

Seeking a Female Private History: Jane Austen's 'History of England' and *Persuasion*

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Introduction

When *Emma*, the fourth published novel of Jane Austen's, was about to appear in 1816, it was proposed that the novel should be dedicated to the Prince Regent, the King-to-be, who had famously been an admirer of her works. There remain some letters in which Austen negotiated about the matter with Revd James-Stanier Clarke, the Librarian to the Prince Regent:

Dear Miss Austen,

I have to return you the Thanks of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent for the handsome Copy you sent him of your last excellent Novel—pray dear Madame soon write again and again

The Prince Regent has just left us for London; and having been pleased to appoint me Chaplain and Private English Secretary to the Prince of Cobourg, I remain here with His Serene Highness & a select Party until the Marriage. Perhaps when you again appear in print you may chuse to dedicate your Volumes to Prince Leopold: *any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg*, would just now be very interesting. (L 325, emphasis added)

This letter, dated March 27, 1816, might have annoyed Austen with its condescension and affectedness, for possibly she was reluctant to dedicate her next work to the notoriously dissipated Prince. With that patronising manner, Clarke gave instruction to write 'any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg', which interests me here. The advice seems to be based upon the facts that the Prince of Cobourg would be married to the Prince Regent's daughter, that Clarke was appointed to be the secretary to

Prince Leopold, and that Clarke himself was the historiographer to King George the Third. Yet the return letter of Austen's, dated April 1, the same year, makes the phrase 'Historical Romance', or 'History' more resonant than these specific circumstances would indicate:

You are very, very kind in your hints as to the sort of Composition which might recommend me at present, & I am fully sensible that *an Historical Romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg* might be much more to the purpose of Profit or Popularity, than *such pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages* as I deal in—but I could no more write a Romance than an Epic Poem.—I could not sit seriously down to write a serious Romance under any other motive than to save my Life, & if it were indispensable for me to keep it up & never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first Chapter.—No—I must keep to *my own style & go on in my own Way*; And though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other.— (L 326, emphasis added)

Here Austen quickly responds to Clarke's suggestion; repeating his phrase 'Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg' almost literally, she flatly, though politely, refuses the advice, which, according to her, could not be reconciled with her 'own style' or her 'own Way' of writing. The 'Historical Romance' is opposed to the familiar field of her novels, namely, 'the pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages'. Although it is safe to assume that Austen may have been flattered by Clarke's interest, her denial appears quite definite.

It is very difficult, however, to decide how seriously and consciously this negative attitude towards 'Historical Romance' is proclaimed; though Austen famously laughs away the convention of Gothic Romances in *Northanger Abbey*, for instance, Tuite, quoting Bourdieu, persuasively regards her as one of 'ex-believers'; Austen parodies Gothic Romance not by refusing but by 'appropriating' the very style of it (qtd. in Tuite 63). Moreover, she is an expert ironist after all, which always leaves her statements ambiguously poised. It seems to require more space and time before we can confidently discern her probable view of the genre.

In fact, Austen had constantly been interested in history throughout her writing career. In an intimate letter to her sister Cassandra mentioning *Pride and Prejudice*, she remarks: ‘The work is rather too light & bright & sparkling;—it wants shade;—it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter—of sense if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense—about something unconnected with the story; an Essay on Writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparté . . .’ (L 212). The quotation shows that actually writing of history was, for her, quite naturally within the bounds of possibility; this would seem to contradict her apparent refusal to engage with the genre. Simultaneously, she might have been laughing at ‘the history of Buonaparté’, imagining that the stiff-mannered masculine history of a celebrity was actually embedded in her ‘light’ work. In addition to this, there emerges Sir Walter Scott, famous for his ‘Historical Romances’. He was an anonymous critic of *Emma* and also one of Austen’s favourite authors as she mentions him in another letter: ‘Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people’s mouths.—I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it—but fear I must’ (L 289). To explain Austen’s complex attitude here, we must first acknowledge the binary opposition established between a poem, traditionally male territory, and a novel where female writers could pursue their desire of writing. At the same time we can discern a comparison between a novel and a romance; if the novels Austen created enact ‘domestic Life’ (L 326), Historical Romances, in which Scott was so dexterous, represent ‘the settings or the events depicted [which] are remote from everyday life’¹ as the item of ‘romance’ in *The Oxford English Dictionary* shows, and which require what he elsewhere terms ‘[t]he Big Bow-wow strain’ (Southam 106). This difference in genre and gender overlaps with the aforementioned contrast in Austen and Clarke’s views on history.

