

Jane Austen's Reading: The Chawton Years

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Of all the diversions of life, there is none so proper to fill up
its empty spaces as the reading of useful and entertaining authors.
Spectator 93 (16 June, 1711)

Introduction to Jane Austen's Reading

The earliest description of Jane Austen's reading is Henry Austen's account in the 'Biographical Notice of the Author' in the first edition of *Northanger Abbey*, published posthumously in December 1817. James Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* of his aunt (1870) also describes her reading, drawing on the information in the 'Biographical Notice'. Henry and Edward focus firmly on authors considered in the nineteenth century to be 'useful and entertaining'. They both agree that she loved the works of Samuel Johnson, William Cowper, George Crabbe and Samuel Richardson, in particular Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4). Henry Austen tells of her early infatuation with 'Gilpin on the Picturesque', writing also that 'her reading was very extensive in history and belles lettres', and that she was 'intimately acquainted with the merits and defects of the best essays and novels in the English language' ('Biographical Notice', 330). James Edward suggests that what Henry had called 'extensive' reading in history was actually 'the old guides - Goldsmith, Hume and Robertson'. He briefly alludes to her admiration of Sir Walter Scott's poetry and *Waverley* (1814), and quotes her joking determination to read no novels but Maria Edgeworth's, her relatives' and her own. James Edward then turns from Austen's reading: 'It was not, however, what she *knew*, but what she *was*, that distinguished her from others' (Austen-Leigh, 78-80).

Caroline Austen documents Austen's appreciation of the importance of reading, recalling her aunt's advice to 'cease writing till I was 16', and her statement 'that she had herself often wished she had *read* more, and written *less* in the corresponding years of her own life' (Quoted in Le Faye, *Family Record*, 239). Despite her desire to have '*read* more' in her youth, recent scholarship has established that the range of Austen's reading was far wider and deeper than either Henry or James Edward suggest. Isobel Grundy makes the point that Austen read like a potential author from a very early age, looking for what she could use, 'not by quietly absorbing and reflecting it, but by actively engaging, rewriting, often mocking it' (Grundy, 190). Austen did not, as far as is known, make a list of her reading, but her letters and novels refer, either directly or allusively, to a wide variety of texts. As Jocelyn Harris argues, Austen's excellent memory stood her in good stead when it came to employing her reading.

This is not the place for a comprehensive list of the books that Austen read, or the plays that she saw, but it is important to give some idea of the scope of her reading. In addition to those authors named by her brother and her nephew, we know from scattered references in the letters and novels that Austen knew the canonical authors of the Augustan tradition - Swift, Defoe, Pope, Gay and Addison, for example. She read both male novelists - Fielding, Sterne and Richardson - and contemporary female novelists,

those still read today, such as Maria Edgeworth, Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe, and those now largely forgotten: Charlotte Lennox, Sydney Owenson, Regina Maria Roche, Mary Brunton, Rachel Hunter, Henrietta Sykes, Elizabeth Hamilton, Laetitia Matilda Hawkins and Sarah Harriet Burney. She knew poetry by Milton, George Crabbe, Robert Burns, Thomas Campbell, Wordsworth and Byron, and the sermons of Hugh Blair, Thomas Sherlock and Edward Cooper. She mentions conduct literature by Thomas Gisborne, James Fordyce, Jane West and Hannah More, and plays by Shakespeare, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, John Home, Richard Cumberland, George Colman, Hannah Cowley, Susanna Centlivre and Elizabeth Inchbald. She read political history by Thomas Clarkson, historian of the slave trade, and Charles Pasley, historian of the government of India, travelogues by Joseph Barette and Lord Macartney, and the correspondence of Hester Thrale Piozzi and Dr Johnson. She knew works by the French authors Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, Arnaud Berquin and Anne Louise Germaine de Staël, and the Germans, Johann von Goethe and August von Kotzebue. She read the efforts of relations and acquaintances such as Cassandra Cooke and Egerton Brydges, and the nascent novels of her nieces and nephew. These are a sample of those directly mentioned in either her novels or letters; critics have also variously argued that Austen also knew authors as diverse as Chaucer, Locke, Rousseau, Spenser, Wollstonecraft, Godwin and Choderlos de Laclos well enough for their works to form an important influence on her own.

