolary mode in *Lady Susan* was not only advantageous to Austen's stylistic development but, furthermore, that she was entirely aware of the advantages that the form afforded her, and fully exploited its literary potential. Beyond this, we also posit that *Lady Susan*'s termination is not primarily related to any stylistic limitations that Austen is said to have perceived with the form; rather—as we will argue in Chapter Three—it corresponds to Austen's awareness of current literary trends that were at odds with the work that she was then producing, and to political and commercial concerns adversely affecting the chances of her work being published. And there is still another weakness to the critical position that sees *Lady Susan* as symbolising a broader rejection of the epistolary, which is that essentially the same claim has been made for a different—and rather later—novel-in-letters, Scott's *Redgauntlet* (1824), a work that also shuts down the epistolary to conclude in third-person narrative:[29] clearly, both claims cannot simultaneously be valid. Notwithstanding this, however, and as we have just outlined, any and all engagement with conventional critical views on the epistolary in Austen necessarily requires detailed assessment of *Lady Susan.*

[29] See comments on Scott in Bray, *Epistolary*, 118-119. We would emphasise, however, that the contrastive narrative modes in Scott's novel are utterly unlike those in *Lady Susan*, in which the epistolary use and discontinuance is not an intentional authorial strategy. In *Redgauntlet*, in contrast, it would be more accurate to describe the form as 'dysfunctional epistolarity', as the novel shifts between letters and direct narrative. Scott himself (Chapter 1 Narrative) justifies this in a lengthy prologue, observing that "the course of the story-telling which we have for the present adopted resembles the original discipline of the dragoons, who were trained to serve either on foot or horseback, as the emergencies of the service required. With this explanation, we shall proceed to narrate some circumstances which Alan Fairford [one of the two main protagonists] did not, and could not, write to his correspondent" (144). For further reference and discussion, see thesis n.66, Chapter One.

Our second justification for focussing on this novella concerns the nature of Austen's other juvenilia epistolary texts. In the sense that this thesis considers the role of the epistolary mode on Austen's stylistic development, it is evident that her early epistolary text *Amelia Webster* (a story that barely runs to two pages) is of limited value in assessing the use of this narrative form.[30] However, later juvenilia epistolary texts such as *The Three Sisters, Love and Freindship, Lesley Castle,* and *Evelyn,* and—though to a much lesser extent—*A Collection of Letters* and *Scraps*[31] have provided material for considerable critical comment. Indeed, we will consider *The Three Sisters* and *Love and Freindship* in fuller detail (see pp.125-127 and 136-141, respectively), in both cases evaluating whether their purported superiority to *Lady Susan* is a tenable critical view. But, as our discussion of these two works suggests, Austen's juvenilia epistolary taken as a whole is of a significantly different character to *Lady Susan,* for a number of reasons, all of which give support to the use of this later work in considering the epistolary mode in Austen's stylistic development. First, in spite of the undoubted achievement that Austen's juvenilia writing represents, the early epistolary texts are essentially burlesque (although this is not always sustained throughout each work to the same extent), largely parodying the sentimental fiction that Austen avidly read.[32] The specific type of burlesque we find in the juvenilia is that which Lascelles (56) defines in the following way:

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[30] Which is not at all to dismiss the general importance of this work. Laurie Kaplan draws attention both to its stylistic and pragmatic value, observing (78) that modern readers "do not often comment on the style and grace of a writer's prose. Yet in reading Jane Austen's books over and over again, we begin to delight in the balance and symmetry of the sentences and the form, the elegance of phrasing...We begin to see how the young author turned "Amelia Webster" into a commentary on contemporary letter writing".

[31] For dates of composition, see Chapter Two, n.3.

[32] "...[R]eading the new novels that poured off the presses into the circulating libraries, [Austen]... registered her protest—the comic artist's protest of burlesque—against their product" (Mudrick, *Irony* 4-5).

> [It] consists in imitation to which exaggeration, displaced emphasis, or some other distortion has given a mocking turn—the object of its mimicry, therefore, being also the object of its mockery, which is not a necessary condition of all kinds of burlesque. It is best suited to criticism of technique... and of patent improbability—and [is] the sport of young wits. It is the staple of Jane Austen's juvenilia...

In that sense, in marked contrast to *Lady Susan*, which even critics such as Southam and Litz recognise as effectively 'unprecedented',[33] these are works of a derivative nature—although we fully accept the validity of Doody's observation that, within the obvious confines of their derivativeness, "Austen's parody is creative, not dismissive".[34] Second, in none of these works is there a sustained attempt to exploit the full range of stylistic potential offered by the epistolary form (an issue that, for *Lady Susan*, we consider fully from p.142 ff.), which is a limitation that undermines the value of these texts for our specific purposes within this thesis. Southam (*Literary Manuscripts* 46) pinpoints this when, in speaking of *Lady Susan*, he observes that the novella "pays regard, as never before, to verisimilitude in the length, frequency and contents of the letters", implicitly highlighting the restrictions of the earlier epistolary works. We would add that, in these texts, the novel-in-letter form often appears to be purely coincidental (this is particularly the case with the more developed *Love and Freindship*, *Lesley Castle,* and *Evelyn*); the narrative and its concerns could have been carried forward equally effectively or even more so in direct-narrative, and—in general—little benefit seems to accrue to Austen's style for

[33] For Southam, see thesis Chapter Two, n.107; for Litz, see the closing comment in thesis Chapter Two, n.185.
[34] Doody, "Reading" 358.

having opted to use this form, all of which is, as we posit, in stark contrast to *Lady Susan.*[35] In short, the only extant epistolary writing in Austen's early work that is a sustained and lengthy use of the letter form as a mode through which to articulate serious literary creativity is *Lady Susan.* Finally, in addition to these comments is the obvious but significant fact that the earlier epistolary writings pre-date *Catharine.* As we have already indicated (p.6), this thesis is centrally concerned with the question of why Austen should have *returned* to the epistolary after composing a third-person narrative, given the prevailing critical view that her progress towards direct narrative (apparently finalised in *Catharine*) is purportedly the culmination of the stylistic evolution leading her to the form used in her mature fiction. In this sense, then, it is evident that we can only effectively address this question through the assessment of epistolary writing subsequent to *Catharine.* This leaves us with the extant text of *Lady Susan*, on the one hand, and the ur-forms of two later novels, on the other. We opt to focus on writing that is currently available for analysis, and leave conjecture on the posited but unproven existence of the epistolary ur-novels entirely to one side, as we now explain.

In limiting our assessment of Austen's development to works that are actually extant (principally *Catharine* and very especially *Lady Susan*, the quintessentially representative early texts of, on the one hand, the direct-narrative mode and, on the other,

[35] This may, however, be entirely intentional—a manner of emphasising the implausible *use* of the epistolary mode found in the literature that Austen delights in ridiculing. Going beyond this, Southam sees the inadequate use of letters in the early juvenilia as Austen's parody of the epistolary itself: by casting these stories in letter form, he argues that she thereby draws attention to its unsuitability as a narrative vehicle. See thesis, p.138.

the epistolary),[36] this thesis will have the clear advantage of referring to writing that is susceptible to analysis and not simply the object of speculation. In this ambit, certain critical argument has put forward the notion—often with an alarming scarcity of supporting evidence—that some of the later novels were derived from epistolary forerunners.[37] For instance, Southam (*Literary Manuscripts* 45-62) and Favret (241 n.24) claim that the definitive forms of *Sense and Sensitivity* and *Pride and Prejudice* were recast versions of longer epistolary ur-forms; Leavis makes the same assertion (*Critical Theory*, passim),[38] as well as suggesting (94) that *Mansfield Park* is a modification of *Lady Susan*. However, compelling though such argument may be, it inevitably founders in light of the fundamental unreliability of supporting evidence—very largely, memory-based family records—and of the telling fact that (excluding Leavis' opinion of the relationship between *Lady Susan* and

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[36] MS of the early extant works, in accordance with Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* xv, are the following: the three MS volumes of juvenilia, *Volume the First* (Bodeleian Library [MS. Don.e.7]); *Volume the Second,* currently owned by Ms Rosemary Mowll; *Volume the Third* (British Library [Loan MS. 52], formerly in the possession of the trustees of the estate of R. A. Austen-Leigh. For details of the contents and dating of these three volumes, also in accordance with Southam, see Chapter Two, n.3. *Lady Susan* is in the Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York (ref: MA 1226). The later works in extant MS form comprise the two cancelled chapters of *Persuasion* (British Library [Egerton MS. 3038], see note 39, below); *Sanditon* (King's College Library, Cambridge); *Plan of a Novel* and a fragment of *The Watsons* (both in the Pierpoint Morgan Library with ref: MA 1034). The remainder of the latter work is currently held by the legatees of W. Austen-Leigh. Southam also wholly attributes the work *Sir Charles Grandison* to Austen (Southam, "Grandison"), though this attribution is not universally accepted. The MS is in Chawton House Library. For a history of the sales of these MS, see Gilson ("Auction Sales"). For comment on the publication and critical history of Austen's juvenilia, see Daffron; for an overview of the publication history of all Austen's work, see Gilson ("Editions"). For information on prices, print runs and sales for Austen's major fiction, see St Clair 578-580.

[37] See n.12. As an example of unsupported assertion, see apRobert's remarks (256): "we *know* there was an early epistolary form of *Sense and Sensibility*" (emphasis added). The notion of this ur-form is entirely plausible and, furthermore, is supported by Cassandra Austen's memorandum: "I am sure that something of the same story & characters had been written earlier & called Elinor & Marianne" (Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* 53). However, to claim a certain knowledge of its existence on this basis appears to overstate the case.

[38] See p.64 of this thesis.

Mansfield Park) not one of these posited ur-texts is now available for us to consult.[39] The issue is complicated somewhat with *First Impressions*, a novel whose existence as a completed work is confirmed by Austen's father's attempt to have it published in 1797 (see thesis, section 3.4). However, in the absence of any explicit evidence, the suggestion that this novel was an *epistolary* forerunner to *Pride and Prejudice*—a position that has been challenged[40]— remains unproven and therefore, as we have observed, is not open to textual assessment. In contrast to this, the arguments made here in favour of the importance of the epistolary in Austen's literary development will be supported, in this thesis, by analysis of texts that have survived, and will avoid conjecturing upon the literary form and attainments that Austen might possibly have achieved in her 'lost' writings. The focus, instead, is upon what she actually left us.

Thesis Outline:

Chapter One contextualises the thesis within the critical continuum of epistolary discussion. The first section (p.22) briefly delineates the various ways in which the epistolary has shown itself to be of interest and relevance to literary theory, underlining the fact that the form, whilst deemed marginal within the development of the novel, has nevertheless proved to be strikingly effective in drawing the attention of a broad number of theoretical ambits.

[39] See the following comments by Southam: "The manuscript of the cancelled chapters of *Persuasion* ... is unique as being the only pages to have survived from the manuscripts of any of the published novels". (Southam, *Persuasion*, 322); "In the absence of manuscript evidence, we have to rely upon the family records for information about the original version of the three novels which underwent considerable change before publication" (Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* 45).

[40] See Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* 58-60. For further discussion, see thesis, p.276. See also this chapter, n.12.

This is then followed (p.44) by an assessment of critical work on the epistolary form itself—including an outline both of the limitations of such criticism and of areas of current epistolary development—and by a review of Austen-specific criticism concerning the letter form. The material discussed throughout basically pertains to English epistolary production since, to paraphrase Gilroy & Verhoeven (9), there is neither the space here nor, indeed, the expertise to assess in detail the "cultural, textual and theoretical specificities of [other] epistolary writings".[41] Given its function—in part—as survey, the extended discussion in Chapter One often ranges far from the immediate realm of Austen's work (although its applications to her writing are commented upon throughout); however, it concludes with the way in which contemporary writers have exposed the limits of the genre, in a certain sense paralleling what some critics have taken to be Austen's own irresolvable problems with the form. The chapter closes (p.78) with an assessment of Austen's personal correspondence and a discussion of the relation between 'real' and fictional letters in epistolary criticism, as a means of establishing the criteria for the type of epistolary writing centred on within the subsequent chapters. The final comments in this first chapter, in light of the critical review undertaken, reiterate the justification for the focus and approach taken by this thesis.

Chapter Two provides analysis of the two most important works from Austen's early period, the unfinished and non-epistolary *Catharine* (1792) and the correspondence

[41] For discussion of European epistolary writings and the cultural contexts surrounding them, see Gilroy & Verhoeven (Introduction); MacArthur and Beebee. For innovative and graphic representation of some of the later European models, see Moretti.

novel *Lady Susan* (c.1794), which—though almost entirely epistolary—was concluded, probably at a far later date, with a direct-narrative closure. These novellas, the culmination of Austen's youthful writing, stand in representation of two contrasting narrative modes, one seen as successful within the evolution of the novel, the other seen as technically inferior—a rejected option. The purpose of this assessment is to review the achievements and limitations of both texts, most particularly as these relate to the narrative form in which they were written, in order to challenge the view that Austen's use of the epistolary mode in *Lady Susan* was a regressive step, and to hypothesise, in opposition to such a view, that this form of writing actually provides Austen with the technical progress that facilitates the attainments of her later work. In our analysis of *Catharine* (thesis, p.89 ff.), we maintain that, in spite both of its considerable inherent value and the advancement that it represents in a number of ambits over the earlier juvenilia, the novella nevertheless—in the context of Austen's artistic ability at that time—left a range of technical difficulties unresolved and, further, that these difficulties were actually complicated by her use of direct narrative. In contrast, and in disagreement with much critical opinion, our assessment of *Lady Susan* (thesis, p.116 ff.) posits that this work in large part resolves the technical difficulties of *Catharine* precisely through its use of the epistolary, a form that, in addition, facilitates Austen's development of certain specific literary aspects (amongst which there is incipient narrative voice, effective presentation of moral conflict, use of irony and plausible realism) that would become central features of her mature fiction. This is presented through the assessment both of critical opinion (and of its specific arguments) that fundamentally deems *Lady Susan* to be an artistic failure, and, in contrast, of those critical views

discrepant of such a position, which affirm the ways in which the novella succeeds in advancing Austen's stylistic development. The chapter concludes, in light of these critical arguments, with an assessment of the stylistic improvements that *Lady Susan* represents over *Catharine,* though in discursive (rather than analytical) style, building upon—and referring back to—the close reading of Austen's writing that has already been undertaken as a means of ascertaining the validity of the critical perspectives under discussion, and in order to sustain our own hypotheses with respect to *Lady Susan.*

Having essentially concluded through our analysis in Chapter Two that the epistolary mode is not a stylistic obstacle for Austen's development, but rather a highly effective manner through which Austen's stylistic progress is established and advanced, Chapter Three then addresses what therefore appears to be a conundrum: if the epistolary mode was really so successful, why then did Austen abandon it at Letter 41 of *Lady Susan,* to later complete the same novel in direct-narrative form and, to all effects (at least inasmuch as the extant works are concerned), never to return to this form in her subsequent writing? The chapter assesses what we deem to be the main reasons for this generic abandonment, which, in addition to the question of formal limitation basically analysed (and rejected) in Chapter Two, include the influence of Austen's reading of contemporary fiction, the influence of the Jacobin/anti-Jacobin politics in 1790s England and the influence of commercial considerations, that is, of factors affecting publication. The chapter looks at each one of these factors separately, although it is evident that their separation is somewhat artificial, as they are clearly interdependent. Indeed, the Chapter closes with the

affirmation that each factor, including (in a limited but important sense) the formal, played its role in leading Austen to abandon the epistolary. However, whereas conventional critical assessment almost exclusively attributes this abandonment to the purported limitations of the epistolary, our assessment highlights the manner in which this is—in our view—substantially less important than the other issues considered. This in turn supports the notion of Austen as a politically and commercially motivated professional whose decisions are shaped not primarily by questions of literary form (the difficulties of which, if and where they exist, she was perfectly able to resolve through her obvious artistic competence) but rather through her close interaction with the complex and competitive world of eighteenth-century publishing.