By employing the proposition that Austen paid some attention towards the word ‘history’ in Clarke’s letter as a starting point, in this essay, I would like to explore how she treats the term and responds to Clarke’s advice in *Persuasion*, which she was just working on during their exchange of letters. Recently, Daniel Woolf, in his rich paper on the idea of history and the attitude towards it in Austen’s works, especially in *Persuasion*, suggested a correlation between Clarke’s advice and seemingly particular stress on history in this work, but only

as a passing mention in an endnote (234).² His brief analysis relies not so much on the way the word ‘history’ works in the novel as on Anne’s reaction towards past as a proper historian; this essay will focus on a much closer textually oriented reading of the term.

To do this, it would also be fruitful to consult her precocious juvenile work, ‘History of England’, where Austen apparently tries to subvert traditional notions of history writing. That in this piece too Austen is aware of femaleness in writing while cheerfully exposing the bias of masculine narrative, as I would discuss, might support the view that she did not decline the offer of writing history but rather sought an alternative female version. Gilbert and Gubar, who point out this gender problem in history writing, correctly note Austen’s frustration concerning ordinary history, but overlook the possibility of her more active literary commitment to reformulating the genre, as Daniel Woolf rightly notices. What I intend to offer, by taking over their argument about the authoress’ dissatisfaction with male public history as far from women’s everyday life-experiences (Gilbert and Gubar 133), is the argument that Austen remakes history ‘in her own style’.

It is partly because of the current vogue for the juvenilia that I put into discussion this problematic piece. Generally speaking, most critics follow Gilbert and Gubar’s emphasis on its defiance of restraint as ‘revolt’ (120). This extravagance has overshadowed the possibility of more complex intertextual relations between the juvenilia and the mature subtlety of later works. So what I would argue in this study, with drawing upon the previous feminist tradition, is a certain kind of mutual echo between ‘History of England’, one of the earliest workings, and *Persuasion*, the last completed novel, in which Austen is highly conscious of the problems of being a woman; this, I hope, would help to sketch one type of generic portrait of the authoress.³

1. ‘History of England’: Emotion and a female history

That Austen very likely took serious interest in history writing is strongly supported by ‘History of England’. This strange text, as Kent observes, appears to jeer at the enlightening schoolroom history, written by such authors as Goldsmith, which ‘was reduced for childhood consumption into facts and dates’ (61). The mocking tone of the narrative is most concisely characterised in the subtitle and the dedication to Cassandra:

By a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant Historian

To Miss Austen eldest daughter of the Revd George Austen, this Work is inscribed with all due respect by

The Author

N. B. There will be very few Dates in this History. (*J* 176)

The work starts with the pompous announcement that the historian is subjective and ignorant, which is actually demonstrated in the lack of dates in the following narrative. The artificial modesty, that Austen often assumes, is reminiscent of the critically famous letter previously directed towards Clarke, to inform him that a copy of *Emma* would be sent to the Prince Regent, and to respond to his earlier advice that she should ‘delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman—who should pass his time between the metropolis & the Country’ (*L* 309). Austen’s letter reads as follows:

I am quite honoured by your thinking me capable of drawing such a Clergyman as you gave the sketch of in your note of Nov: 16. But I assure you I am not [emphasis original]. The comic part of the Character I might be equal to, but not the Good, the Enthusiastic, the Literary. *Such a Man’s Conversation must at times be on subjects of Science & Philosophy of which I know nothing*—or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which *a Woman, who like me*, knows only her own Mother-tongue & has read very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving.—*A Classical Education*, or at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English Literature, Ancient & Modern, appears to me quite Indispensable for the person who w^d do any justice to your Clergyman—*And I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress.* (*L* 319, emphasis added)

A beautiful coincidence occurs here between the subtitle of the history and the last jestingly spoken sentence ‘I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an

Authoress'. The exquisitely chosen verb 'boast', reminiscent of witty Anna Howe's sayings, also echoes what Drabble describes in the juvenilia as 'their extraordinary narrative confidence' (XIII). In spite of the interval of about thirty years since the composition of 'History of England', the polite letter betrays a glimpse of the same atmosphere of the teenage writing; or put in another way, while working on the letter, Austen might have been remembering 'History of England', after recognising, in Clarke's preceding letter, the word 'history', which perhaps evoked more important meanings for her than he had ever expected.