Neither the 'Biographical Notice' nor the *Memoir* gives any indication of the real breadth and eclecticism of Jane Austen's reading, as demonstrated in her letters and the references in her novels, but it is important that both Henry and James Edward are sensitive to what a person's choice of reading says about them. This is not surprising – after all, Austen's own novels frequently display a similar awareness of the part books play in denoting character. Time and again, characters reveal themselves through their responses to literature. We think, for example, of shallow Caroline Bingley, who uses books only as props, taking up the second volume of Mr Darcy's book in a contemptible attempt to gain his attention, in *Pride and Prejudice*, and compare her to *Mansfield Park's* Fanny Price, for whom books are the friends and guides that help her to moral growth. *Northanger Abbey* sets John Thorpe's callow and unthinking rejection of all novels except M.G. Lewis's Gothic shocker *The Monk* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* against Henry and Isabella Tilney's rational liking for all sorts of literature, including novels and history. The cultural resonance of books allows Austen to use them as a sort of convenient shorthand to help her readers swiftly understand her characters. Cultural commentators of Austen's period frequently suggested that 'we are what we read'. In Austen's novels, it might be truer to say that how we use what we read defines us; it is possible, like Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, to reduce reading to an arid collection of clichés, or like Sir Edward Denham in 'Sanditon,' to 'derive only false principles from lessons of morality' (183). Emma Woodhouse, to Knightley's despair in the opening chapters of *Emma*, 'will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience', despite her lists of 'books that she meant to read regularly through [...] and very good lists they were – very well chosen, and very neatly arranged – sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule' (*Emma*, vol. 1, ch. 5). It is also possible, however, for Austen's heroines to turn reading to good account; a 'fondness for reading' is, for Fanny Price, as, we believe, for Austen herself, 'an education in itself' (*Mansfield Park*, vol. 1, ch. 2).

The Exhibition

This exhibition focuses on Jane Austen's reading during the years she lived in Chawton (1809-1817). These books reflect only a tiny proportion of Jane Austen's reading, and thus do not include some of her favourites – Crabbe, Johnson, Edgeworth for example – but have been chosen as a snapshot of her reading during the Chawton years. The books exhibited here are all from Chawton House Library's collections, and a substantial minority come from the Knight collection. At one time, this collection was owned by Jane Austen's brother Edward, who was adopted into the Knight family, and as such it was a library known to and used by Jane Austen herself. We think it probable that at least one of the books exhibited here is the exact copy read by Jane Austen.

The exhibition is structured according to the different kinds of evidence available to us about Austen's reading. Reconstructing the reading experiences of any reader is always a task fraught with interpretative difficulty, but we have tried to combine the best evidence available to ensure that all the works in these cases were actually read or re-read by Austen between 1809 and 1817. We have used direct references to reading experiences in her letters, and references, quotations and allusions in the novels written or redrafted during the Chawton years as our primary evidence. We have also carefully considered the opinions of biographers and scholars to come to our conclusions.

Case One contains books that Jane Austen mentions in letters written during the period under consideration. **Case Two** contains books referenced in novels or minor works written or redrafted between 1809 and 1817, taking Kathryn Sutherland's chronology of composition and publication as our guide. **Case Three** contains books from the Knight Collection that are also discussed in novels or letters in the relevant years, and **Case Four** contains Jane Austen's favourite novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, and the Chawton House Library's manuscript of the Grandison playlet, written in Jane Austen's handwriting, but possibly dictated to her by her niece Jane-Anna-Elizabeth (Anna) Austen, later Lefroy.

We are grateful to the Trustees of Chawton House Library for allowing us to curate this exhibition from material held in the library. Particular thanks go to Dr Sandy Lerner, Chair of the Board of Trustees, whose generous benefaction provided the bulk of the main collection, and to Mr Richard Knight, whose family collection, the Knight collection, is on extended deposit at Chawton House Library. We would also like to thank Jacqui Grainger, Sarah Parry and Helen Scott, colleagues past and present at Chawton House Library, for their generosity in sharing their expertise. We are also grateful to Karen Attar and Olivia Murphy for their help in preparing the exhibition guide.