Chapters Four and Five complete the thesis with the presentation of our conclusions and of their implications, and with an outline of further research that, in our opinion, would contribute to a still fuller comprehension of Austen's writings, both juvenilia and mature, of her relation to a range of epistolary texts and, more generally, to her early stylistic development.

1. The Epistolary: Theoretical Interest & Critical Attention

"[T]he letter, the epistle... is not a genre but all genres, literature itself".

(Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card* 48)

Notwithstanding the limited role accorded the epistolary within the development of the novel and the frequency with which epistolary writing as a literary vehicle has largely been deemed moribund since effectively the close of the eighteenth century,[1] the form *per se* has nevertheless attracted—and continues to attract—considerable critical notice; indeed, with the attention given to the epistolary by, for example, Formalism, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, New Historicism, Feminism and Cultural Studies (see p.22 ff. of this thesis), it might even be said to have undergone something of a revival, if not greatly in its use[2] then at least in the interest it generates, "both in and as theory".[3]

[1] Literary definitions tend to give emphasis to the essentially archaic nature of the form (see, for example, Gray, and Drabble [Ed]).
[2] That said, however, it would be misleading to affirm that the epistolary form no longer appeals to modern writers; it is also worth observing that the form—as might be expected—is swiftly regaining its original character as a natural vehicle for often spontaneous communication through the growth of e-mail correspondence and even of publications in e-mail format. For a (mostly) recent and somewhat informal selection, see "Epistolary Fiction", a booklist prepared by Madison Public Library for the Jane Austen Society of North America's 2005 Annual General Meeting in Milwaukee, USA (monographically concerned with the epistolary). The list is available at http://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/booklists. For a survey of contemporary use of the epistolary form, see Beebee (199-205) and Gilroy & Verhoeven (6).
[3] Gilroy & Verhoeven (6). See Beebee (5 ff.) for an account of the historical development of the form and for the difference between French and German models of the letter (16-17). See Gilroy & Verhoeven (1 ff.) and Spencer (4 ff.; 23-33) for a brief review of the epistolary form in English. For a bibliography of major European epistolary fiction from 1473 to 1850, see Beebee, 231-258.

1.1 Literary Theory and the Letter form

The fundamental reason for which the epistolary has been of continued interest to such a broad range of theoretical ambits, or for which the form relates so aptly to the notions generated by such theory, is the manner in which it symbolises—in its composition, content, purpose and reception—the very essence of literary communication. Citing Schuerewegen, Beebee observes that:

> '[t]he letter written in the absence of the other, which goes forth without knowing where it is going (between sender and receiver there is the Post Office, a powerful machine not always to be trusted)... helps us better to understand whenever a book opens itself to a reader.' ...A letter is a text which has become separated from its author and has entered the various postings and relays which will inevitably influence its interpretation and evaluation.[4]

Formalist concern with the epistolary is expressed most notably through Bakhtin, who stresses the polyphonic and essentially dialogic character that the novel in general provides, and of which the epistolary is an important element. The belief that the stylistics of written language inevitably contains within it various and interconnecting levels of heteroglossia, that these levels carry out a dialogue between themselves[5] and that language

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[4] Beebee, 15

[5] "Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel... is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions, but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*... In such discourse there are two voices [the character speaking and the author], two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated... it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other". *The Dialogic Imagination*, 324 (emphases in the original).

'answers back', both within a single text and across different texts, and even across different times,[6] underpins Bakhtin's overall view of the novel:

> Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships [always more or less dialogised]. These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heterroglossia—this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.[7]

Central to Bakhtin's notion of dialogism is the idea of the embedded or inserted genre, in which the particular stylistic characteristics of a given genre are found implanted within the surface genre of the text. Thus, a text itself contains within it levels of other generic forms that add to the multiplicity of speech 'types': "[a]ll these genres, as they enter the novel, bring into it their own languages, and therefore stratify the linguistic unity of the novel and further intensify its speech diversity in fresh ways".[8] This stratification, in turn,

[6] "...people and ideas which in historical reality never entered into real dialogic contact... begin to come together..., people and ideas separated by centuries collide with one another on the dialogic plane" (*Problems*, 112).

[7] *The Dialogic Imagination*, 263.

[8] *The Dialogic Imagination*, 321. The multiplicity of perspectives that this gives rise to also coincides with the essentially Bakhtinian view of all fiction as, in part, subversive. See also Bakhtin's comment (ibid) that certain genres play an especially important role in structuring novels, sometimes so much so that they impose an over-riding structure upon the novel and in turn create novel-types that then bear that genre's name. He specifically names the personal letter as one of these.

means that, however monologic a text may be intended to be (Bakhtin lists biographical, historical and novel-epic writings as examples of this[9]), its dialogic character is inevitable.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin's epistolary-specific observations are made in part through the discussion of the Baroque novel, which he sees as highly representative of inserted genre. This novel form (he claims[10]) divided into two branches: one provided the continuation of the 'heroic' form, typified, amongst others, by the works of M.G.Lewis, Ann Radcliffe or Horace Walpole; the other was the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century epistolary writing of authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Marie-Madeleine La Fayette or Samuel Richardson. This Bakhtin sees as "characterised by psychology and pathos [...and...] the epistolary expression of love".[11] A principal characteristic of this form is that it creates "a specific-temporal zone of Sentimental pathos associated with the intimacy of one's own room".[12] In other words, Bakhtin identifies the single formal property of the epistolary that, whatever other difficulties and weaknesses are perceived as inherent to the form,[13] has been of abiding aesthetic importance, namely, its capacity to provide direct, intimate and psychological insight into the character of the epistolary participants. In terms of Austen's writing, as Chapter Two considers in fuller detail, this is an aspect of particular validity when considering the stylistic advances represented by *Lady Susan* over *Catharine* and earlier works.

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[9] *Problems*, 271.
[10] *The Dialogic Imagination*, 396.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Op.Cit., 397.
[13] See, for instance, Southam's comments on its limitations in *Lady Susan* (*Literary Manuscripts*, 50), or Walton Litz's observations on the overall 'failure' of the same novella (see p.67 of this thesis).

However, as we have observed,[14] it is the polyphonic nature of the epistolary, the multiplicity of voices within the same text, as well as the dialogic "reckoning with an absent interlocutor"[15], one who is both outside the letter or novel yet implicitly central to it, that are of particular interest from the formalist perspective. For whilst, in Bakhtinian terms, dialogism characterises the novel as a whole, it is specifically the epistolary form that is "the representation of such dialogism",[16] as the letter is always written for another, in anticipation of and in possible response to that other's voice:

> A characteristic feature of the letter is an acute awareness of the interlocutor, the addressee to whom it is directed. The letter, like a rejoinder in a dialog, is addressed to a specific person, and it takes into account the other's possible reactions, the other's possible reply.[17]

In light of this view, it is of interest to note Favret's idea on epistolary polyphony (190-192, in turn derived from Bakhtin), which is that it represents the 'refraction' both of dialogue and of authorial intent created by the epistolary form, facilitating the specific relation of epistolary writers to their text, "at a remove from the languages of the novel, yet implicated in them", thus preventing the establishment of a single, unitary voice. (Favret cites Kristeva [139] to the effect that the form is "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point, as a dialogue among several writings... Diachrony is transformed into

[14] Thesis, p.22 ff.
[15] *Problems*, 205
[16] Beebee, 144. See also Bakhtin's comment that the letter is "half ours, half someone else's" (*Discourse*, 44).
[17] *Problems*, 205. For additional reference to studies of European polyphonic literature, see Beebee 224, n.16. For further specific comment on orality and the epistolary, see Day ("Speech Acts"), 187-197.

Synchrony")[18]. Nevertheless, whilst this is of interest at a theoretical level, at the more practical level of text it is clear that epistolarity need not preclude the discrete presence of 'authorial intent', nor even the move towards the unitary perspective of the narrator: inasmuch as the narrative voice of Austen's later fiction may be viewed as 'authorial', such a voice—albeit in an incipient form—can clearly be heard in the letters of Mrs Vernon in *Lady Susan*.[19]

In addition to the multiplicity of languages and voices, formalist interest in the epistolary form also lies in its 'incompleteness'.[20] This, as Beebee (101) indicates, refers to the re-orientation of the narrative away from images of the past, in which completed narrative is possible (generically, this comprises the epic and tragedy) towards images of the present, and their inevitable association with the future, hence their incompleteness (generically, this comprises the novel and the epitome). For Bakhtin, the effect of this incompleteness is to facilitate and heighten the connection between, on the one hand, the *representedness* of the literary construct and, on the other, external and 'unfinished' reality:

> When the present becomes the centre of human orientation in time and in the world, time and world lose their completedness as a whole as well as in each of their parts... This creates the radically new zone for structuring images in the novel, a zone of maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary reality in all its inconclusiveness.[21]

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[18] Favret, 192
[19] See Introduction, *Lady Susan* (Alexander & Owen, eds). See also thesis, p.166.
[20] Beebee identifies, as characteristic features of the epistolary, its incompleteness and its capacity for defamiliarisation (see p.32 of this thesis).
[21] Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel", 30-31.

The epistolary has also proved itself to be of an abiding interest to Structuralist and Post-Structuralist critics. For Lacan, the letter "map[s] the route of subjectivity";[22] his seminar on Poe's *The Purloined Letter* illustrates how, for him, the concept of the appropriated text functions "as a parable of the primacy of the linguistic sign over the speaking subject".[23] Roland Barthes, who himself played with the epistolary in *Lover's Discourse* (1977),[24] draws attention to the candid subjectivity of the letter form, which, whilst sharing what Beebee (169) calls "the illusionist imperative" of the historical or realist novel, maintains the "I" of its discourse (Barthes asks "how many novelists—in the epoch of realism—imagine themselves 'objective' because they repress the signs of 'I' in their discourse?").[25] In contrast with other novel forms that, by suppressing the individuality or personalisation of narration, attain a "quasi-scientific objectivity",[26] the epistolary form is "defined in terms of a network of social relationships which directs and legitimates reading activity".[27]

For Michel Foucault, the letter pertains to that group of discourses that lacks an 'author function':

[22] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 7
[23] Ibid. For further writings on Lacan's seminar, see Favret (218 n. 22). For Derrida's response, see Gilroy & Verhoeven, 175 n.1.
[24] In which, as with Derrida's *Postcard,* he "skilfully mimic[s] the passion, disorder, and delirium of the *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*" (Kauffman, *Not a Love Story*, 198-199). See, however, Beebee's comment (202) that *Lover's Discourse* would not "readily be identified as an epistolary fiction".
[25] Beebee, 169, citing Barthes, *Le discours de l'histoire.*
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid. The legitimising of letter reading, in a socio-political context, is fully developed by Watson, 108 *et passim* (see p.55 of this thesis). For a full account of structuralist analysis of epistolary fiction from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, see Altman.

> Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary fleeting words... Consequently, we can say that in our culture, the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others: a private letter may well have a signatory, but not an author.[28]

In other words, this is an assessment of the letter form within the hierarchy of written texts that demotes the value of certain epistolary writings, specifically, those which are not a fictitious use of the letter but instead represent genuine, non-literary correspondence and which, very often, correspond to letter writers such as women, many of whom—for reasons both of gender and genre—were historically excluded from full access to literary representation. And implicitly, it values above such writings those texts that have an author, texts that provide something more than an everyday content ("ordinary fleeting words") and that are thereby accorded more than "momentary attention".

Recent epistolary critics such as Heckendorn Cook, however, have taken justifiable issue with Foucault's taxonomy of the author function, that is, with the literarily elitist limitation of the status of author, and the consequent recognition that this incurs, to texts that would exclude forms such as the personal letter or the private diary, relegating the importance of these latter typologies for their quotidian concerns. In the context of the eighteenth-century letter form, they have also—very reasonably—challenged the blanket assumption that those distant times are in any valid sense 'our culture'.[29]

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[28] Foucault, *What is an Author?* 1627-1628.
[29] See Heckendorn Cook, 6 ff.

Additionally, although not intended primarily as comment on the epistolary, it is of interest here to remark that elements of Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish* of the body politic ("...a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relation that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge")[30] have been taken up in contemporary epistolary criticism in support of the notion of "Epistolary Corporealization" (Heckendorn Cook, 32) the metonymic representation of the letter for the (usually female) body, and therefore—by extension—of the fragility and uncertainty that women may face in sometimes hostile environments.[31] Heckendorn Cook observes that, in epistolary writings, "the letter serves as a metonym of the body of the writing subject, vulnerable like it to markings, invasions, violence of all sorts". That is, it is a form that can be overseen, intercepted, added to perhaps even against the wish or knowledge of the writer, delivered or lost without the writer/sender having control over this eventuality and that may or may not be accorded credence and acceptance on reception, all of which it is argued can be interpreted to reflect—at a metonymic level—the historical vulnerability of women themselves.

Jean-François Lyotard's assessment of the postmodern condition is of particular relevance in light of the early development of the epistolary. Lyotard famously observes

[30] Foucault, *D&P*, 28.
[31] For discussion of the importance of the body in epistolary writing (a major concern in Heckendorn Cook's study) see *Epistolary Bodies*, chapter 3. For further reference to 'corporealization', see Kelly & von Mücke. See also Gilroy & Verhoeven, 23, n.31: "Recent theories continue to produce, in however deconstructed a way, an erotics of the epistolary that elides the letter and the female body".

that postmodernity "excludes dependence on grand narratives...The mini narrative becomes the form in which imaginative invention appears".[32] Beebee (6), citing MacArthur, makes the point that early epistolary writing established forms "in nearly every discursive practice, from philosophy to science" that were, in essence, mini narratives, and that aimed at substituting the ineffective grand narratives of the day (theology and discourse focussed on maintaining the socio-political status quo). MacArthur, reflecting Lyotard's ideas, suggests that the epistolary was favoured in the early-modern period precisely because its "preoccupation with... questioning the received order was best conveyed in pluralistic, fragmented textual forms such as encyclopaedias, dialogs and letters".[33] This is therefore a perspective of some relevance when asserting the specific subversive character of Austen's juvenilia epistolary writing, as it argues for the particular validity of the epistolary as a literary form on the one hand associated with the challenging of orthodox positions and ideas and, on the other, as an adequate means by which to articulate this 'questioning of the received order' through multi-voiced and often intimate reflection in contrast to the discourse of the hegemony (as we outline further on p.33 of this thesis). This is also of relevance in positing the political unacceptability of the epistolary mode to hegemonic socio-cultural control—see Watson and Chapter Three of this thesis—an issue that we see as centrally important in Austen's decision to terminate the correspondence section of *Lady Susan*.