One more thing that seems necessary to be particularly mentioned here to make explicit the similarity further, is the recurring, almost tautological, emphasis on femaleness in the above-quoted letter. By the reiteration of words such as 'woman', 'female', and 'authoress', Austen tries to differentiate herself from the male literary style enforced by classical education, by adopting a female one to strategically foreground the ignorance of which she 'boasts'. The conscious accentuation of femaleness is also achieved in the degree of intimacy established with Cassandra in 'History of England'.⁴ This is especially apparent in the way of using the second person pronoun, as is plain in the section on Henry the 6th: 'I cannot say much for this Monarch's Sense—Nor would I if I could, for he was a Lancastrian. *I suppose you know all about the Wars between him and the Duke of York who was of the right side; If you do not, you had better read some other History*' (J 178, emphasis added). Strangely, as the work is history genre after a fashion, 'you' repeatedly appears as if the narrator actually speaks to a specific addressee. To work out this mysterious pronoun, it would be somehow helpful to once again mention the biographical background. The Austen sisters, unusual as it is considering the customs for girls at that time, had belonged to a boarding school, in whose teaching, it is probable, '[h]istory was regarded as a particularly appropriate subject for girls' as 'fashionable . . . women's education' (qtd. in Kent 61). It was a male privilege to be written in and write history, but as for learning of it, as 'materials for conversation' (qtd. in Kent 61), this was assigned to girls to make them sophisticated conversationalists. Since the juvenile work was dedicated to Cassandra with whom young Austen might have shared exhausting history classes, the 'you' seems to connote Cassandra intimately talked to by the narrator, a persona of Austen. What is also suggestive is that Cassandra not only listens to her sister's

laughing narrative, but also takes part in the production of ‘History of England’ with her drawing the portraits of the noble characters; these facts, that is, you-as-Cassandra and her active artistic engagement, enable a creation of a unique text space where women can retain their intelligent, and exclusive one-on-one conversation, something that Burton names ‘a more utopian faith in the possibilities of sisterhood’ (46).

Much louder than this ‘you’ is of course the narrator ‘I’ that repeatedly dares to put itself forward. The ostentatiousness of this ‘I’ and the shameless avowal of its subjectivity not as a vindication but rather as a strategy form a contrast to the narrative of far more ‘conscientious’ historians such as Hume whose ‘calm, philosophic presence pervades his history, intervening usually through impersonal constructions such as “it is reasonable to infer . . .”’ (Kent 65); ‘[h]e rarely introduces himself directly, and when he does it is as “we”—the voice of gentlemen of good sense and understanding’ (Kent 65). One clear instance of Austen’s subjective propensity may be observed concerning Richard the Third where we come across the warning reiteration of the phrase ‘I am inclined’. This draws the readers’ laughter and at the same time paradoxically lends a rare note of unaffected sincerity: what truly matters in the work is that it is prepared to admit that its historical conscience is inevitably ‘partial’ and ‘prejudiced’.⁵

The ‘prejudiced’ subjectivity, which is often associated with femaleness in Austen’s novels, notably in *Pride and Prejudice*, is clearly realised in the excessively emotional manner of the narrator showing ‘my Spleen’ or ‘my Hatred’ (*J* 178).⁶ This is highlighted, in the part of Elizabeth, in the narrator’s use of long-winded sentences, exclamations such as ‘oh!’, and biased words such as ‘wicked’ or ‘Crimes’ (*J* 183) unsuitable for ordinary capitalised ‘History’. Thus the narrator attempts to display her uncontrollable detestation of Queen Elizabeth, but what is interesting here is that the feeling reaction is sometimes channelled into ‘pity’ (*J* 186) too (and this word pervades throughout Austen’s marginalia in Goldsmith’s *History of England*, where she, like Sir Walter, writes comments in the margins). However slight it is, this sympathetic benevolence, firmly related to fashionable sensibility, seems to conform with what had come to be required to be virtuous heroines in literary conventions.⁷ Though juvenilia almost always attacks convention severely, the sympathy elicited by characters such as Elinor or Anne works as a certain kind of barometer to decide their degree of psychological maturity. In *Persuasion*, Anne tells Captain Harville

that 'ours [women's feelings] are the most tender' (*P* 253) to vindicate women's constancy. Interestingly, 'tender' means '[s]usceptible to moral or spiritual influence; impressionable, sympathetic; sensitive to pious emotions' (*OED*). In this sense, the narrator, who generously sympathises even with 'wicked' Elizabeth, can be said to consciously narrate history in a highly female tone.