Case One: Allusions in the Letters

Exhibit 1. Sydney Owenson, *Lady Morgan, Woman; or, Ida of Athens*. London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, Paternoster-Row. 1809. 4v. Vol. I, open at title page.

In January of 1809, as the Austens were preparing to move to Chawton, Jane wrote to Cassandra, 'We have got *Ida of Athens* by Miss Owenson; which must be very clever, because it was written as the Authoress says, in three months. – We have only read the Preface yet; but her Irish Girl does not make me expect much. – If the warmth of her

Language could affect the Body, it might be worth reading in this weather' (*Letters* 17-18 January 1809 to Cassandra Austen). Sydney Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl* had been a runaway success when it was published in 1806, but Jane Austen clearly did not think much of it, although she was fond of other writers of national or regional novels such as Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth. 'The warmth of her language' was noticed by others, as shown in these lines from Leigh Hunt's poem, 'The Bluestocking Revels':

And dear Lady Morgan, look, look how she comes,
With her pulses all beating for freedom like drums,
So Irish, so modish, so mixtish, so wild;
So committing herself, as she talks, like a child,
So trim, yet so easy - polite, yet high-hearted,
That truth and she, try all she can, won't be parted;
She'll put on your fashions, your latest new air,
And then talk so frankly, she'll make you all stare.

Exhibit 2. Anne Grant of Laggan, *Letters from The Mountains; being the real correspondence of a Lady, between the years 1773 and 1803*. London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, Paternoster Row. 1806. 3v. Vol. I, open at title page.

In 1807, while still living in Southampton, Austen mentioned Anne Grant's *Letters from the Mountains* to Cassandra as a recommendation for a present to Martha Lloyd. She continued, 'what they are about, or how many volumes they form I do not know, having never heard of them but from Miss Irvine, who speaks of them as a new & much admired work, & as one which has pleased her highly. - I have enquired for the book here, but find it quite unknown' (*Letters*, 20-22 February 1807 to Cassandra Austen). Six years later, she had finally got hold of the book, read it, and was ready to pass it on, writing 'I have disposed of Mrs Grant for the 2d fortnight to Mrs Digweed' (*Letters*, 9 February 1813 to Cassandra Austen). The reference to the '2d fortnight' suggests that the book belonged to the Chawton Reading Society, and had been borrowed by the Austen ladies, then passed on to the Digweeds. These snippets from Austen's letters remind us that books were relatively expensive luxury items, often bought by circulating libraries or private reading societies and circulated among the members or subscribers. Jane Austen got hold of books in many different ways - reading them in her father's library at Steventon, and her brother's Godmersham library, borrowing from circulating libraries in Bath and Southampton, joining the Chawton Reading Society and borrowing the latest publications from her publisher - but she rarely bought books. Those bought during her youth were sold with her father's before the move to Bath in 1801, and presumably regularly purchasing books was quite simply outside the limited means of the Austen ladies' household during their years in Bath, Southampton and Chawton.

Exhibit 3. Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; or, female difficulties*. London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, Paternoster-Row. 1814. 5v. From Knight collection. Vol. II, open at title page.

In a letter of 23-24 September 1813, Jane Austen mentioned 'Mde. Darblay's new novel' – a novel that can only be *The Wanderer* – to Cassandra in a letter sent from Godmersham Park, the home of her brother Edward. She could not have read the book at this point, since it was not published until 1814, but the first edition of *The Wanderer* appears as an entry in the Godmersham library catalogue, so it is possible that she later read the Godmersham library copy while staying there, and that the copy on display here was the copy she read, either at Chawton, or at Godmersham Park, since books seemed to have travelled on occasion between the two estates. Austen was a great admirer of Frances Burney's work, mentioning Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla* as two of the works 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language' (*Northanger Abbey*, vol.1, ch. 5). She also alludes directly to *Camilla* in 'Sanditon', and paraphrases *Evelina's* Dr. Villars in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Exhibit 4. Eaton Stannard Barrett, *The Heroine; or, adventures of a fair romance reader*. London: Printed for Henry Colburn, Public Library, Conduit-Street, Hanover-Square, and sold by George Goldie, Edinburgh, and John Cumming, Dublin. 1813. 3v. Epigraph on title page. 'L'Histoire d'une femme est toujours un roman [A woman's life story is always a novel]. Vol I, open at page 5, 'The Heroine to the Reader'.