[32] Lyotard, 98.
[33] MacArthur, 12.

For Derrida, "the dualism of correspondence enact[s] the duplicity of all language".[34] Inherent to it is not only its need for interpretation but also, in fact, the representation of a deferral of any final meaning in all communication:

> ... there is postal manoeuvring, relays, delay, anticipation... the possibility and therefore the fatal necessity of going astray... a card lost in a bag that a strike, or even a sorting accident, can always delay indefinitely, lose without return.[35]

Indeed, certain critics—amongst others, Lascelles and Favret[36]—have argued that Austen grew tired of the epistolary *precisely* because of this inconclusiveness, this potential capacity to endlessly postpone closure that the postman's next visit permanently seems to offer.

Equally symbolically, in the manner in which the act of sending a letter can be seen to mirror destiny, the letter for Derrida represents fate:

> The letter is a physical process often portrayed as metaphysical (the letter as turning absence into presence). It is thus analogous to the German word *Geschick* (fate, but derived from "schicken", to send), which turns the physical concept of sending into the metaphysical one of fate. Jacques Derrida calls this the letter's *tekhné*: 'a metaphysical and technical determination of the *envoi* or of the destinality of Being'.[37]

[34] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 7
[35] Ibid, 66-67
[36] For Lascelles, see thesis, 62; for Favret, see thesis, 72.
[37] Beebee, 54-55, citing Derrida, 192

However, Derrida's most obvious and direct connection with the letter form is *The Post Card,* a work that claimed to "mark the end of the epistolary genre and the postal epoch".[38] The apparent irony of a deconstructionist toying with the highly traditional form of the letter in order to experiment with notions of person-to-person separateness and with the indeterminate nature of corresponded meaning has not, of course, gone unnoticed.[39] Employing a broad range of epistolary techniques, Derrida reinforces the primacy of the reported (written) over the direct (spoken) word in a work in which the letter is made to stand in representation of all writing:

> Appearing on what (seemed) to be the terminal cusp of print culture, Derrida's monologic epistolary text redeploys every trick in the Scriblerian/Sterneian repertoire of typographical puns, from intrusive footnotes to textual gaps of the 'hic multa desiderantur' variety. The letter-writer muses on travel, telephoning and translation; on the history of postal institutions; and on Poe's, Freud's and Heidegger's relations to epistolary intercourse. A thinnish subplot even works in the motif of the missing love letter. But these allusions remain superficial; Derrida's real interest is the perverse textual relation between Plato and Socrates at the heart of Western culture that is exposed on the eponymous postcard... [through using] the letter as a trope for all writing.[40]

Another area of the epistolary that is of interest to post structuralism is its characteristic process of defamiliarisation (an area that was also focussed on by earlier approaches). This is the means by which the letter reflects content—objects, actions, words, entities, concepts—in such a manner that its obviousness, familiarity and quotidian nature

[38] Kauffman, *Epistolary Directions*, 215
[39] See Bower, 162-163
[40] Heckendorn Cook, 23. For further discussion of *The Post Card,* see also Gilroy & Verhoeven, 161-163 and Favret, 13-15.

is undermined. As a result, not only is this seen as if anew, but also our relationship with that content, and our understanding of its meaning and value, are called into question and redefined. That is, content is made "noticeable, debatable, historical, no less to the feelings than to the reason".[41] This in turn reinforces the letter form's ability to articulate mini narratives that undermine the 'obviousness' of meta-narrative content, and so supports its function as alternative, sometimes subversive, discourse. As we have already observed,[42] this subversive facet is evidently present in much of Austen's juvenilia epistolary writing, as with—for example—*The Three Sisters* (which strikingly highlights the economic basis of marriage), *Love and Freindship*[43] (which systematically undermines adult and male hegemony) or indeed *Lady Susan* (with Lady Susan's letters to Alice Johnson detailing the Machiavellian ways in which she plots against the socially and morally responsible world of her counterpart, Mrs Vernon). Defamiliarization, however, takes many forms, not least amongst which is the ability of the discourses of power to assume the guise of fiction, or for epistolary fiction itself to veil sermons or messages aimed at socio-political control.[44]

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[41] Beebee, 79, citing Brecht. See also Bakhtin's comments on the device of 'not understanding', used widely in the eighteenth century to expose conventional attitudes, tastes and fashions (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 164). Bakhtin refers at this point to Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*.
[42] See p.30 of this thesis.
[43] As indicated in n.5, we maintain Austen's original spelling of the substantive throughout. Wrongly and almost universally deemed erroneous—and taken as such as a further indicator of Austen's immaturity (Fay Weldon's mawkish introduction to her edition of the novella imagines a cosy fireside spelling lesson, gently imparted to the precocious Jane by her indulgent family, in which the 'anomaly' is corrected [viii])—this form was in fact a perfectly acceptable variant in private writing at the close of the eighteenth century. See Alexander & Owen, *Lady Susan* 101-104.
[44] For a fuller account of epistolary defamiliarization, see Beebee, 76-102. For an example of the discourse of power in the guise of fiction, see the discussion of Hanah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, thesis, pp. 272-275.

As Beebee (205) comments, there are further aspects of the epistolary that appeal to postmodernity: "[p]ostmodern appropriation of the letter form presents a theme-and-variations motif, in which the particular uses to which the eighteenth century put the letter return in their formal aspects, but invested with new social energies and ideational content".[45] That is, its value is seen to lie in its capacity—through polyphonic and private reflections in opposition to monologic, official discourse—to deconstruct the ideology of single, unitary ideologies such as, for example, nationalism in certain contemporary contexts (Beebee cites Chinese, Israeli and Latin-American examples); the combination of this very polyphony with the "indeterminacies of the modernist temperament";[46] the confusing nature of the signifier, the dialogic characteristics of discourse; the triangularity of communication;[47] the conflict between private and public spheres (see the following section); conflict between the presence of speech and the absence of writing and the indeterminate condition of non-fiction writing.

A notable feature of epistolary writing, often overlooked or given insufficient emphasis, is the breadth of the textual taxonomies that it houses. Far more than simply being *stories told in letters*, as Heckendorn Cook (16-20) observes, the form was used for all types of writing, from the fictional through to scientific treaties, conduct books, political texts and personal correspondence. This, and the letter's essential characteristic—indeed,

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Beebee, 205, citing Bradbury, 62.
[47] "What I as a reader have before me… is a text addressed to someone else. It is the existence of the second person, whom I displace, that distinguishes my position as reader in epistolary fiction" (Beebee, 8, citing Suleiman). See also p.84 of this thesis for further comment on the importance of the non-addressee reader to epistolarity.

its very function—of making the private public (however narrowly we may wish to define those terms) is of particular importance in light of the notion of the Public Sphere, and most especially in terms of the ideas within that ambit put forward by Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas states that the bourgeois public sphere, the *Öffentlichkeit*, arose in late seventeenth-century Europe as a separate cultural zone from the earlier bi-polar spheres of the State (formal authority) and Civil Society (the strictly private realm). Critically, participation in this new sphere, autonomous from either of the two pre-existing zones, was egalitarian: "[p]rivate individuals [came] together in the public sphere as citizens employing disinterested reason to consider matters of public concern".[48] The very autonomy of this sphere allowed for its participants to assess and freely critique both the state and civil spheres, which in turn, Habermas suggests (*passim*), facilitated the democratic uprisings of the eighteenth century. Graphically, the notion of the public sphere posited by Habermas can be represented as follows:[49]

Private Realm		**Sphere of Public Authority**
Civil Society (realm of commodity exchange and social labour)	Public sphere in the political realm Public sphere in the world of letters (clubs, press)	State (realm of the "police")
Conjugal family's internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)	(market of culture products) "Town"	Court (courtly-noble society)

[48] Heckendorn Cook, 9.
[49] Ibid, representing Habermas' own graphic scheme.

Of central importance to the relationship between this sociological thesis and the epistolary form, in addition to the egalitarianism of participation in this sphere, is that it was also "frequently literary and usually rendered through the medium of print"[50], of which the letter played a crucial part in being accessible to a broader number of people. That is, the letter itself—along with other discursive forms such as discussion, books and essays—was an essential tool in the construction of this new zone, and one that allowed the discourse of rationality and equality to replace official dictate. In effect, what the letter facilitated was the writer's introduction into the social network.[51] Through this and other media, the conceptual space of the public sphere allowed "reasoning individuals, abstracted from their private interests [to reach] a consensus on public affairs".[52]

As regards the connection between such theory and Austen's writings, it is possible to read *Lady Susan* as, in effect, a dramatised debate between conflicting views of social and socio-political behaviour. That is, in the sense that the Vernon 'camp' within the novel promotes, protects and validates socially and morally cohesive, constructive and responsible behaviour in contrast to the Lady Susan 'camp' (see p.117 of this thesis), which actively seeks to undermine this through the promotion of hedonistic, morally destructive and socially subversive behaviour, *Lady Susan* operates as a deliberation from within the private realm, yet with clear ramifications for a far broader political canvas. Most especially within the context of the French Revolution and the reaction to this within

[50] Brewer, 6, cited in Haslett, 114. For a discussion of the symbolic significance of literary production within the three-sphere framework, see Heckendorn Cook's review of Contract Theory, (14ff).
[51] Beebee, 195.
[52] Heckendorn Cook, 10.

Britain, Habermas provides a fruitful theoretical background against which the novel can be interpreted, complementing the political readings of (especially) Nicola Watson.[53]

However, Habermas's ideas, whilst broadly accepted,[54] have nevertheless been brought into question from a number of ambits, particularly that of feminist criticism. Basically, the reservations made about the theory focus on Habermas' "idealisation of a theoretical public sphere, in which an abstract humanity makes all equal, [which] blinds him to its historical exclusions".[55] Yet it is precisely this area of disagreement that also proves to be highly fertile for certain critics in assessing given epistolary writings, as it facilitates analysis of the manner in which male writers (and their texts) were able to move between spheres, whereas this flexibility was denied women writers, who were essentially limited to the private sphere,[56] a notion that our interpretation on p.36 would appear to confirm. In discussing these 'gender codes and literary authority' with reference to Richardon's *Clarissa*, Heckendorn Cook (199, n.12) suggests that:

> ...[t]he mediating function of the epistolary quasi public gives the male writer simultaneously access to and distance from the disorder of (feminine) private passion, and aligns him with (masculine) civic and moral order. Where the author and his text inhabit the public, his female protagonist remains in the ambiguous zone of the quasi public.

[53] See p.55 of this thesis. For further assessment of political readings of *Lady Susan*, see Chapter Three, section 3.3.

[54] Nevertheless, see Heckendorn Cook, 9, for comment on alternative theories of modern *publicness*.

[55] Haslett, 264. For further expressions of feminist reservation, see Haslett 139-144; 159-162 and 169, n.2. See also Heckendorn Cook, 116.

[56] See Gilroy & Verhoeven 2, who assert that women's roles "were increasingly circumscribed within the constraints of bourgeois ideology".

Historical approaches to textual criticism have led to fuller recognition of the historical and cultural specificity of the epistolary. Notably, epistolary fiction's special claim to realism has made it the object of considerable attention.[57] As Gilroy & Verhoeven (1) observe, the letter form carries the marks of specific historical practices requiring that we "read the envelope of contingency"[58] surrounding it.

A fundamental element in the perspectives of historical approaches, including New Historicism, Feminism and Cultural Studies, reflected in the works of writers such as Nancy Armstrong, Stephen Greenblatt, Hans-Robert Jauss, Michael McKeon, Edward Said and Robert Weimann,[59] in stark contrast to early approaches such as formalism that sought to foreground the special 'literary' character of the text, is an insistence on assessing all forms of textual discourse as valid, focussing not primarily on tendentious questions of literary 'merit' but rather on the historical and cultural conditions and contexts that gave rise to such discourse. Beebee (4), partly citing Cohen (45), states that these approaches are:

> '...in opposition to the modernist separation of literary language from ordinary language... [Such approaches] resist modernist aesthetic criteria, [finding] aesthetic functions previously disregarded. They are against views of textual holism'. In other words, newer historical methods tend to view literature as one of many discourses.

[57] See Gilroy & Verhoeven, 8-13.
[58] Favret, 56.
[59] See Beebee, 4.

As we consider in fuller detail,[60] this is of particular relevance to the discussion on the literary character and interpretation of Austen's private correspondence.

Gilroy & Verhoeven's work on the epistolary observes (10) that current tendencies in the study of the various typologies of the letter form emphasise movement "away from thematic and structuralist criticism and towards meticulous cultural historicization: the epistolary generic contract is always revised in the light of changing historical contexts". The obvious and direct consequence of such approaches is to distrust the traditional literary taxonomies that relegated certain forms of writing (most notably, for example, women's diaries and personal letters), to challenge the content and even the notion of the literary canon and, broadly speaking, to establish a critical context in which study of genres such as all forms of the epistolary is deemed to be as *defensible* as any other form of textual production.[61] This, in turn, brings somewhat into question the validity of the evolutionary model within the novel's development by arguing for a less restrictive view of what constitutes 'valid literature' (and which is therefore considered worthy of study and attention). As this thesis argues for Austen's writing, by recognising more fully the stylistic validity of the epistolary, in effect by distrusting traditional literary taxonomies, a far more central position can be accorded to it within her development.

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[60] See especially p.83 of this thesis.

[61] For a socio-historical account of everyday letters in the lives of Georgian women, see Vickery (*business letters; conduct letters; love letters; manuals*). For examples of letters within the ambit of the Austen family that may have been a source for *Lady Susan*, see Le Faye (Ed).

Feminist criticism of the epistolary has drawn attention to the manner in which the letter traditionally validates female experience yet, at one and the same time, is emblematic of historical dichotomy, "either lock[ed] into marriage (as in *Pamela*) or betray[ed] into death (as in *Clarissa* or *Julie*)".[62] Indeed, feminist critical attention given to the epistolary has regretted that "the one genre with which women have been persistently connected has specialised in narrowing the range of possible inflections for feminine expression".[63]

Additionally, certain recent critics, in assessing earlier feminist analysis of Enlightenment epistolary writings, have struck cautionary notes with respect to either the emphasis given by such accounts or to the overly optimistic view that this work transmitted, thus attempting to rebalance contemporary feminist assessment and to revise its findings in light of more recent theoretical development.