Besides this affective dimension of the narrator, the characters themselves disclose their personal feelings such as 'satisfaction' (*J* 177); so, this text, on various levels, aspires to be emotional. If the inner emotion, which also appears to add privateness, domesticity, and dailiness to 'History of England', functions to defy the narrative objectivity in History of 'the fact that it all happened' (*Kent* 61), it can be said that Austen exposes the invalidity of this claim not by writing fictional Historical Romance, which is relatively free from problems of objectivity compared to History of 'facts', but oxymoronically by persisting in writing brazenly subjective history. It is suggestive that Virginia Woolf, extremely conscious of the problematic status of female writers, states Austen's works are characteristic because of their showing 'less of facts and more of feelings than is usual' (181) stressing the factor of emotion in her work.

2. *Persuasion*: Public and private history

As we have seen, Austen intentionally underlines the female aspect of 'History of England' to distinguish it from the traditional male public History of 'facts and dates'. Though here what is connoted is History such as Goldsmith's, it will be useful to remember the 'Historical Romance' that Clarke hinted she should write; this is because the 'fact' Kent expresses concerning male History only includes politically serious affairs, for example, '[t]he quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences' (*NA* 110), and in that Historical Romances, though fiction, also concentrate on such supposedly important actions. It might be said that Austen mocks both capitalised History and Clarke's favourite genre of Historical Romance as something that exclusively centres on public events, by writing about unimportant personal matters such as private emotions of individuals as one history.

The antithesis of public and private history appears to be inherited in *Persuasion*, the novel which Austen was working on during her epistolary intercourse with Clarke.⁸ Though Daniel Woolf only maintains the weight

of history as a crucial theme in that work, failing to adequately examine the semantic plurality of the word history, which I would like to focus on. Before this, it is necessary to look at how the word is introduced first, in the quotation below taken from the opening scene:

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt. As he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century—and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read *his own history* with an interest which never failed—this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened:

‘ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH-HALL.

‘Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the country of Gloucester; by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, Nov. 5, 1789; Mary, born Nov. 20, 1791.’ (P 3, emphasis added)

In general, the starting scenes of Austen’s novels, except *Pride and Prejudice*, touch on the introduction of heroines or their parents, yet *Persuasion*, in the very first sentence, has something different: the subject is appropriately heroine’s father Sir Walter, but the sentence finally aims at not the exploration of his situation or intrinsic nature but rather ‘the Baronetage’, the family history. His property, estate, or family structure, the first things the narrator of marriage plots never fails to remark on, are not to be explained. What happens instead is the showy introduction of ‘his own history’ with the rhythmic sentences: employing ‘the Baronetage’ as a starting point, ‘there’ is reiterated four times creating a sense of exaltation together with the repetition of ‘into’, which enables a sort of suspenseful entrance after a significant dash, ‘and’, and comma. This overblown atmosphere can also be understood as a more sophisticated form of the mocking narrative of the juvenilia. It is perhaps because Sir Walter is in so much debt

that his financial state is left unclear; but anyway this does not seem enough to account for the reason why particularly history is singled out as a subject. Here in *Persuasion*, Sir Walter is unfortunately subordinated to the introduction of his own family genealogy into the text.

Then the question at present is: in the quotation above, what kind of satire is planned by thus referring to history? To answer this, I would once again like to go back to biographical knowledge about Austen and Clarke, as we might be inclined to doubt any direct link between Clarke's hint about writing Historical Romance and the early mention to history with a studied air in *Persuasion*. We can also regard Sir Walter as a certain clue to the problem because he functions as an agent to dramatise history, and according to Harding, his personality 'is being as sharply and mockingly emphasized as the nose or eyebrows of a politician in a cartoon' (81). Here it might be useful to quote the letter Clarke wrote as a response to Austen's first one to ask whether it was proper to dedicate *Emma* because it contains a hint which might have inspired Austen to imagine Sir Walter. There, he tells her to write 'an English Clergyman, . . . Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature—no man's Enemy but his own' (L 309). What is ominous is that the librarian himself is a member of the Church. In the second letter to Austen too he is enthusiastic about an idealised version of the profession: 'an English Clergyman after your [emphasis original] fancy—much novelty may be introduced—shew dear Madame what good would be done if Tythes were taken away entirely, and describe *him* burying *his* own mother—as I did—because the High Priest of the Parish in which she died—did not pay her remains the respect he ought to do. I have never recovered the Shock.' (L 320, emphasis added) Interestingly, there happens a transition of pronouns: by writing 'as I did', the third person pronoun to indicate the clergyman is changed into a first person. This is a moment when we can recognise a narcissistic desire of Clarke to be written in a kind of autobiography while he is seemingly suggesting a purely fictional character.