Jane Austen enjoyed reading *The Heroine*, though it seems her elder brother James did not. She wrote: 'I finished the Heroine last night & was very much amused by it. I wonder James did not like it better. It diverted me exceedingly'. She 'tore through' the third volume, and did 'not think it falls off. It is a delightful burlesque, particularly on the Radcliffe style' (*Letters*, 2-3 March 1814 to Cassandra Austen). Austen reworked *Northanger Abbey* some time between 1816 and 1817, and it seems probable that at least some of it is indebted to Barrett's work. We might suspect a reference to *The Heroine* in its ironic first sentence, for example: 'No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine' (*Northanger Abbey*, vol 1. ch. 1). Like Catherine Morland, *The Heroine's* heroine, Cherry Wilkinson, has read more Gothic novels than are really good for her. Like Catherine, Cherry has difficulty differentiating between life and fiction. And like *The Heroine*, *Northanger Abbey* might itself be called 'a delightful burlesque on the Radcliffe style'. *The Heroine* is also parodied in Jane Austen's 'Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters'.

Exhibit 5. William Combe, *The Tour of Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque, a poem*. London: R. Ackermann. 1823. Open at p. 205, plate 25, Syntax and Bookseller.

It is not certain which of William Combe's *Three Tours of Dr Syntax* Jane Austen had in mind when she wrote to Cassandra that 'I have seen nobody in London yet with such a long chin as Dr Syntax, nor Anybody quite so large as Gogmagoglicus' (*Letters* 2-3 March 1814 to Cassandra Austen). However, Deirdre Le Faye identifies the reference as his *Tour in Search of the Picturesque*, and we have chosen to exhibit this 1823 edition of the *Tour in Search of the Picturesque*, which Austen could not of course have known, on two grounds: that we know that she was interested in the picturesque, and to show off Dr Syntax's

remarkable chin. It may be that Austen was thinking of the Thomas Rowlandson illustrations to the 1812 edition, which caricature nose and chin, rather than the text itself, which does not mention his facial features. But as her brother wrote in the 'Biographical Notice', 'she was a warm and judicious admirer of landscape, both in nature and on canvass. At a very early age she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque; and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or men' (330). She kept up with publications on the picturesque, and it therefore seems very probable that she had read the poem, as well as looked at the illustrations. Austen satirizes the fashionable cult of the picturesque in *Sense and Sensibility*, where Edward Ferrars tells Marianne Dashwood:

"You must remember [...] I have no knowledge in the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. [...] It exactly answers my idea of a fine country, because it unites beauty with utility – and I dare say it is a picturesque one too, because you admire it; I can easily believe it to be full of rocks and promontories, grey moss and brush wood, but these are all lost on me. I know nothing of the picturesque [...]"

"It is very true," said Marianne, "that admiration of landscape scenery is become a mere jargon. Every body pretends to feel and tries to describe with the taste and elegance of him who first defined what picturesque beauty was..." (*Sense and Sensibility*, vol. 1, ch. 18)

Exhibit 6. Helen Maria Williams, *A Narrative of the events which have taken place in France with an account of the present state of society and public opinion*. 2nd Edition. London: Printed for John Murray, Albemarle-Street. 1816. Open at title page.