Heckendorn Cook, for example, reviews the critical history of Montsequieu's *Lettres persanes* and, whilst recognising that "feminist criticism and deconstruction [has] made epistolary narratives legible again" (23), points out that these approaches simply inverted the value structures that had hitherto marginalised epistolary production. Whereas traditional criticism of the *Lettres persanes* had foregrounded its discussion of government, customs or religion, ignoring the harem letters as superfluous, early feminist accounts reversed this perspective, leading to equally restricted definitions:

[62] Favret, 10, who cites Spacks, 75, to the effect that "however angry or despairing [epistolary fictions may be, they nevertheless] reinforced the status quo by assuming it".
[63] Ibid, citing Goldsmith, xii.

> [W]hen the epistolary genre is seen as limited to the sentimental epistolary plot of feminine passion, the exclusive identification of women and letters reaffirms essentialist concepts of gender and sexuality, as well as replicating an artificial division of human experience into separate and gendered public and private spheres. Such a confusion of classificatory principles can only further obscure our understanding of the interrelation of genre and gender, and our awareness of the cultural construction of both. (24)

The same author (116) draws attention to the "overly optimistic" accounts that feminist studies in the 1970s made of writers such as Laclos, Condorcet, Voltaire and "even" Rousseau.[64] She suggests that 'postliberal' feminist assessment would be less optimistic of the socio-political position held by eighteenth-century women than that put forward by earlier critical evaluation. This is due, she argues, to contemporary awareness of the effects of separating human experience into private and public ambits. These include the definition of the private domain, as it developed into its recognisably modern form, as "the proper space of women" (118; see thesis, p.35), with the concomitant results that this had on women's cultural standing and freedom within Enlightenment liberalism.

Beyond this, for some women critics, the epistolary form itself, the qualities and capacities accorded it, its treatment in light of other genres and its eventual decline, if not quite demise, are taken together to reflect the unfavourable conditions faced historically by women. Favret (13-22) argues that the intimate spaces established by the letter—domesticity, the family and friends, personal reflections—have systematically been

[64] Heckendorn Cook, 205, n.3.

perceived as 'feminine' space, giving rise to a "distinct fiction about letters and the feminine" (14).[65] She maintains that, in effect, the letter has metonymically taken on the figure of woman and has thus been denied a public voice. Conventional critical emphasis on the *privateness* of letters in turn undermined recognition of their ability to reflect the concerns of the external world, its time and its distances (19). This intimate, highly innocent space, "[r]ead as tempting boxes of private experience, detached from 'the world' [becomes] the repository for 'private emotions', a confessional form whose 'privacy', like virginity, invites violation" (20). Further, the 'fiction' of interpreting letters as a feminine space, removed from the difficult concerns of the masculine world, singularly unable, in fact, to reflect those concerns, leads to the downfall of the epistolary form, which, seen here (19, 22) as a weak and then fallen women, soon meets its end:

> In the nineteenth century, when the more dynamic historical novel arrived with its "great bow-wow thing", as Walter Scott put it, the letter supposedly could not keep pace in a world with political agitation, war and reform… the innocent letter ventures out into the world, where she falls victim to manipulation, violation and finally, to literal or metaphorical death.[66]

[65] Gilroy & Verhoeven refer to "a rhetoric that equates epistolary femininity and feminine epistolarity, [one] that derives largely from a particular view of the eighteenth-century novel and its association with women" (1). See also Heckendorn Cook (6), who refers to the letter becoming "an emblem of the private; while keeping its function as an agent of the public exchange of knowledge, it took on (over the eighteenth century) the general connotations it still holds for us today, intimately identified with the body, especially a female body, and the somatic terrain of the emotions, as well as with the thematic material of love, marriage and the family".

[66] However, for a counter-example, see Heckendorn Cook's assessment of Riccoboni's *Les Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd* (28). Favret's reference both to Scott and to the suggested inability of the letter-form to keep pace with such a turbulent, politicised world, is in this case a rather partial vision, given that Scott actually wrote a historical epistolary novel, *Redgauntlet* (published in 1824), which concerns the fictional attempt by Prince Charles Edward to regain the Scottish throne a full two decades after 1745. It is interesting to observe that *Redgauntlet* also terminates in direct, third-person narrative and that this—exactly as occurs with *Lady Susan*—has often been taken to symbolically mark the demise of the letter form within the novel. However, given both the intended archaic tone of Scott's novel and the fact that, by the time of its composition, third-person narrative was now the main narrative form, it seems reasonable to assume that Scott's use of the letter
(Continued on the next page)

Indeed, one of the central insights of feminist criticism directly applicable to the epistolary form, as the comments above indicate, is the gendering of genre and the limitations that such a socially constructed configuration bring to bear on the critical evaluation of any given text.[67] In illustration of this, and returning to the discussion of the *Lettres persanes*, Heckendorn Cook (24-25) observes that:

> When the *Lettres persanes* is classified as political philosophy, its novelistic or literary aspects may be ignored on the assumption that a literary genre linked to "feminine" values will not be relevant to a "masculine" political discourse. On the other hand, when [the text] is treated as a forerunner of the "domestic-realistic" novel, its satirical and political elements are erased, for the plot of feminine passion is held to belong to a private sphere of human experience that excludes political and philosophical issues.[68]

As we have argued,[69] however, although *Lady Susan* puts forward a conflicting view of women's roles, attitudes and actions played out within the 'private sphere of human experience' (and even recognising that the conventionally, conservatively feminine values of Mrs Vernon eventually triumph, though somewhat ambiguously), we would assert that this particular epistolary conflict can nevertheless fruitfully be read as social metaphor,

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is a deliberate throwback to an earlier mode as a means of establishing authenticity (see Bray, *Epistolary*, 118-119 for a short review of critical comment on this aspect of Scott's novel).

[67] In this respect, see Gilbert & Gubar (107-45). See also April Alliston, who argues for the particularly female character of the epistolary, "an inheritance passed down from one generation to the next, as a substitute for the material, patrimonial inheritance denied the heroine, who as a woman is defined by the laws of patrimonial transmission as an improper receiver" (110), cited in Buck, 213.

[68] For further reading on the association between women and the epistolary novel, see Gilroy & Verhoeven, 21, n.5. For a list of essential critical works on seventeenth- to nineteenth-century women's writing produced until the mid 1980s, see Lund. For further works providing a feminist perspective on Austen's writing, see Poovey and, more recently, Looser. See also Deborah Kaplan, Kirkham and Spacks (*Female Imagination*). For argument from the 1970s that Austen is implicitly in Wollstonecraft's camp, see both Sulloway and Lloyd Brown (*Feminist Tradition*).

[69] See p.36 of this thesis.

highly "relevant to [the] 'masculine' political discourse" that followed the French Revolution.[70]

1.2 Critical Work on the Epistolary[71]

Of the "voluminous scholarship on epistolary fiction" (Beebee, 9), an immense amount of it undertaken by women, the earliest critical assessment that, through the breadth of analysis undertaken, is still of some importance is that of Godfrey Frank Singer (1933) and Frank Gees Black (1940), both of whom assess the rise and fall of the form and, largely in keeping with Watt's later work on the novel, assign marginal importance to the genre in the development of the novel. As indicated in the Introduction, in the sense that this notion applies to Austen, the analysis of Austen's stylistic development carried out by this thesis will challenge the validity of such a perspective. Black (8) gives figures (whose details though not their general conclusion are disputed by Spencer, 33) outlining the significant proportion of women epistolary writers in the late eighteenth century. Beebee (5) ironically suggests that Black's opinions, along with Robert Adams Day's 1966 work on epistolary fiction prior to Richardson "wrap the history of the genre into a narrative as tight and convincing as the evolution of technology". Day's work outlines a number of 'advantages' that the form brought to fiction—a point often overlooked in the too-ready dismissal of the

[70] See thesis, Chapter Three, section 3.3.
[71] This section is indebted to the detailed introductory reviews in the works of Beebee and Gilroy & Verhoeven.

form as a misdirected venture on the road to the third-person narrated novel[72]—and highlights a transitional form in which works are made up both of letters and non-epistolary writing; however, it too suggests that the form is simply a stepping-stone to the more effective narrative techniques established in the nineteenth century. The discussion focuses on a broad range of letter-fiction forms written between 1660 and 1740 that eventually were to come together into the epistolary novel, reviewing the various formal epistolary techniques that in turn were absorbed by realistic fiction as a whole. Beebee also outlines the contributions made along evolutionary lines by the work of Bernard Bray (1967) and Laurent Versini (1968)[73], which puts forward the thesis of an almost accidental development of the form, followed by its rapid transition from the monologic to the polyphonic, a thesis that Beebee himself questions (48 ff.). 1969 saw the publication of John Richetti's *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*, a work that discusses the sharing by readers of epistolary fantasy, amongst which was "the fable of persecuted innocence"[74] employed by novelists such as Eliza Haywood and Delariviere Manley. Richetti draws attention to the ways in which such fiction contributed, on the one hand, to fusing the notions of the destruction of innocence with aristocratic corruption, decay and immorality—an idea that Austen's *Lady Susan* partly articulates—and on the other, to reinforcing oppositions between infidelity and religion, providing the groundwork from

[72] For fuller discussion of the advantages offered by epistolary form in *Lady Susan*, see Alexander and Owen, *Lady Susan*: (Introduction), and Alexander and Owen, "*Lady Susan*: a Re-evaluation of Jane Austen's Epistolary Novel" (In Press [Spring 2006]). See also thesis, Chapter Two, section 2.2 and sub-sections.
[73] Beebee, ibid.
[74] Richetti, cited in Lund, 402.

which "the English novel derives the ideological matrix in which Richardson's *Clarissa* may be said to achieve a heroism close to sainthood".[75]

As Gilroy & Verhoeven's account (1-14) indicates, critical work from the early 1980s has both intensified and become more inclusive of a broader range of thematic areas, with critics reflecting on the letter "as a cultural institution with multiple histories" (4). Ruth Perry's 1980 *Women, Letters and the Novel* discusses the social and economic terrain from which the epistolary novel grew, arguing to great effect that the form was particularly suited to women's interests and to their formation as it was accessible from the (often slight) educational training that had been allowed them and, furthermore, had never been socially discouraged. Terry Eagleton's *The Rape of Clarissa* and Terry Castle's *Clarissa's Ciphers*, two influential works on the form that were published in 1982, both foregrounded the ideological preoccupation of epistolary writing. Castle puts forward a feminist reading of *Clarissa* that emphasises the essential communication established between readers within and without the novel itself. Eagleton outlines the manner in which sex and class define the dynamics of power in all epistolary relations, arguing—as is his wont—that Richardson uses the form to undermine the hegemony of the upper class: "the novel is an agent of cultural revolution, for Clarissa dies to give birth to the middle class and the feminization of discourse that marked its consolidation of political power".[76] These

[75] Ibid, 403. For a discussion of Aphra Behn's epistolary writing, see Lindquist's 1969 assessment of "Love Letters". In contrast to conventional critical approaches to works by Behn (which have often tended to highlight the somewhat exotic character of her lifestyle or her achievements in the genre of drama [see Lund, 406]), Richetti's study outlines the formal aspects of her epistolary fiction.

[76] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 4. Both Castle and Eagleton write in clear opposition to William Warner's deconstructive analysis (1979) of Richardson's novel.

conclusions—most notably the idea of the development of the middle class—are in general accordance with those drawn by Nancy Armstrong. In contrast, however, her slightly later *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) posits a more politically constructive image for epistolary form than that of Eagleton, and provides far greater emphasis on the domestic empowerment through female subjectivity that epistolary discourse, in part, both facilitated and reflected, and which, in her assessment, played a role in laying the foundations for modern institutional power.

Janet Gurkin Altman's early work (*Epistolary: Approaches to a Form*, 1982) undertook a structuralist analysis of epistolary fiction from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, documenting the most characteristic forms of the genre. More recently, her work has focussed on a cultural history of letter writing; the myth of the epistolary as a feminine genre and the state use of the letter in the form of letter manuals to establish civic identity. She has also studied French epistolary literature to reveal the ways in which women's writing—presented in the public sphere as examples of cultured, literary art—was, in fact, often used subversively to challenge the state. Although the mature Austen was, we would argue, too commercially astute to risk her later work being tainted as politically unacceptable (in turn, an issue critical to her abandonment of the epistolary, as this thesis posits), Altman's comments on French literature are certainly applicable to Austen's *juvenilia* epistolary writing: whilst the young writer cannot reasonably be accused of serious subversion against the state, we have already suggested that her early epistolary

work is certainly—and unequivocally—challenging of male and adult hegemony.[77] Indeed, in our view, an awareness of the unacceptability of this lack of conformity (along with other issues detailed in Chapter Three) largely informs Austen's decision to seek other less precarious modes of expression.[78] Critical work has also highlighted fruitful 'cross-channel' influences, particularly between French and English epistolary writing. Elizabeth MacArthur's *Extravagant Narratives* (1990) details the importance of the letter in seventeenth-century France and roots the epistolary novel in epistolary manuals, providing a "detailed reading of [primarily] the women's letters in the Du Deffand/Walpole correspondence".[79] April Alliston has also produced work on the exchange between British and French women writers (see p.49 of this thesis).

Linda Kauffman's work (such as *Discourses of Desire*, 1986) has traced the ways in which female discourses have been "disparaged or repressed by the structures of official thought from Ovid onward".[80] It also outlines (as in *Special Delivery*, 1992) how the significance of 'desire' put forward in epistolary fiction is configured by contextual forces such as politics, economics and the given culture itself, a view largely in accordance with that put forward earlier by Eagleton, and which certainly also accords with the forces that shape desire in *Lady Susan*. From the perspective of Kaufman's study (which makes reference to Atwood's fiction), the highly particular form of the epistolary is seen as "a

[77] See p.33 of this thesis.
[78] See Doody ("The Short Fiction" 93), and Fergus ("The Professional Woman Writer" 13).
[79] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 9.
[80] Ibid, 8.

destabilised and destabilising category in both twentieth-century fiction and theory".[81] Susan Sniader Lanser's 1992 study suggests that the eighteenth-century interest in the epistolary may have contributed to the "restriction of oppositional voices to discourse privatised in both content and form",[82] which, as Gilroy & Verhoeven suggest (5), casts light on the possible anxieties felt about the place of women within the writing 'marketplace', their acquisition of a public voice and their ability to address that public. As Chapter Three of this thesis considers in further detail, it is exactly the preoccupation with the marketplace, with a voice deemed acceptable for addressing the public and with access (via publication) to that public that is to definitively shape Austen's relationship with the epistolary, thus—arguably—bringing her further use of the form to an abrupt halt.

As well as Kauffman's work, Beebee (9) cites the studies by Ruth Perry (1980, see p.46 of this thesis), Katherine Ann Jensen (1995), April Alliston (1996) and also that edited by Elizabeth Goldsmith (1989, see n.63), as analyses of the complicated gender relations involved in epistolary fiction, all of which work "counter[s] notions of literary autonomy by exploring the complex interaction between women's social position, their position as writers, and their representation and self-representation in fiction".[83] April Alliston's *Virtue's Faults*, in addition, suggests a comparative handling of eighteenth-century women's writing, and highlights connections between British and French women writers. Responding to a different model of cultural transmission than that of the national

[81] Kauffman (*Special Delivery*), 263.
[82] Op. Cit, 5.
[83] Beebee, 9.

patriarchy, such writers established what Alliston terms a cross-channel "female homosociality",[84] reading each others' works at least as much as they read the foremost male epistolary writers (as their translations suggest).