The letter of his above continues: 'Carry your Clergyman *to Sea* as the Friend of some distinguished *Naval Character* about a Court' (L 320, emphasis added). This supports the assumption that Austen (though it is questionable that she was favourable to his condescending opinions) plans to partly realise the hinted settings in *Persuasion*. Besides this, what is more crucial is the biographical fact that Austen actually wrote 'Plan of a Novel, according to hints

from various quarters' (LM 226), where Clarke's name appears on the list of the advisers. Austen, in her third letter addressed to Clarke, comments that '[y]ou are very, very kind in your *hints* as to the sort of Composition which might recommend me at present' (L 326, emphasis added), so the 'hints' in the title of 'Plan' might be something that are concerned with those offered by Clarke, as 'Plan' was written after the composition of *Emma*. It might seem closer to joking, even malicious, conjecture than to a serious design, but since what the last sentence pronounces, '[t]he name of the work [the work to be *Persuasion*] not to be *Emma*—but of the same sort as S&S. and P&P.' (LM 229) is in reality fulfilled in *Persuasion*, 'Plan' is not necessarily an entertainment. The possibility of gradual composition which Q. D. Leavis pointed out concerning early pieces and canonical novels (61) might be relevant also in the case of 'Plan' and *Persuasion*.

According to 'Plan', the perfect heroine's father is a 'Chaplain' to which Austen notes 'Mr. Clarke' (LM 227).⁹ One citation from 'Plan' would demand our close attention:

[I]t [the narrative] will comprehend his [the heroine's father's] going to sea as Chaplain to a distinguished Naval Character about the Court, his going afterwards to Court himself, which introduced him to a great variety of Characters & involved him in many interesting situations, concluding with his opinion of the Benefits to result from Tythes being done away, & his having buried his own Mother (Heroine's lamented Grandmother) in consequence of the High Priest of the Parish in which she died, refusing to pay her Remains the respect due to them. The Father to be of a very literary turn, an Enthusiast in Literature, nobody's Enemy but his own—at the same time most zealous in the discharge of his Pastoral Duties, the model of an exemplary Parish Priest. (LM 227)

Thus Austen represents the noble hero Clarke suggested in his letter using the very words and phrases he employed, for, as Doody states, '[Austen was] readily amused at Clarke's serious egotism' (C 360n). With the comparison between the letters and 'Plan', we can see that in spite of that slightly ironical atmosphere characteristic of her writings which covers 'Plan', Austen was sufficiently sensitive to Clarke's hints as to adopt them to write her next novel.

Bearing this intertextual relationship in mind, I would like to return to the above-mentioned question about *Persuasion*'s opening scene: that is, what is being mocked at the beginning of the novel with the pretentious introduction of 'history' and the satirical representation of Sir Walter. As to the former, it can be stated that by affectedly presenting the word, Austen possibly attempts to mock Clarke, whose persistent meddlesome 'persuasion' to write 'Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg' might have irritated the authoress. Then considering the fact that while disingenuously describing an imaginative character, he is trying to make her write a novel about himself, it is quite curious that the first use of the word 'history' in the above-quotation from *Persuasion*, accompanies 'his own', a stressed form of a possessive adjective, which happily exposes Clarke's hidden desire. Concerning the word 'history' here, it seems also necessary to add that it has a double-meaning: it means, on the surface, public history about aristocratic pedigree, classified as something constitutive of 'History of England' (though Austen's one is not at all a 'good' example), while if we take it as an innuendo about Clarke, it works as a private history about his past life. About this fluctuation between two meanings, I would like to go into more details later.

As for the function of Sir Walter, I think we can safely maintain that there is a somewhat of analogy between Clarke and Sir Walter. Though of course he is not a clergyman, his narcissism is parallel to that of Clarke. Admiral Croft correctly points out Sir Walter's, and perhaps Clarke's, nature: 'I should think he [Sir Walter] must be rather a dressy man for his time of life.—Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself' (*P* 138). Together with the omnipresent images of water throughout *Persuasion*, the mirrors Sir Walter surround himself with remind us of Narcissus. The mirror might be a prop which reflects and reveals the true character of Clarke's benevolent advice, or which projects his self-admiring proclivity onto Sir Walter.