Jane Austen borrowed the first edition of this book from her publisher, John Murray, while staying in London with her brother Henry, writing to Cassandra: 'He [John Murray] has lent us Miss Williams & Scott, & says that any book of his will always be at my service' (*Letters* 24 Nov 1815 to Cassandra Austen). Her reading of this work suggests an interest in contemporary politics and recent foreign history, with which she is rarely credited. Following James Edward's statement that 'the politics of the day occupied very little of her attention' (*Memoir*, 78), for many years critics considered Austen to be an entirely apolitical writer, with little or no interest in contemporary current events. However, more recent scholarly work has reassessed this early view. Austen's reading of the *Narrative of the Events which have lately taken place in France* demonstrates the breadth of her reading, and mention of Scott and Williams in the same breath shows her willingness to read books by those with widely differing political views. Helen Maria Williams was a notorious political radical, an 'unsex'd female' in Richard Polwhele's 1798 poem of the same name, in which he warns women readers in particular away from 'Gallic Freaks' such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Williams. Walter Scott was broadly conservative in his political ideology.

Exhibit 7. Sir Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*. Edinburgh: Printed by James Ballantyne and Co. for Archibald Constable and Co. Edinburgh; and Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, London. 1816. 3v. Edward Knight bookplate. Vol. I, open at title page.

Walter Scott was probably the most popular British writer of Austen's period in both verse and prose. Austen had known his poetry since at least 1808, and admired much of it, and when he turned to novels with *Waverley* in 1814, she jokingly wrote to her niece Anna: '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' (*Letters*, 28 September 1814 to Anna Austen). It is likely that she read all his works published in her lifetime. We know she read *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake* and the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. From her letters, we know that she planned to read *Waverley* (and doubtless did so), and she certainly read *The Antiquary*, mentioning it humorously in a letter to James Edward in 1816: 'we could make our Heroine read it [a sermon by Henry Austen] aloud of a Sunday Evening, just as well as Isabella Wardour in the *Antiquary*, is made to read the History of the Hartz Demon in the ruins of St Ruth - tho' I believe, upon recollection, Lovell is the Reader' (*Letters*, 16-17 December 1816 to James Edward Austen). Austen read Scott's review of *Emma*, writing that 'The Authoress of *Emma* has no reason I think to complain of her treatment in it - except in the total omission of Mansfield Park' (*Letters*, 1 April 1816 to John Murray), but there is no evidence that she knew that the 'clever' author of the review was Scott, anonymity being a policy of the *Quarterly Review*, as indeed it was for every other literary review of the period. Austen certainly never knew the extent of Scott's admiration for her: he wrote in his journal that he considered 'her talent for describing the involvement and feelings and characters of ordinary life' to be 'the most wonderful I ever met with' (Scott, Journal, entry for 14 March 1826).

Exhibit 8. Jane West, *Alicia De Lacy, an historical romance*. London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, Paternoster-Row. 1814. 4v. Vol. IV, open at page 284-84, 'Historical Notices'.

On 28 September, 1814, Jane Austen wrote to her niece Anna that she was 'quite determined [...] not to be pleased with Mrs West's *Alicia de Lacy*, should I ever meet with it, which I hope I may not. - I think I *can* be stout against any thing written by Mrs West. - I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours & my own' (*Letters*, 28 September 1814 to Anna Austen). This was, of course, a joke from *Northanger Abbey*'s great defender of the genre of the novel as 'productions [that] have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world'. Austen continued voraciously to read novels, including historical romances like *Alicia de Lacy*, throughout the following years. She never became a fan of Jane West's conservative and didactic work, though she does express astonished admiration for her multitasking abilities in a letter of 1816 to Cassandra: 'And how good Mrs West cd have written such Books & collected so many hard words, with all her family cares, is still more a matter of astonishment! Composition seems to me Impossible, with a head full of Joints of Mutton & doses of rhubarb' (*Letters*, 8-9 September 1816 to Cassandra Austen).

Case 2 Allusions in novels from the Chawton years

Exhibit 9. Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, in The Strand. 1808. 2v. Vol I, open at title page.