Thomas Beebee's 1999 *Epistolary Fiction in Europe* considers the form as a pan-European genre, of significance to all major languages. His study focuses on the specific characters of the letter form (its incompleteness [thesis, p.26], defamiliarisation [thesis, p.32] and the self-referential aspects of such writing), the relationship between form and gender and the particular uses made of the epistolary by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers. Its bibliography of key epistolary fiction to 1850 is invaluable. In marked contrast to the major studies by Favret, Heckendorn Cook and Watson, however, Beebee restricts himself to a study of fiction.[85] Gilroy & Verhoeven's collection of critical essays, *Epistolary Histories* (2000), provides discussion of a range of epistolary-related issues such as the association between the letter and the private sphere, and discourses of gender, class and politics. Contributors include Nancy Armstrong and Linda Kauffman, and its innovative presentation involves each critic responding to another's work in a dialogic 'postscript' that mirrors the communicative function of the epistolary itself.

Joe Bray's 2003 work *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* and, to a somewhat more limited extent, his 2001 article "The Source of 'Dramatized

[84] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 10.
[85] Nevertheless, he observes that "such fiction can be found everywhere, and not just in texts aimed specifically at aesthetic consumption" (3).

Consciousness': Richardson, Austen, and Stylistic Influence", the forerunner of several arguments set out in the later study, is of considerable significance in the reassessment of the epistolary mode in English, presenting a strongly contrastive voice to orthodox accounts of novelistic development. In common with the basic position taken by this thesis, Bray (2003) opposes those critical views that have systematically accorded a lesser value to the letter form, such as the comment by Showalter cited in his introduction (1): "the epistolary novel, despite the prestige of Richardson and Rousseau, was obviously a technical dead end".[86] Bray argues that the epistolary actually represents a sometimes profoundly complex and effective model for the representation of consciousness (in opposition to views that have conventionally seen it as essentially superficial in its attempts to render subjectivity). Central to Bray's arguments are fairly detailed assessments of the development of free indirect style (FIS), his 2003 study giving particular support to the notion that FIS is also pertinent to first-person narrative (a view that rarely merits inclusion in discussion of the style).[87] Remarking upon the distinction and tension between the narrating self and the experiencing self, Bray posits that the epistolary is especially suited to playing with the "'separation' and 'discrepancy' between subject and object 'in the experience of remembering'" (2003: 16). Indeed, this tension between the two narrative perspectives—a notion that many critics fail to recognise in the epistolary, limiting it exclusively to third-person narrative—underscores the essential objective of his 2003 work, outlined on p. 20, which is to delineate:

[86] Showalter, 121.
[87] For example, the comments cited by Lodge in n.4, Introduction (thesis), make no reference to this dimension of the issue. See also thesis, pp. 110-113 and comments in thesis, Chapter Two, section 2.2.3.

> … the fluctuating relationship between the narrating self and the experiencing self in epistolary novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, showing how their constant push and pull creates anxieties of self and identity"

Later parts of this same publication focus on Austen's epistolary, tracing the influence of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*—most notably, its use and control of FIS—on Austen's correspondence-based writings. With specific reference to *Lady Susan*, Bray's judgement (123)—largely in support of Roger Gard—is that Austen's use of the form fails to take advantage of the psychological examination of character that Richardson so extensively exploits, and concludes that, for Austen, the letter "is an inappropriate form for the exploration of psychological tensions" (123). This perspective, both of Richardson and of Austen in this respect, is one with which we basically disagree,[88] seeing such a position as an inadequate evaluation of the nature and extent of the psychological and moral conflict between Mrs Vernon and Lady Susan that, in our assessment, is of central importance in the novel. In terminating his discussion, Bray also remarks on Austen's use of the correspondence in her later fiction, observing (131) that "letters remain central to her art", a point that we fully support. His comments are particularly valuable in drawing attention to the manner in which, in the later works' extensive incorporation of the letter into the fabric of the direct-narrative, the characters' inner voice—and readers' access to such intimate recesses—are an obvious vestige and legacy of the correspondence novel.

[88] See n.116, Chapter Two, and p. 149 of this thesis for our argument in opposition to the views of Bray and Gard.

With the significant exception of Bray's ideas on the limitations of the letter form's ability to reflect psychological conflict, we otherwise agree with the essential positions set out most particularly in *The Epistolary Novel.* Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the focus in our thesis is distinct. Bray is primarily concerned with the representations of consciousness afforded by use of the epistolary novel; our approach, in contrast, focuses on the broader stylistic achievements that Austen attained through the correspondence novel. These include what Bray would term 'consciousness'—particularly as this may be identified with narrative voice—but also concern other issues important to the later writings such as the effective articulation of moral (and indeed political) conflict and, tonally, the development of irony.

However, whilst Bray's work is obviously an important contribution to the study of the epistolary mode; the *sine qua non* of critical work on the letter form in English epistolary writing—as indicated above—is that by Mary Favret (1993), Nicola Watson (1994) and Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook (1996).

Gilroy & Verhoeven (10) suggest that "perhaps no critic has done more than Mary Favret [...] to historicize the letter in literature". Her re-examination of epistolary writing between 1789 and 1830, *Romantic Correspondence*, a study that goes well beyond the traditional epistolary canon[89] (providing assessment of a broad range of non-fiction

[89] Also termed the rarefied canon, comprising *The Portuguese Letters*, the letters from Héloïse to Abélard, *The Life of Marianne, Pamela, Clarissa, The Sorrows of Young Werther, Julie; or the New Héloïse, Les Liaisons dangereuses* and *Evelina.* See Gilroy & Verhoeven, 4, and Favret, 34, for the list and comment.

writings, thus 'de-personalising' the form), outlines the manner in which the letter—not only those produced by women Romantic writers—developed into a markedly political, sometimes subversive current, aspects that—as we have observed[90]—may be seen in Austen's juvenilia and in *Lady Susan.* In keeping with a considerable body of epistolary criticism, *Romantic Correspondence* challenges the categories of genre and gender that are conventionally made use of in shaping our understanding of (especially Romantic) literature. Like Watson, Favret takes a political approach to reading such issues in light of the effects on British socio-political attitudes of the French Revolution. She argues that, in the 1790s, public reaction to the letter either condemned it as the instrument of Jacobin treachery or else celebrated its capacity to go beyond traditional class barriers. Favret posits that, in the end, the growing politicisation of women's letters (itself the result of the 'flexibility' of women's writing that was able to bridge class gaps in an increasingly literate society) tainted such writing with a form of *promiscuity* that may partly account for its rapid demise.[91] Additionally, she draws attention to the critical role of the Post Office in shaping and controlling attitudes towards the letter itself:

> [I]t was precisely the government intervention in personal correspondence that facilitated the development of the modern Post Office... [T]he post-1800 development of postal bureaucracy... organised a "national fiction of correspondence" that erased "the story of traitorous correspondence and partisan activity" and delegitimated unregulated correspondence. The penny

[90] See p.33 of this thesis.

[91] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 11. This is a fate that was, in a certain sense, personified by contemporary reaction against Mary Wollstonecraft, whose political and affective tendencies alike were viewed with suspicion.

> post, introduced in 1839, transformed "the postal service into an ideological vehicle of 'progress' for both political economy and national education".[92]

Nicola Watson's study, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, analyses the 'disappearance' of epistolary writing as a discrete genre by the mid-1820s,[93] and its modification into the third-person narrative form that gradually became the universally preferred mode of fiction writing. The backdrop to her study is the political aftermath within Britain of the French Revolution, the essential thesis being that:

> ...the sentimental novel, and especially the epistolary novel, paradigmatically represented by Rousseau's ambiguous plot of illicit passion in *Julie*, came to be seen as a marker of a dangerous, individual excess, a potentially revolutionary energy that had to be expelled or marginalised in the formation of a new national identity and political consensus.[94]

This is a view with which the current thesis greatly accords, particularly in the sense that such 'excess' was perceived by Austen to be central to the 'Augustan' mode of writing that—as we argue in Chapter Three—was no longer commercially (or, indeed, politically) viable.[95] *Revolution* delineates Watson's view that there was a gradual 'disciplining' of the form into a narrative mode deemed acceptable to the state and family patriarchy, through the suppression of epistolary fiction, the discredit into which the use of letters is seen to fall

[92] Ibid, 13, citing Favret, 203-10. See Day (*Told in Letters*), 49, for an account of the seventeenth-century postal service. For discussion of the development of the British postal system, see Browne. For Favret's work on the relationship between the Napoleonic Wars and epistolary writing, notably the manner in which this shaped the experiences both of the population 'at home' as well as those directly involved in the conflict, see Favret ("War Correspondence").

[93] See Gilroy & Verhoeven (6) for the notion that Watson's work, through the richness of the documentation provided, adds impetus to the expansion of the traditional epistolary canon.

[94] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 5.

[95] For further discussion of the "aesthetic of excess" (Juliet McMaster) in Austen's early work, and its suppression, see McMaster, "The Juvenilia: Energy Versus Sympathy", p.175.

in the historical novels of Scott, Morgan or Jane Porter and what Watson sees as their parody and eventual rejection in the works of Austen and Edgeworth. In this view, feminised epistolary plots (and the plot of sensibility in general) are chastised, in effect, in the wake of social anxieties concerning the French Revolution, as the relation between social consensus and the individual is reconfigured and a degree of social control is seen to permeate English fiction:[96] "discipline ...replac[ed] the individualism of epistolary self-representation with communally accredited systems of right reading...designed to produce both the ideal domestic subject and, by extension, the fully national subject".[97] This is a perspective that provides a compellingly alternative interpretation to the evolutionary model that sees the demise of the epistolary on the grounds of its posited technical inferiority; its value also lies in its explicit recognition and inclusion of the non-canonical writers and texts that the evolutionary explanation essentially ignores. However, as we have already outlined in the introduction and as Chapter Three will consider more fully, our thesis hypothesises that Austen's decision to abandon the epistolary mode, whilst informed by the general change in political climate, corresponds more primarily to a network of commercial considerations, however much these were shaped (as indeed they were) by political concerns.

Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook's *Epistolary Bodies* studies the form through a detailed analysis of Montsequieu's *Lettres persanes*, Richardson's *Clarissa*, Riccoboni's *Lettres de*

[96] For example, Watson, in agreement with Epstein (*Female Epistolary Tradition*) and Poovey (*Proper Lady*), reads the non-epistolary conclusion to *Lady Susan* as "the only way Austen can effectively *censure* Lady Susan's disruptive fiction" (82, n.17, emphasis added). See also n.11, Introduction to this thesis.
[97] Watson, 108.

Mistriss Fanni Butlerd and Crèvecouer's *Letters from an American Farmer*, texts covering a sixty-year period from the 1720s to the 1780s. The study is based on Habermas' ideas of the public sphere, Heckendorn Cook arguing that the epistolary novel negotiates the private individual's participation within the public sphere, helping to create, socialise and control such individuals: "[j]ust as the social contract produced citizens of political republics... the literary contract of the epistolary novel invented and regulated the post-patriarchal private subject as a citizen of the Republic of Letters".[98] Her view of eighteenth-century epistolary production is that private and public categories were effectively part of an interlocking system (in which, for example, scientific epistolary writing made use of forms of subjectivity characteristic of sentimental epistolary fiction), and that the form as a whole, which apparently concerns itself with the private and the affective, is actually complicit with the "technologies of capitalism",[99] a view that we have broadly endorsed as a possible reading of *Lady Susan* (thesis, p.36). Additionally, she observes that, in the first half of the eighteenth century, print culture was still developing and books as cultural productions had not yet been fully assimilated into that culture. Their transformation from manuscript to print symbolically mirrors the transition of their own authors and readers to print culture, with the epistolary form not only telling stories in letters but also relating, in its own form, the development of letters themselves.

[98] Heckendorn Cook, 16. For criticism of this approach and view, see Beebee, 7. For comments on and additional reference to Heckendorn Cook's concern with the body in epistolary writing, see note 31.
[99] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 9 (quotation and observations on interlocking system).

1.3 Critical Limitations and Developing Areas in the Epistolary

Despite the quantity and scope of critical work on epistolary writing, there are nevertheless ambits that have yet to be effectively covered. Gilroy & Verhoeven (13-14) identify the absence of epistolary criticism focussing on race and postcolonialism, noting the paucity of discussion on the work of Hispanic or black Americans, in spite of considerable study of American epistolary writing and the availability of texts such as *The Color Purple* (1982), a cross between slave narrative and the epistolary, which—it is somewhat fervently claimed—"radically revises literary history (by destabilising the bourgeois credentials of 'the rise of the novel', ... bound up with the rise of epistolarity)".[100] The same authors also point to an absence of epistolary-focussed work on the function of the postal service as a technology of empire, which "coordinated channels of communication and fostered Britain's imperial interest".[101] Beebee, concluding his study (199-205), implies that a fruitful area of study, yet to be fully undertaken and going beyond the conventional Euro-American focus, is that of an incipient "world form" of the epistolary, based initially on European models, such as the correspondence fiction now published in China, Taiwan, Israel and South America.

[100] Ibid, 14 (parentheses in the original). The somewhat ambiguous syntax of the original citation may cause us to lose sight of the political point being made here, which is that the rise of the novel—seen as bourgeois—is inextricably bound up with the growth of the epistolary, by implication a form that is far more at the service of the socially less privileged. This 'binding' of the genres is thus destabilising of the evolutionary and hierarchical notion that posits the rise of the novel not *in conjunction with* but essentially *apart from* the epistolary.

[101] Op.Cit, 13. For comments on the Post Office, see n.92 and p.54 of this thesis.

New areas of epistolary concern are several and varied. In part, this corresponds to the fact that the letter now reflects a vast multiplicity of interests, as Watson (21) notes:

> Today, the letter seems able to represent an almost promiscuous range of radical potentialities—the possibility of 'bodily' writing for both the French theorists of *l'écriture feminine* and American feminists, the replacement of the privileged voice by the seductive slippage of writing for Jacques Derrida and his followers, the ultimately 'writerly' text that invites interminably unstable interpretation for novelists such as John Barth, the proof of the itinerary of subjectivity for Jacques Lacan.