Hence from the irony ringing in the phrase 'his own history' and from the analogy of Narcissus emerges the similarity between Clarke and Sir Walter, which is highlighted in the scene in which Sir Walter adds to the history made by a 'printer's hands'. I present the quotation culled from the part just after the Baronetage ends:

Precisely such had the paragraph originally stood from the printer's

hands; but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of himself and his family, these words, after the date of Mary's birth—'married, Dec. 16, 1810, Charles, son and heir of Charles Musgrove, Esq. of Uppercross, in the county of Somerset,'—and by *inserting most accurately the day of the month* on which he had lost his wife.

Then followed the history and rise of the ancient and respectable family, *in the usual terms*: how it had been first settled in Cheshire; how mentioned in Dugdale—serving the office of High Sheriff, representing a borough in three successive parliaments, exertions of loyalty, and dignity of baronet, in the first year of Charles II., *with all the Marys and Elizabeths they had married*; forming altogether two handsome duodecimo pages, and concluding with the arms and motto: 'Principal seat, Kellynch hall, in the county of Somerset,' and Sir Walter's hand-writing again in this finale:

'Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot, Esq., great grandson of the second Sir Walter.' (P 3-4, emphasis added)

Though Clarke himself did not write but just tried to have Austen compose his autobiography, his readiness to fall into the self-applauding narrative in the letters makes us think of Sir Walter actually writing about himself, which, as Sedgwick notes, is nothing but 'mental masturbation' (110). If Sir Walter, about whom the narrator observes '[v]anity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character'(P 4), is a parody of Clarke, it can be said that Austen, in one sense, docilely obeys Clarke's 'persuasion' by writing a history (of a private personal kind) of Sir Walter and by dramatising the act of writing history itself at the very beginning of *Persuasion*.

Thus it becomes plain that there works a clever ironical device to satirise Clarke. What is additionally worth noting is that it is Sir Walter, one of the most oppressive fathers in Austen's novels, that writes history here, for because of him, the contrast between men and women, such as I made a brief survey of in the section of 'History of England', is underlined.¹⁰ As Wentworth writes a letter towards Anne, in *Persuasion* we often notice the images of writing men. I would not go into minute case studies of each male character here, but it is suggestive, then, that Wentworth famously lets his pen drop in the end and that Sir Walter, through continuing to write his favourite history, is thus ridiculed, if we think about the thematic commonness between 'History of England' and *Persuasion*

in terms of history writing and gender.

Remembering the connection between the two texts, we can understand that the Baronetage is no less than public history made up of ‘facts and dates’, which has traditionally been a male-dominated field. If we take a look at the citation above, the first word ‘[p]recisely’ and the phrase ‘inserting most accurately the day of the months’ seem to mock the ‘correct’ and ‘true’ capitalised History, that cannot possibly exist. Also the perfunctory phrases like ‘in the usual terms’ and ‘all the Marys and Elizabeths’ show something of the boredom and frustration towards existing history also found in ‘History of England’ and Catherine Morland’s well-known statements in *Northanger Abbey*. This early novel contains similar jokes on historical names, and they are observed in the description of heroine’s father: ‘[h]er father was a clergyman, without being neglected, or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard—and he had never been handsome’ (*NA* 5). The subversion of the stereotype of Richard the Third by presenting him as ‘a very respectable man’ reminds us of ‘History of England’, which defies the ordinary histories to devalue Richard. Yet the reason why I especially mention the name Richard here is rather because in *Persuasion* likewise appears ‘neglected’ ‘poor Richard’ (*P* 54), that is, Richard Musgrove, a black sheep. In fact, the novel has other significant historical names. In the last quotation, we can discern a phrase ‘all the Marys and Elizabeths’, which indicates scarcely less than the names of the heroine’s sisters. At the same time they are the names of the two Queens in ‘History of England’, who interested Austen so much (though unhappily, it is difficult to assert that each character in the two works who shares the same names is characteristically alike, for Mary in *Persuasion* is mostly represented as ill-natured). Here, Austen seems to recycle the historical names in the novel. Parrinder notices Austen’s probably deliberate choice of the name Wentworth stemmed from the Straffords, and this is all the more plausible because ‘a single entry in the *Peerage of England* yields Wentworth, Woodhouse, and Watson as potential fictional names’ and ‘[o]ther Austen names with strong Whig associations are Bertrum, Brandon, Churchill, Dashwood, . . . D’Arcy, Fitzwilliam, Russell, and Steele’ (188). Of course it might be a little too ambitious to rely on the repetition, because those personal names such as Mary or Elizabeth, on the other hand, are common and found also in other Austen’s novels. However, if I venture to stick to these clues, it is meaningful that the heroine’s name is Anne, for this is the same name with that

of Queen Anne, James the Second's daughter, who never makes an appearance in Austen's 'History of England'. The absence of that Queen in this work is somehow reminiscent of Anne's neglected situation in *Persuasion* as 'nobody' (P 6). Or it might make us remember Anne Boleyn, the Queen persecuted by Henry VIII, the Tudor King whom Austen disliked.¹¹ Anyway, the memorable expression 'she was only Anne' (P 6) appears to induce readers to doubt somewhat of connotation in the name.

With the intertextuality over *Persuasion* and 'History of England' foregrounded by these suggestive names, we again go back into the close reading of the novel. As I have maintained, the word 'history' at the beginning satirises the public capitalised History, about which Austen joked in the juvenile work, and simultaneously performs a private (though mocking) history of Clarke, who might have newly triggered Austen's interest in history while she was writing *Persuasion*. Afterwards, the word is repeated for seventeen times in this text; the first three of the words including the first one we have taken a look at mean the Baronetage, namely, male History of 'facts and dates', but it is the fourth one that I would like to pay attention to, since here happens a variation. It occurs in the descriptive narrative about Mr Elliot. One long citation is here necessary:

This very awkward history of Mr. Elliot, was still, after an interval of several years, felt with anger by Elizabeth, who had liked the man for himself, and still more for being her father's heir, and whose strong family pride could see only in *him* [emphasis original], a proper match for Sir Walter Elliot's eldest daughter. There was not a baronet from A to Z, whom her *feelings* could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal. Yet so miserably had he conducted himself, that though she was at this present time, (the summer of 1814,) wearing black ribbons for his wife, she could not admit him to be worth thinking of again. . . .

Such were *Elizabeth Elliot's sentiments and sensations*; such the cares to alloy, the agitations to vary, the sameness and the elegance, the prosperity and the nothingness, of her scene of life—such *the feelings* to give interest to a long, uneventful residence in one country circle, to fill the vacancies which there were no habits of utility abroad, no talents or accomplishments for home, to occupy. (P 9, emphasis added)

Here the word ‘history’ is semantically shifted: what was ‘[a] written narrative constituting a continuous chronological record of *important or public events* (especially in a particular place) or of a particular trend, institution, or person’s life’ (*OED*, emphasis added) becomes more like an easy private history which is ‘[t]he *whole* series of past events connected with a particular person, country, institution, or thing’ (*OED*, emphasis added). The fifth appearance of the problematic word, which indicates the course of Anne and Wentworth’s abortive first love, also works in the same way:

More than seven years were gone since *this little history of sorrowful interest* had reached its close; and time had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him,—but she had been too dependant on time alone; no aid had been given in change of place, (except in one visit to Bath soon after the rupture,) or in any novelty or enlargement of society.—No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her *memory*. No second attachment, the only thoroughly natural, happy, and sufficient cure, at her time of life, had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste, in the small limits of the society around them. (*P* 30-31, emphasis added)

Significantly, Anne’s private history is called ‘little’, as if opposed to the public great History.¹² One shared feature in the fourth and fifth usages of history is indeed its close relation with individual experiences. On their first appearance in the Baronetage, Elizabeth and Anne were no more than mere ink stains, known to readers only by their names which told them nothing about their personalities; but through their own private histories, they are transformed from supporting characters (in fact, the opening scene where a heroine is generally supposed to be introduced is usurped by Sir Walter) into rich full-dimensional ones.

What especially highlights the individuality of this ‘little’ history is that it entails vivid recollection of past emotion. For example, Elizabeth’s ‘history’ is something that is ‘awkward’ (*P* 9), brings her ‘anger’ (*P* 9) and ‘disappointment’ (*P* 7), and finally disturbs her frosty ‘sentiments and sensations’ (*P* 9). It is also the case with Anne; her history is ‘sorrowful’ (*P* 30) and reddens her pale cheeks (*P* 27). That past private history gives characters certain richness is what

distinguishes *Persuasion* from the other Austen's novels. While in the others, ongoing actions or episodes stimulate the feelings of characters, in *Persuasion*, the past private history and memory (what readers cannot directly access) are the catalyst for their emotional deepening. This is what makes the decisive difference between the private history and Sir Walter's public history. It is not the memory of Sir Walter's that is listed in the Baronetage but rather that of distant ancestors, and therefore it never affords him any emotional agitation or inner complexity as a character (and his probably poignant experience concerning the death of his wife and son is only available in the public history).¹³ In addition, this stress on emotion is exactly what Austen appears to focus on in 'History of England'. If it is her strategy in 'History of England' to accuse authoritative 'facts and dates' History of a certain degree of hypocrisy, the shift from public towards private history in *Persuasion* is highly suggestive.