In addition to this, however, there are the developing ambits of, for instance, technology, cybernetics and violence that Gilroy & Verhoeven (13) outline. The final contribution in their collection of essays is Kauffamn's *Epistolary Directions*, which points to the growth of an epistolary 'anti-aesthetic' (highlighting the experimental; an awareness that no approach is wholly new; a fundamentalist approach to the postmodern dissolution of the high/low culture dichotomy and a refusal to delimit this general approach to any given medium, even the epistolary) within contemporary writing such as John Hawke's *Virginie: Her Two Lives* (1981); D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel* (1981) and Robert Coover's *Spanking the Maid* (1982), or, in general, the work of Kathy Acker. Kauffman also outlines the development of writing into (initially) hypertext and (eventually) hypermedia; this work, in an electronic format, makes use of a variety of presentations, from photography and sound to animation. As Kauffman observes (209), such a format highlights "the indeterminacy of gender in cyberspace... (and)...fulfils the displacement of authorial mastery so long ago predicted by Roland Barthes". In her final section, 'Twenty-first Century Epistolarity', she indicates the areas of epistolary production that are of

contemporary interest, including texts from e-mail, fax machines, personal advertisements and fan mail. Perhaps the ultimate expression of a broadly 'epistolary' experimentation, however, is the example of the French artist Orlan:

> She is in the process of turning her face into a composite of the icons of femininity in classical Western painting: the chin of the Botticelli Venus; the nose of Gerome's Psyche; the mouth of Boucher's Europa; the forehead of the Mona Lisa. She achieves this through plastic surgery; her operations take place in art galleries... the verbal and the visual interact, for Orlan's correspondents can *see* as well as hear her, just as she sees, hears and responds to [them]. This takes epistolary communication far beyond the powers of even e-mail. The 'correspondence' is *visual, aesthetic* and *clinical*—all at the same time. It is *multiple, spontaneous* and *staged*—all at the same time.[102]

Clearly, development in epistolary experimentation has led to forms that, whilst arguably still mostly pertain to the same literary subgenre, are nevertheless vastly different—in some senses, unrecognisably so—from the form that Jane Austen and her contemporaries inherited at the close of the eighteenth century. What appears to remain the same, however, is an abiding interest (though now considerably less intense) in the epistolary form for its fundamentally communicative character and, at the same time, the evident capacity of the form to adapt itself to the aesthetic requirements made of it by new generations, changing times and even changing media.

[102] Kauffman, 211. Emphasis in the original.

1.4 Critical Attention to Austen's Epistolary Writing[103]

It goes without saying that critical work on Austen's writing is vast. However, within the enormous range of criticism that has grown up around her novels, only a relatively small amount of work has paid *sustained* attention to the epistolary writings, and most of this focuses principally on *Lady Susan* rather than on the epistolary pieces of the juvenilia.[104] Indeed, a number of central critical figures in Austen studies (for example, Butler, Tanner, Trilling, Watt) have little to say on the use Austen made either of the epistolary texts, *per se*, or of epistolarity within the mature fiction in general, highlighting once again the double-edged fate of the letter form: its importance to and as literary theory, yet its often marginal character within many studies of the novel.

Very early criticism of Austen was entirely concerned with her strikingly natural presentation of 'reality' (as Scott's renowned review of *Emma* made clear in the *Quarterly Review* in 1815),[105] and not at all with aspects such as epistolarity that were to become of interest to a later age.[106] Furthermore, as the juvenilia and *Lady Susan* were not made available to the public until 1871, with the publication of the second edition of the J. E.

[103] For a list of the epistolary works, see Introduction, n.5. For details of editions referred to in this section, see Works Cited and Consulted.
[104] This section serves as an overview of the critical work that has been carried out in the ambit of Austen's epistolary writing in general. Sections 2.2.1 & 2.2.2 of Chapter Two provide much closer focus on—and evaluation of—both positive and negative critical response to *Lady Susan*.
[105] "That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me".
[106] For a review of Austen criticism from 1814-70, see Duffy.

Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir*—the early writings were referred to but not published in the first edition of 1870—and as these pieces were, without exception, presented as very marginal works,[107] they attracted little critical notice. However, with Chapman's editing of the complete *Minor Works*, beginning in 1925, and against the backdrop of the increasing *professionalisation* of literary criticism (finally disposing of the infamous Janeite debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries),[108] serious critical attention began to be given to Austen's epistolary writing.[109]

The first of the 'modern' critics (that is, whose work is still of a certain referential importance within contemporary discussion) to consider Austen's writing in letter form is Mary Lascelles (1939). The initial section of *Jane Austen and Her Art*, dealing with the composition of each of Austen's works, is in keeping with conventional views of the juvenilia as "hilarious burlesque" (9), additionally and influentially recording the opinion that *Lady Susan* finally abandons its epistolary form in a manner that indicates Austen's ridiculing of the genre, "when [she] had lost patience with the device of the novel-in-letters" (13-14),[110] a view that has resonated down the decades. It also refers to the stylistic character of epistolary writing in the mature fiction, observing that:

[107] Of *Lady Susan*, Austen-Leigh says that it is "scarcely [a tale] on which a literary reputation could have been founded: but though like some plants, it may be too slight to stand alone, it may, perhaps, be supported by the strength of her more firmly rooted works" (201).

[108] See Southam ("Janeites"). For further reference to the debate, see Johnson ("Cults"). See Southam ("Criticism 1870-1940") for an account of the increasingly prolific body of professional critical work on Austen that developed in the 1920s.

[109] As an indication of growing general interest in the minor works in the 1920s and 1930s, it is relevant here to cite the radio adaptation of *Love and Freindship* by the BBC Regional Service, August 17 1936 (adaptation and production by M. H. Allen).

[110] See also comments in n.11, Introduction to this thesis.

> ...like all letters in Jane Austen's novels, [they show a marked distinction] from the speech of the writer. The men's letters always show a very little increase of formality...; the women seldom attempt this formality, unless... they are straining after gentility; nevertheless, a passage from one of their letters could rarely be mistaken for a passage of dialogue, since these letters catch and hold a mood as speech can rarely do. (101)

On the question of narrative effectiveness, Lascelles makes the salient point that Austen had no direct model for the realism of the letters in her mature fiction, the earlier epistolary tradition of Richardson basically providing examples of lengthy conversations or reflections quoted verbatim, and the letters in stage-comedy necessarily being of an overly concise form for her own narrative purposes.[111]

In 1940, the provocatively innovative approach taken by D.W Harding's influential *Regulated Hatred*,[112] which claimed that Austen ironically undermined the values and assumptions of the very society of which she formed part and portrayed, also provided new veins of interpretation for *Lady Susan*, setting this within the framework both of inter-generational conflict and the psychology of the parent-child relationship: "[i]n her early novels, Jane Austen consistently avoided dealing with a mother who could be a genuinely intimate friend of her daughter. Lady Susan... is her daughter's enemy" (22). This is

[111] Lascelles 102.

[112] Following the general line of discussion and analysis set down by Reginald Farrer's "Jane Austen" in the Quarterly Review CCXXVIII (July 1917). In terms that clearly foreshadow Harding, Farrer deems *Lady Susan* to be " important to the study of its authors career and temperament.... [its] cold unpleasantness is but the youthful exaggeration of that irreconcilable judgement which is the very backbone of Jane Austen's power, harshly evident in this first book" (cited in Knuth, 216). On the provocative tenor of Harding's work, see the concluding remarks to *Regulated Hatred*: "This attempt to suggest a slightly different emphasis in the reading of Jane Austen is not offered as a balanced appraisal of her work. It is deliberately lop-sided..." (23).

unquestionably a rewarding manner of approaching the novel, but it privileges a beguiling though essentially marginal aspect of the work over a more complex and stylistically valuable component, namely the moral conflict between Lady Susan and Mrs Vernon,[113] an indicator of Austen's developing concern with the preoccupations of her mature fiction. That is, although the novella attracts Harding's attention, its stylistic qualities are not the object of his study.

Q. D. Leavis (*A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings*, I, II and III, Summer 1941 to Spring 1944 in *Scrutiny*) provides the first most direct critical comment on Austen's early and epistolary writings, and, indeed, on the importance of letters in general to her value as an artist, dedicating an entire section to Austen's personal letters. Leavis suggests that Austen's composition of the later fiction was integrally related to the events of her own life, to the lives of those around her and to her reading. In addition, she outlines her views on the manner in which certain juvenilia pieces provided the bases for aspects of

[113] See thesis, pp.167-176. However, see thesis p.171 ff. and thesis Chapter Three, section 3.3 for discussion of the political consequences of Lady Susan's maternal shortcomings. In this respect, the mother-daughter conflict between Susan and Frederica (an intensified and more dramatic version of many other dysfunctional mother-daughter relationships in Austen's fiction) gains significance when contrasted with the solidity of Catherine Vernon's relationship with her own mother and children. Indeed, whilst Harding suggests that such conflict is restricted to "her early novels", Catherine is almost unique in Austen's fiction, taken in its entirety, as a model of a 'successful' mother and/or partner in a healthily functioning mother-daughter relationship. In all Austen's other writings, including early texts such as *Catharine* or later 'draft' work such as *The Watsons*, with the single exception of *Northanger Abbey*, the mother is either not present or else is largely inadequate within the circumstances of the narrative. And even *Northanger Abbey*'s Mrs Morland, whilst certainly not an unsuitable mother, is nevertheless simply absent for the greater part of her daughter's various struggles. All of which places Catherine Vernon in a unique light and emphasises further still her role as the 'domestically wholesome' model presented in stark opposition to Lady Susan. See Horwitz ("The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work") and Fritzer for further related discussion.

the later novels. None of these assumptions has remained unchallenged.[114] However, it is Leavis' assertion that *Mansfield Park* is, in effect, a modification of *Lady Susan* that provides us with her detailed commentaries and analysis of an epistolary work. Of no small importance, this includes an attempt to balance the hitherto commonly held view that *Lady Susan* was of questionable literary worth (Leavis draws attention to G. K. Chesterton's acerbic comment in his introduction to the juvenilia *Love and Freindship* that he "would willingly have left *Lady Susan* in the waste-paper basket").[115] She underlines the fact that the work is in draft form, not meant for publication, thereby establishing the grounds for a separate, more tentative treatment of the novella.[116] Indeed, Leavis suggests that it is *Lady Susan*'s deceptive completeness that has misled critics into accepting it as an 'entity'.

Delineating the alleged transformation of *Lady Susan* into the later work, Leavis observes that "there seems... quite obviously [to be] an overlaid epistolary novel in the versions of *Mansfield Park* that we have" (94). Subsequent criticism has—not surprisingly—challenged the certainty with which Leavis assumes that this transformation occurred, the specific details of this reworking and the notion that there were epistolary ur-

[114] Chapman, Southam (*Literary Manuscripts*) and Mudrick all take issue with Leavis' argument. Another area of controversy in Leavis' work on *Lady Susan* is her assertion (92) that this was based in part on the life of Eliza Hancock, Comtesse de Feuillide (1761-1831), Austen's first cousin who, following her marriage to Jean Capotte, Comte de Feuillide—guillotined in the aftermath of the French Revolution—was subsequently married to Jane's brother, Henry Austen. See also Le Faye, Deirdre (Ed). *Jane Austen's Outlandish Cousin. The Life and Letters of Eliza de Feuillide*, and n.61 to this chapter.
[115] Leavis, 89.
[116] However, for further and somewhat discrepant comment, see thesis Chapter Two, n.186.

forms for *Sense and Sensitivity* and *Pride and Prejudice* (whose posited but, unfortunately, unproven existence shores up her thesis).[117]

Of the growing body of critical work on Austen in the 1950s (including important studies such as Trilling's *The Opposing Self*), the major and at the same time most controversial contribution is Marvin Mudrick's *Irony as Defense and Discovery*, which provides perhaps the first sustained critical assessment of the juvenilia in their own right (in contrast to Lascelles' more cursory review or to Leavis, whose critical focus, whilst detailed, was primarily concerned with the early writing as sources for the later fiction). Additionally, *Irony* devotes an entire chapter to *Lady Susan* and *The Watsons*, its observations following in the spirit of Leavis' readjustment of critical accounts. In what is still one of the most compelling readings of the novella, Mudrick notoriously observes that:

> ...the supervising irony of the book is not single, its target is not Mrs Vernon only; it finds at least one other... mark: Lady Susan herself [...the] ultimate tragic victim, the beautiful woman who must waste her art in pretense, her passion in passing seductions, her will on invertebrates like her daughter and Reginald. The world defeats Lady Susan, not because it recognizes her vices, but because her virtues have no room in it. (138)

Of critical significance in the progression of Austen's epistolary writings towards fuller aesthetic acceptance, Mudrick is the first to recognise unequivocally the importance

[117] Harding is particularly dismissive of this notion, stating that "[o]ne of the minor curiosities of literature is the stubborn persistence of the story that *Sense and Sensibility* was originally in the form of letters, though nobody can see who the correspondents could have been" (*Regulated Hatred*, Appendix A, p.211). See also n.12, Introduction to this thesis.

of *Lady Susan* (without feeling the need to apologise for its form, style, irony or abrupt ending), calling it "her first completed masterpiece [undermining] the sentimental domestic haze"[118] that many readers have preferred to view her through. As with other critical work, however, the essential focus here lies with the character of Lady Susan herself, and the stylistic qualities of the work are not greatly considered.

Several of Mudrick's observations were challenged in one of the key critical works on Austen from the 1960s, A. Walton Litz's *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (1965),[119] whose discussion begins with close analysis of the juvenilia and *Lady Susan*, setting them firmly within preceding literary tradition and reinforcing the general trend towards a far more appreciative approach to the quality of this earlier writing. The careful assessment of *Lady Susan*, however, takes issue with the centrality accorded the novella by Mudrick, claiming that "[t]he epistolary form precluded any significant authorial comment, yet [Austen's] irony had not evolved to a point where she could establish a presiding moral vision by implication" (44). Here, indeed, we *do* have engagement with the stylistic characteristics of the novella: in Litz' view, this unresolved technical difficulty means that the work, in spite of its evident qualities, is ultimately a failure. However, as this thesis will argue, this dismissal of the novella's lack of a 'presiding moral vision' overlooks the role of Mrs Vernon—whose perspective not only

[118] Mudrick 138.

[119] Other major contributions in this decade include works by Bradbook (which outlines Austen's debt to writers such as Burney, Lennox, Radcliffe, Inchbald and Edgeworth) and Lodge (*Fiction*). For a survey of the critical panorama seen from the early 1960s, see Watt (*Collection*); for a review of Austen criticism from 1939-1983, see Litz ("Criticism"). For an alternative assessment of critical works from the nineteenth century to the mid 1990s, see Stovel.

foreshadows the narrative voice of the later novels but also, within this particular work, functions as incipient counter-perspective to the subversive views presented by Lady Susan, and therefore prepares the ground for Austen's development towards 'significant authorial comment'.[120] Notwithstanding this, the value of this fundamental contribution in the development of the critical reception of Austen's epistolary writings lies in its emphasis on questions of epistolary structure—on its advantages and drawbacks—as one of the central elements to be considered in any assessment of her stylistic development.

Precisely such considerations are foremost in Brian Southam's slightly earlier *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts* (1964). This analysis pays close attention to the juvenilia and *Lady Susan*, whose role in Austen's stylistic development is carefully considered. Southam's view (as indicated on p.6 of this thesis) is that the use of the epistolary form in the later juvenilia is essentially regressive—in accordance with Watt's evolutionary model—and was employed purely for its technical simplicity, Austen having (in Southam's opinion) experimented and failed in *Catharine* with a more challenging narrative form. Whilst recognising the importance of *Lady Susan*, observing that "there is no precedent for a short epistolary novel largely designed to exhibit [a character such as Susan Vernon]",[121] his final assessment basically foreshadows that of Litz:[122]

> It is clear... that what we choose to call its originality or maturity is won at the cost of a radical simplification in subject-matter and technique...Having

[120] See p.26 of this thesis.
[121] *Literary Manuscripts* 47.
[122] cf Litz's "cautious retreat" (n.17, Chapter One).