It is salutary, as we have seen, to regard Clarke's 'hints'—or more interestingly, in other words, his 'persuasion'—as one feasible source of the theme of history in *Persuasion*.¹⁴ In that novel's excessive way of dramatising history, we can find out a response towards Clarke's advice, which, though he never admits it, is after all a self-centred demand that Austen should write about himself.

This egoistic demand accidentally, or consciously coincides with Austen's artistic desire to realise a private female history. To work this out, in this novel, Austen seems purposely to attempt semantic alteration of the term 'history': from 'the one and only' 'true' male public History which only concerns 'facts and dates' and politically important affairs towards plural and private female histories about individual daily events. The latter particularly emphasises the factor of emotion, which was one solution, or at least one compromise for young Austen to deal with the problem concerning the historian's conscience. Then the shift in *Persuasion* is a sort of declaration to point out the impossibility of the male capitalised History, that was already suggested in 'History of England'. Though their literary genres are quite different, conditionally in terms of the ideology about history, these similarities between the two works might enable us to consider *Persuasion* as a late rewriting of the 'History of England'.

Notes

1 'The choice of a legendary or historical setting remained typical well into the 19th century' (*OED*).

2 As Looser observes, in the long eighteenth century, '[h]istory as a genre (like fiction) did not appear neatly defined and fully formed' (21), and the word 'history' more loosely meant a narrative, as is the case with *The History Tom Jones, A Foundling*. Still here, I think we can consider this term found in *Persuasion* rather in the current sense because of the letters of Clarke which might somehow have inspired the authoress.

3 Many critics have indicated the heroine Anne's extreme femaleness compared to other Austen novels: Brown states that 'she is too "tender", . . . too excessively "feminine"' (136), and Wiltshire notices a 'relationship between femaleness and nursing' (167).

4 Mrs Austen famously comments that 'if Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate' (Austen-Leigh 18). It is interesting that the beheading image is parallel to those of 'History of England' and to the execution metaphor in the above-mentioned letter: 'I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first Chapter' (*L* 326).

5 There might be some similarity between this narrator's attitude in 'History of England' and that in six canonical novels where the narrator cuttingly concludes with a notoriously brief and authoritative comment, problematising the transparency of the preceding narration.

6 Still it does not necessarily mean the prejudice is negative, for Catherine's imaginative one towards General Tilney, in the end, turns out to be true on a metaphorical level. A prejudice, or female ignorance, which Austen 'boasts of', might really be something after all, as Mrs Bennet with these qualities makes an acute observation of difficulties of women denied inheritance of a family estate.

7 Here I do not intend the sensibility Sedgwick terms as 'a certain autoerotic closure, absentation, self-sufficiency' (120); rather, though paradoxical to some extent, the mean sensibility which altruistic Elinor understandably shows.

8 Precisely *Persuasion* was written from August 8, 1815 to August 6, 1816 (*P* xix).

9 The heroine of *Persuasion* Anne is often qualified with the word 'perfect'.

10 Because '[f]ew women could think more of their personal appearance than he did' (*P* 4) as the narrator tells, the unstableness of Sir Walter's gender has often been discussed. Yet in this essay I just focus on his tyrannical and patriarchal aspect, not his material inclination to care too much about his appearance, that makes him compared to women according to the narrator.

11 Austen is actually sympathetic to the unfortunate Queen even going so far as to describe her as 'amiable' (*J* 181) in 'History of England'.

12 Also significant is her famous expression in a letter towards her nephew James Edward Austen: ‘What should I do with your strong, *manly*, spirited Sketches, full of variety & Glow?—How could I possibly join them on to the *little bit* (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces *little* effect after much labour?’ (*L* 337, emphasis added). Along with the repeated ‘little’, the choice of the word ‘labour’ is interesting in that it seems to underline femaleness if we remember another of its meanings, that is, giving birth.

13 It is interesting that Elizabeth defines herself through the Baronetage; she hates to see it, feeling ‘her approach to the years of danger’ (*P* 7). Also Mr Elliot is observed through it: ‘There was not a baronet from A to Z, whom her feelings could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal’ (*P* 9).

14 When Anne warns Elizabeth about Mrs Clay’s design, she responds as following: ‘I think it rather unnecessary in you to be advising to me’ (*P* 38). It might be understood as a subtext to show how Austen actually feels about Clarke’s meddling.

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