> drawn Lady Susan, Jane Austen seems to have lost interest in the other figures, and lets the work run to a conventional ending, without any serious regard to probability and distinction in character and action. (48)

Litz observes, in accordance with comments made by Southam, that analysis of Austen's works in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s "neglected the historical reality of the novels in their search for formal patterns",[123] a view echoed by Stovel (235). And indeed, the 1970s saw the production of a number of enormously influential works on Austen criticism that, moving away from the close reading of an earlier phase, began providing a "greater subtlety and sophistication in the handling of the political, literary and educational backgrounds",[124] such as Alistair Duckworth's *Improvement of the Estate* (1971); Norman Page's *Language of Jane Austen* (1972: chapter 5 discusses the epistolary) or Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975: with the central thesis that Austen's work defines itself, politically, in opposition to revolution; and with some comment on the juvenilia[125]). Nevertheless, it is not a decade marked by major contribution to the study of Austen's epistolary writings. That said, there is a considerable body of critical work that refers in part to the early texts and, in particular, to *Lady Susan*, indicating the general tendency of Austen studies towards recognising the need for an assessment of the epistolary texts in analyses of a more comprehensive character.[126] This work includes Jane Hodge's

[123] Litz ("Criticism"), 115
[124] Ibid, 114.
[125] See, for example, pp.168-172, in which Butler argues that the use of the epistolary (she principally considers *Love and Freindship* but also the type of writing produced in the juvenilia in general) effectively helped Austen to develop the irony that characterises her later work. See also comments on p.3, Introduction to this thesis and thesis Chapter Three, p.227.
[126] *Lady Susan's* contemporary popularity can also be gauged by radio adaptations of the novella such as BBC Radio 4's four-part production (arranged and produced by Margaret Etall) from December 26 to 29 1972 or, (Continued on the next page)

Only a Novel (1972); Wellesley Brown's *Bits of Ivory* (1973); Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women* (1978); David Cecil's *A Portrait* (1978) and Julia Prewitt Brown's *Jane Austen's Novels* (1979).[127]

With the 1980s, the growing influence of literary theory on critical writings becomes apparent in the quantity and quality of works that pay ever-closer and more serious attention to Austen's early fiction. Although there are important studies that give little or no emphasis to the epistolary texts (such as Tony Tanner's *Jane Austen*, 1986)[128], the decade saw the publication of one of the key critical texts on the early writings, *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and 'Lady Susan'* (1989). This not only cemented the significance of the early texts within Austen studies, but also provided detailed critical focus on and discussion of the texts themselves (including Beatrice Anderson and Hugh McKellar on *Lady Susan*; Laurie Kaplan on Austen's readers, contemporary and current, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Walton Litz, Claudia Johnson and John Halperin on the juvenilia, Pepper Robbins on Austen's early epistolary fiction as a whole and Mary Gaither Marshall on a descriptive history of the manuscripts in question). A marginally earlier collection of critical essays on Austen—and on a range of subjects of interest to her work—is the 1986 *Jane Austen Companion*, which provides analysis both of the juvenilia texts (Southam) and of *Lady Susan* (Ruth apRoberts, who remarks on the extent of critical judgement on the

more recently, the seven-part production by Oneword Radio ('The Naxos Hour'), October 21 to October 27 2005.

[127] Litz ("Criticism", 116) draws attention to five of the many collections of critical work that appeared in 1975 on the occasion of the bicentennial of Austen's birth.

[128] However, see Spencer's 1986 *Rise*, a study that views Austen as the culmination of a tradition of women's writing, for its reference to the genre of epistolary fiction.

novel, ranging from complete success to outright failure). Other important work on the juvenilia and the epistolary is that by Julia Epstein (1985), which sought to place the early letter-form texts within the female epistolary tradition of the eighteenth century, on the one hand challenging the 'solitary genius' view of Austen by suggesting her openness to source texts, but on the other hand refusing to wholly accept earlier critical assessment that the juvenilia writing was primarily derivative, that is, arguing for fuller acceptance of Austen's inherent literary qualities, an aspect rarely accorded to any writer's early works.[129]

Further major critical works from this decade include Claudia Johnson's enormously influential *Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988), which provides a close analysis of some of the anarchic juvenilia pieces (assessed together with *Northanger Abbey* as an early work that is deemed to continue the politically subversive vein of the shorter fiction), and Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady* (1984), which, in its chapter 6, outlines the issue of ideological contradictions and narrative form, focusing especially on the epistolary, through *Lady Susan*, painting Austen as a victim of the society she depicts, a forceful interpretation but one with which this thesis does not agree.

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[129] See Alexander and Owen: "Since 'juvenilia' are youthful works, even now unfairly defined as "reflecting psychological or intellectual immaturity, unworthy of an adult" (Webster's), Austen's early works—together with *Lady Susan*—still have some way to go before even a majority of Austen aficionados recognise their intrinsic merit and agree with Virginia Woolf [135] that they are 'astonishing and unchildish', full of seriousness behind the 'clever nonsense'" ("*Lady Susan*: a Re-evaluation of Jane Austen's Epistolary Novel" In Press [Spring 2006]). See also Litz, "The Juvenilia" (1), for comments on the adequacy and accuracy of the term 'juvenilia'. He attributes the modern, negative connotation of the term as it refers to Austen's work to "the Victorian world in which Jane Austen's earliest fictions were first published", since the presentation of these texts was always couched in apologetic terms (see this chapter, n.107). For further general critical comment on juvenilia writing, see *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, Introduction (Alexander and McMaster).

More recent Austen criticism that highlights the epistolary necessarily includes the influential work by Favret, 1993; Watson, 1994 and (to a somewhat lesser extent for Austen) Heckendorn Cook, 1996 (see p.50 ff. of this thesis). None of these critics, of course, focuses monographically on Austen, but Favret and Watson give close attention to the early texts, and most especially to the crucial and ever-controversial closure to *Lady Susan*.

Favret, in a lengthy discussion of Austen's early novella, makes the point—amongst several other observations on the text—that the third-person narrative interruption "is taken to mark [her] rejection of the epistolary form and her movement toward third-person, impersonal narrative" (139), a movement away from a technically rudimentary and dying form towards a more developed, mature style of writing. Whilst indicating the considerable technical superiority, and artistic seriousness, of *Lady Susan* over the juvenilia epistolary texts (notably *Love and Freindship*), Favret nevertheless suggests that Austen's abandonment of the form corresponds more to her dissatisfaction with the letter's identification with the increasingly monitored condition of female propriety following the French Revolution, rather than to "a mere dissatisfaction with obsolete form" (145), closely arguing that this formal change should be seen in the context of the political and social pressures that had been brought to bear on the letter from 1790 to 1795: "[i]n *Lady Susan...*, epistolary art is in league with social consensus and parental authority. Rather than managing the letter into a parody of anarchy [as Favret claims had been done in the juvenilia], Austen begins to see it in a more threatening aspect, as a paradigm of law" (144-

145). This is a view with which this thesis partly agrees, but—as argued on p.55 of this thesis and considered further in Chapter Three—we see the major influence on abandoning the epistolary as being a complex of commercial rather than exclusively political concerns, however this latter idea may be characterised.

Watson, too, sees political motivation in the conclusion, suggesting that Austen's undermining of the epistolary form mirrors state intervention in the personal; she also suggests that Austen had grown suspicious of the letter's purported ability (one that had made it the preferred vehicle for much *foenestra in pectore* writing in the eighteenth century) to act as transparent communication of intimate thought:

> *Lady Susan,* also interested in the potential for equivocation inherent in the epistolary form, chooses eventually to shut down the letter by recourse to third-person narrative.[130] In insinuating third-person narrative, the official story, Austen resorts, like Edgeworth, to invoking a state institution...while here at the same moment belittling the power of epistolary intercourse to do very much to undermine the State. Unlike Edgeworth, however, Austen entirely collapses the epistolary framework, premised as it is upon absence, by bringing her characters into proximity, reckoned as more transparent, less amenable to masquerade than the letter... Austen assaults the idea that the letter is 'naturally' transparent, and unmediated expression of 'true feeling', by highlighting the letter as vulnerable to falsification. (83)

[130] This argument is, in turn, based on that posited by Epstein and Poovey (*Proper Lady*), as indicated in Watson's n.17, p.82.

This is a position with which, in large measure, we agree;[131] it is an immensely fruitful approach for assessing the broader contexts shaping Austen's writing at this time in her development (as well, of course, as that of other writers) and marks a convincing and effective contrast to the more conventional critical perspectives that, limiting themselves to the perceived stylistic inadequacies of the epistolary, appear to have little interest in connecting Austen's artistic growth with the real world in which this was actually taking place. That said, however, and as we have observed for Favret (thesis, p.72), the basic position that we will be positing in this thesis is that Austen's ultimate abandonment of the epistolary in *Lady Susan* (and therefore, to all real effect, her rejection of the form in what is currently extant of her writings) is that this was brought about by a clear-sighted commercial perception of the literary market, and her very precise gauging of public literary taste. These factors are unquestionably shaped, in turn, by the underlying socio-political forces that Watson alludes to, but it is our assessment that it was primarily the range of issues configuring the commercial ambit rather than the strictly political arena that most affected Austen's definitive shift of narrative mode, in spite of the many stylistic advantages that the epistolary form represented for Austen's early development, as Chapter Two of this thesis will outline.

Heckendorn Cook is less directly concerned with Austen's epistolary writings, limiting herself to the observation that *Lady Susan* "is an epistolary tour de force" (174); nevertheless, she points the way forward for further critical study of Austen's epistolarity,

[131] For further discussion of Watson's views in relation to the non-epistolary Conclusion to *Lady Susan*, see Chapter Three, section 3.3.

recalling that, whilst the form *strictu sensu* played no further part in Austen's mature production, she continued to make highly effective use of the epistolary trope in each one of her later novels, a view echoed by subsequent critical work such as that by Joe Bray (see p.50 of this thesis).

As Stovel observes, however, the "older kind of criticism did not simply disappear" (235), and Oliver MacDonagh's *Real and Imagined Worlds* (1991) is a case in point. This elegantly written account provides a close reading of *Lady Susan*, claiming that "we can certainly speak of (Susan Vernon's) role in the same sense as Lucifer's in *Paradise Lost*" (21). The analysis outlines what it sees as Austen's suggestion in the novella that, whilst men have all the outward trappings of power and influence, women are always able to undermine this through a "countervailing force" (28).

The collection of critical essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (1997)[132] provides discussion on the early epistolary work from one of the key figures in eighteenth-century literary criticism, Margaret Anne Doody ("The Short Fiction"). Doody claims, most convincingly, that Austen's updating of the 'lost fiction' from epistolary to impersonal narrative represents a "personal and authorial revolution [that] made her publishable" (86), suggesting in turn that this was fuelled by Austen's growing realisation that her work, as originally conceived, might never be accepted; that is, rather than positing the rejection of the epistolary on purely stylistic or political grounds, she implies that there

[132] For further reference to collections of critical work (in addition to those indicated by Litz, n.127), see Stovel, 237-238.

may have been an essentially professional calculation to Austen's revision, a position that has also been persuasively argued by Jan Fergus.[133]

Mary Waldron's 1999 critical appraisal, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* suggests that Austen's work, early and mature, was the radical, innovative reaction to the constraints of contemporary fiction. It argues that Austen's scepticism of this fiction (an attitude shared by her family) motivated her early stylistic developments, and that "the reasons why [the unfinished writings including *Lady Susan*] were abandoned may hold some clues to the gradual development of Austen's fictional aims" (18). That is, Waldron sees both *Catharine* and the closure of *Lady Susan* as artistic failures, and, in the latter case, points to its 'abandonment'—the narrative intervention implying recognition of the form's limitation—as, in effect, progress towards a more successful narrative form. Again, the position of this thesis is that such argument fails to sufficiently consider the many stylistic advantages that the epistolary nevertheless provided; furthermore, as Chapter Two will posit more fully, the idea of epistolary rejection, argued from the fact of the non-epistolary conclusion, needs to engage directly with the dating of the two distinct sections if such an idea is to be valid.

A Companion to Jane Austen Studies (2000), a collection of critical essays edited by Lambdin & Lambdin, offers compelling and provocative recent analysis not only of the

[133] Doody also expresses this view, though more forcefully, in the introduction to her co-edition of *Catharine and Other Writings* (xxxi). See Fergus ("Professional Woman Writer" and "Women Readers") for further discussion of professional women authors' concerns; see also McMaster & Stovel (*Business*).

epistolary but also of the juvenilia as a whole. The collection provides studies that focus particularly—or at least in good part—on *Lady Susan* (Deborah Knuth, Eric Daffron, Paula Buck) as well as on Austen's letters (Stephanie Moss), and includes Juliet McMaster's influential "The Juvenilia: Energy Versus Sympathy", which argues for the greater similarity of *Catharine* to the later fiction, within the ambit of literary tone, in light of its "ethic of sympathy", in marked contrast (in McMaster's view) to the more juvenilia-leaning *Lady Susan*, characterised by an "ethic of energy".[134] Daffron's publication and critical history provides not only an invaluable summary of critical tendencies with respect to the juvenilia, showing how these are shaped by the historical contexts in which they were written, but also yields an effective soundbite by which to describe the critical journey that the appreciation of Austen's juvenilia has taken, from "derisive dismissal, romantic inclusion and finally semiotic and cultural contextualization" (195).

Robert Miles's study, *Jane Austen* (2003), whilst concerned primarily with a range of aspects in the mature fiction, is nevertheless of interest to the discussion of epistolary form affecting Austen's early writing (and especially the structural characteristics and possible stylistic limitations that the form may have), as it provides detailed focus on the use of free indirect speech[135] in creating narrative realism and establishing fuller authorial control (pp.62-107), an issue of critical concern since the work of Litz in the 1960s.

[134] See Chapter Two, n.9. Other interesting insight provided by McMaster in her chapter includes the suggestion that, in the early juvenilia, Austen's expressionism can be traced to the fact of her having "more lively priorities than realism" (176) and an indication of the importance—for a number of reasons—of *A Collection of Letters*, a much-overlooked epistolary juvenilia piece that can be seen as "a milestone of distance covered, a signpost of things to come" (183).

[135] See also thesis, Chapter One n.4 and thesis pp.110-113.

What becomes clear from reviewing this critical response to Austen's epistolary writing is the manner in which assessment of the juvenilia and early work has gradually accorded fuller centrality to such writing in her development. That is, by recognising and then accepting its value, concern has shifted from analysis of the texts as mere prototypes of the later fiction or as fertile testing grounds for Austen's developing literary imagination and skills – interesting, but essentially peripheral—towards the key role that such texts are now seen to play in Jane Austen's stylistic progress. From the perspective of reassessing the epistolary in Austen, this is clearly positive; however, most of this work suggests that the epistolary is, ultimately, a stylistic obstacle to be overcome, and much of it uses the ever-polemical conclusion to *Lady Susan* as a means for resting its case. This thesis takes issue with both these points, viewing the epistolary as a stylistic springboard rather than an impediment, and seeing other motives to *Lady Susan*'s closure than Austen's frustration with the form (see Chapter Three).

1.5 Austen's Real and Fictional Letters[136]

The focus in this thesis on the epistolary in Austen concerns the *literary* use that she made of the letter, particularly as it affects the stylistic development of her earlier writings; the emphasis is not, therefore, on the letters of her personal correspondence. However, this

[136] For an outline of the publication history of the Letters, see Modert, 272-274. For further discussion of the letters as reflecting Austen's reading, and so as a possible factor in her rejection of the epistolary, see thesis pp.232-236.

gives rise to two distinct ambits of concern: first, that any discussion of epistolarity necessarily and inevitably has to confront the issue of the relationship between fictional letters in literature, on the one hand, and those in private communication, on the other. Second, that it is relevant to consider—within Austen's personal correspondence—those aspects that may have a repercussion on her literary writing.

The distinction between fictional and private letters, *a priori,* might appear transparent, and indeed conventional assessment of Austen's writing has perceived a veritable gulf between the existing correspondence[137] and (particularly) the quality and content of the later fiction. Such views, however, have occasioned discrepant voices.

Many of Austen's earliest and more intimate commentators would have remarked, as has been suggested, that there is very little connection at all between Austen's letters and her fiction. The early opinions given by her family, as well as Chapman's editorial views, have all stressed what they took to be the essentially trivial character of Austen's personal correspondence. Much of the discussion of Austen's private letters has in fact been a history of apology, as they have been assessed with the same literary criteria brought to bear on her fiction (indeed, on fiction in general), and have largely been deemed insubstantial: "Chapman's edition exposed Austen to the scrutiny of many who, like Garrod [Keats' editor] and [E. M.] Forster, judged her letters according to predetermined assumptions as to what a writer's published correspondence should provide—assumptions

[137] See n.141, this chapter.

which were often more appropriate to the work and more especially to the lives of male writers. It is hardly surprising, then, that Austen's letters were found wanting"[138]. Henry Austen's 1817 *Biographical Notice* advises his readers that they should not be overly demanding of his sister's letters, given their inferiority to her fiction, observing—patronisingly, to say the very least—that they "resemble the nest which some little bird builds of the materials nearest at hand".[139] Caroline Austen, the writer's niece, writing fifty years after Austen's death, belittles the letters' domesticity, highlighting what she perceived to be their blandness and observing that her aunt "seldom committed herself even to an opinion—so that to strangers they would be no transcript to her mind—they would not feel they knew her the better for having read them".[140] Chapman's 1932 introduction to the *First Edition of the Letters*, essentially contrasting the form of Austen's correspondence with that of her published fiction, observes (xi) that the letters are "occasional, unstudied and inconsequent. As a series... they have no connexion, they have no coherence;[141] they

[138] Jones, *Selected Letters* (Ed.) xi. This comment gains validity in light of the great popularity of Lord Chesterfield's personal letters (beginning in 1737, first to his son Philip, later to his godson, also Philip). What these letters 'provided' was frequently deemed scandalous, hence—very surely—their success: Dr Johnson commented that they "teach the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing-master" (Drabble, *Companion* 195).

[139] 59-60.

[140] *My Aunt Jane Austen*, pp.9-10, cited in Modert, 274. See also Jones' comment (ix-x) that "[t]he family's anxieties were borne out by early critical opinion. Keats's editor, H. W. Garrod, dismissed the letters of Keats's female contemporary with a waspish concision worthy of Austen herself. For Garrod, Austen's letters were nothing but 'a desert of trivialities punctuated by occasional oases of clever malice'. And when R. W. Chapman's scholarly edition of 1932 made all of Austen's known letters available to the public for the first time, her correspondence was dismissively summed up in E. M. Forster's famous judgement that: [s]he has not enough subject-matter on which to exercise her powers'".

[141] The need for coherence, connection and 'plot' in unpublished private letters is, in itself, telling, and would appear to reinforce Jones' suspicions (see n. 138). This sense of incompleteness, however, is certainly intensified by Cassandra Austen's excision or even destruction of a significant part of her sister's correspondence. The exact extent of this destruction (and the reasons for its undertaking) can only be guessed at, but the remaining letters, as Leavis remarks (130-131; 137-138), do not, for example, contain any of Austen's correspondence with her 'favourite' brother Henry, nor are certain momentous family episodes (Continued on the next page)

straggle over twenty years, and lack a plot. Their details... are not the ingredients or the embellishments of a rounded composition".

Since at least the 1940s, there has been well-documented disagreement with these readings of the letters, readings that basically mask disappointment at finding the content to be of such an 'inconsequential' nature (in addition to another—completely distinct—ambit of objection, which is a certain Victorian prudishness at the Augustan vigour and vitality that many of the letters express)[142], starting with Leavis' careful consideration of the letters in *A Critical Theory*. In Leavis' view, one that roundly rejects the triviality accorded to Austen's letters and which presents a broad selection of fragments underlining, in her opinion, Austen's ironic vision of the quotidian, there is a clear and direct link between the private correspondence and the *creation* of her fiction:

> The *Letters*...were an indispensable stage in the production of the novels. We see [in them] the novelist writing steadily and for an audience, and an audience which had imposed a certain attitude and tone on the writer and which demanded certain kinds of information...[This is] the groundwork of the novels, and after reading the *Letters* we can see more clearly the part that the Austen attitude played in making the novels what they are. (139; 144)

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recorded, such as the death of Cassandra's fiancé in 1797. In other words, what we are left with is very probably of questionable representative value. (See also n.143.)

[142] A reaction that was also expressed in the early twentieth century. See Leavis, 131. For a more recent sample of reaction to the letters (1974, updated 2003), see Drabble's introduction to *Lady Susan* (10-11), in which she asserts that Austen, in writing her personal letters, "nothingnesses" (sic; here a verb, not a substantive), adding that the correspondence is "disappointing if one looks for deeper truths or lasting subtleties". Of particular interest is the application of this negative opinion to Austen's unsuitability as a writer to the epistolary form as a genre: "She was a prolific but not a great letter writer, and it's not surprising that she turned away from the epistolary novel", a view that appears to confuse personal correspondence with fictional letters, in addition to applying literary criteria (of 'greatness') to the evaluation of non-literary writing.

Laurie Kaplan, broadly in accord with Leavis' arguments, suggests that analysis of Austen's personal correspondence may throw considerable light on aspects of her stylistic development as a whole. Most particularly, the letters provide Austen with a highly sympathetic, receptive and like-minded 'public', very largely in the shape of Cassandra[143] and were, given the 'security' of this readership, an ideal forum within which to try out literary devices such as "irony (especially), paradox, [and] understatement",[144] as well as rehearsing a range of what might be seen as narrative or authorial comment and thematic concern.[145]

Later critical work largely supports the view that the letters, in a certain sense, are 'groundwork' for the fiction.[146] Flynn observes (111), on referring to letter 114 in which Austen admits to spying into the bedroom cupboard of one of her nieces, making a rather caustic remark on its contents, that "if one thing is constant in the domestic novel, it is the exposure of the female, who is always subject to the watchful eyes of others"; Modert has suggested that it is the very *ordinariness* of the letters which provides a key to understanding Austen's creativeness:

> For years and years now, Jane Austen has been trying to tell us in the novels that the little events of everyday life—what Austen-Leigh condescendingly called "only 'the details of domestic life'"—are the things that shape

[143] For a recent fictional account of this relationship and of Cassandra's purportedly complex and perhaps conflicting attitudes towards her sister's letters, see Pitkeathley, *Cassandra & Jane*.
[144] I am grateful to Professor Laurie Kaplan both for this suggestion itself and for the specific details indicated here (private correspondence, 29/07/2005).
[145] See also Jones' comments cited on p.83 of this thesis.
[146] However, see Hardack (*Bodies in Pieces*), who argues strongly against the traditional view of non-fictional letters as supplementary to a given author's literary writing.

> character and often spell the difference between happiness and sorrow, comfort and pain. When we begin to comprehend how fully Jane Austen uses the little events of her own life, as illustrated in the letters, we may understand more fully the ripening of her genius. (277)

On the whole, however, recent critics have preferred to redirect attention towards the cultural importance of the letters themselves. Stephanie Moss makes a convincing case for interpreting Austen's letters in nineteenth-century Britain in light of the ability of their content to "forge a stable past in order to steady a mutable present" (260). Deborah Kaplan has argued that the representations of self-denial and domesticity in the letters are a form of self-expression underlining the dual pull of class and gender,[147] whilst Whealler suggests (195) that the minutiae of this much-reported domesticity is the source of a "private power".[148] Related approaches have also sought to assert the generic autonomy of the familiar letter, as a province most particularly of women's writing, in order to highlight the inadequacy of earlier critical perspectives when assessing such letters in view of other—particularly male-dominated—literary genres. In this respect, Vivien Jones (*Selected Letters* xi-xii) puts forward a persuasive counter-argument to opinions such as those held by Chapman,[149] et al.:

> [Austen's letters] belong to a particular genre—the female familiar letter—and they are therefore concerned with a particular point of view and particular kinds of 'materials', with precisely those 'details of domestic life' which James Edward Austen-Leigh found so inferior to their 'execution'. If we recognise their generic identity, we begin to understand the relationship between 'materials' and 'execution' more fully, and Austen's letters attain

[147] *Representing*, pp.211-219, and especially *Jane Austen*, Chapter 3 ('The Women's Culture'), passim.
[148] See Flynn 101 and 113, n.6.
[149] See p.80 of this thesis.

> their proper importance: as the 'transcript', to use Caroline Austen's word, not only of her individual mind, but of the demands, pleasures, and frustrations of a way of life which she shared with other women in her social position—concerns and perceptions which are also central to her work as a novelist.

These approaches therefore effectively circumnavigate the question of whether the letters are vitally connected with Austen's fiction by establishing a separate terrain for their assessment.

Clearly, though, whilst these views reflect disagreement about the 'quality' of the letters, the focus in many of these perspectives has been on the distinction to be made (or not) between Austen's correspondence and her fiction taken *en masse*; it is not primarily concerned with the relationship between the fictional and non-fictional letter, the boundaries of which, when looked at from a more theoretical realm, are in fact seen to be porous. As Thomas Beebee has observed, the distinction between the two is not a given, but depends simply upon the presence of a reader other than the intended recipient:

> '[A]t the moment where the letter is read by a third, anonymous reader, there occurs an invisible, qualitative leap which raises the letter from a brute or native to a second-level epistolary, to the recognition of a first level by a foreign gaze which radically transforms it, since the relationship established by the correspondents becomes, through this gaze, occasion for a point of view of the [third] reader on that relationship'. This transformation lies at the heart of epistolary fiction... 'to become Novel... letters must be read by someone other than the one to whom they are addressed. They must be Purloined'. (8-9)[150]

[150] Citing, first, Roger Duchêne and, second, Homer O. Brown.

From this angle, then, it seems clear that we would have to accept that Austen's private correspondence—or the part of it that has remained—in being most thoroughly purloined, has arguably been *transformed* into the realm of Novel. This view is important, along with the insights and reflections of critical work such as that by Leavis, Modert, Flynn and Deborah Kaplan *et al.*, in asserting the validity and quality *per se* of Austen's private correspondence, and in rescuing it from its position of a marginal supporting role in the bigger picture of her literary writing.

However, within the argumentative framework of this thesis, a distinction will be made between Austen's epistolary writings of a private character and those that form a consciously created part of her fictional writing. Such a stance is not intended to question the significance of her personal correspondence, whether this be considered a stepping-stone to or testing ground for her fictional works, as a cultural entity or as a form of literature in its own right. Rather, even accepting the positions of Leavis, Laurie Kaplan and Jones that aspects of the letters may in a certain sense foreshadow the general character of the fiction seen as a whole, the view taken by this thesis recognises that, in the discussion of stylistic development within Austen's fictional writing—particularly, the assessment of texts such as *Catharine* and *Lady Susan* that use either direct narrative or the epistolary, which is our central focus (see p.16 of this thesis)—the letters of her private

correspondence have no fundamental part to play, and will therefore not be a major area of concern to this argument.[151]

Having reviewed criticism both of the epistolary form itself and of Austen's epistolary writings, there is the need in concluding this chapter to reiterate the justification for this thesis. As outlined on p.6, the position that will be presented here, in contrast to the conventional view that sees Austen's use of the epistolary as regressive, a stylistic impediment that she rapidly overcame on the path to the narrative transparency and realism of her mature fiction, is that the epistolary was, in fact, a fundamental component in her stylistic development and played a major part in evolving that very transparency and realism for which she is celebrated. Even amongst those few critics who have accorded fuller importance to epistolary writing such as *Lady Susan* within the Austen canon (principally Leavis and Mudrick),[152] no critical focus has yet attempted, in a sustained and contrastively analysed manner, to suggest the centrality of the epistolary to Austen's stylistic development. And whilst the notion of Austen's 'non-linear progress' (that is, her early *use*, *disuse* and *reuse* of the epistolary) has been considered elsewhere,[153] the

[151] However, see Chapter 5, Further Research, for additional comment. For the value of Austen's letters in ascertaining details of her reading, see thesis, p.232. We recognise that, from a determined critical perspective, the approach taken in our thesis may be interpreted as privileging certain texts over others, to the detriment of written forms that, as our assessment has highlighted, have traditionally been accorded marginal validity. We would emphasise here that our approach has been determined by the wish to focus on formal and stylistic concerns within Austen's fictional writing and that the necessary exclusion of other texts that this implies is in no way to undermine the broader significance of such writing, or the role it may have within Austen's work as a whole.

[152] See pp.64 and 66, respectively, of this thesis.

[153] See especially Lascelles, Litz (*Artistic Development*) and Southam (*Literary Manuscripts*).

prevailing view—most notably that expressed by Southam[154]—has been that this was a return to a less complex form and that the result was, artistically speaking, failure.[155] This thesis challenges such a view and puts forward an opposing assessment. Furthermore, whilst it is also the case that Austen's abandonment of the epistolary has concerned a number of critics who have posited a range of plausible suggestions for this (as indicated on p.3 of the Introduction), none of these analyses has attempted to support its argument by the stylistic comparison of Austen's early work, which is the approach taken here. Evidently, such an approach can no more uncover the reason for Austen's eventual abandonment of the form with any greater certainty than that suggested by other critics; it can, however, make a case—as the thesis will claim—that the predominant notion of abandonment for artistic failure is a misrepresentation both of the epistolary itself and, most specifically, of Austen's own early development. For this purpose, therefore, this thesis justifies its approach.

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[154] See thesis, p.6.
[155] See thesis p.67.