In a piece of Austen's juvenilia, 'Catharine; or, The Bower,' an old-fashioned aunt berates her niece for sitting alone in the garden with a young man. She says: 'I had hoped to see you respectable and good; to see you able and willing to give an example of Modesty and Virtue to all the Young people hereabouts. I bought you Blair's Sermons, and *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, I gave you the key to my own Library, and borrowed a great many good books of my Neighbours for you, all to this purpose' (*Juvenilia*, 287). Peter Sabor writes 'Austen originally wrote "Seccar's explanation of the Catechism', alluding to *Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England* (1769) by Archbishop Thomas Secker. Secker's work was popular in its time, but Jane Austen might have found it dated by the early 1800s. More's novel, about a bachelor in search of the perfect wife (his name derives from *caelebs*, Latin for unmarried) caught Jane Austen's attention as soon as it was published. In a letter to Cassandra of 24 January 1809, she writes that 'my disinclination for it before was affected, but now it is real; I do not like the Evangelicals'. A week later, she added that in the name "Coelebs, there is pedantry & affection. – Is it written only to Classical Scholars?"' (*Juvenilia*, 287, n. 114). Given the date of the publication of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, it seems likely that Austen returned to some of her juvenile works once she and the family were settled in Chawton Cottage, updating the literary reference in 'Catharine' to a more suitable title, one uppermost in her mind because of the correspondence with Cassandra earlier in the year.

Exhibit 10. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals, a comedy*. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Covent Garden. London: Printed for John Wilkie, No. 71, St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1775. Open at Act 1 Scene 2.

Jane Austen was a keen theatre-goer, as demonstrated by (among others) Penny Gay in *Jane Austen and the Theatre*. In *Mansfield Park*, the company reject a number of plays, including *The Rivals*, before finally settling on Elizabeth Inchbald's translation of August von Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*: 'All the best plays were run over in vain. Neither Hamlet, nor Macbeth, nor Othello, nor Douglas, nor the Gamester, presented any thing that could satisfy even the tragedians; and the Rivals, the School for Scandal, Wheel of Fortune, Heir at Law, and a long etcetera, were successively dismissed with yet warmer objections...' (*Mansfield Park*, vol. 1, ch. 14). The rejection of 'the best plays' in favour of *Lovers' Vows*, a play notorious for its validation of free love, shows the intellectual nullity and the moral risk involved in the projected acting scheme. This copy of *The Rivals* is open at the scene where Lydia Languish hides her more risqué books such as *The Innocent Adultery* under a copy of Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man*. This scene must surely have appealed to Austen, given her interest in the use of books to denote character.

Exhibit 11. *The Works of the Right Hon. Lord Byron.* London: Printed for John Murray, Albermarle-Street, 1815. 2v. Edward Knight Bookplate. Vol. I, open at p. 54-55, plate from 'Bride of Abydos', painted by Thomas Stothard, engraved by F. Engleheart.

In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot kindly draws out the heartbroken Captain Benwick by talking about literature. Both characters read the latest productions, and delight in discussing the two most popular authors of the time, Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott:

Though shy, he did not seem reserved; it had rather the appearance of feelings glad to burst their usual restraints; and having talked of poetry, the richness of the present age, and gone through a brief comparison of opinion as to the first-rate poets, trying to ascertain whether *Marmion* or *The Lady of the Lake* were to be preferred, and how ranked the *Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*; and moreover, how the *Giaour* was to be pronounced, he shewed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of the one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other; he repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly [...] she ventured to recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and on being requested to particularize, mentioned such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurance. (*Persuasion*, vol. 1, ch. 11)

Austen could have read *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos* any time between their publication in 1813 and the writing of *Persuasion* in 1817. See also Exhibit 21.

Exhibit 12. Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest: interspersed with some pieces of poetry.* By the authoress of "A Sicilian Romance," &c. London: Printed for T. Hookham and J. Carpenter, New and Old Bond Street. 1791. 3v. Vol I, open at title page.

Exhibit 13. Regina Maria Roche, *The Children of the Abbey, a tale. In two volumes.* 4th Edition. Dublin: Printed by P Wogan, 23, Old-Bridge, 1801. Vol I, open at title page.

The Romance of the Forest and *The Children or the Abbey* are books recommended to Robert Martin by Harriet Smith in *Emma*. Harriet tells Emma: 'He has read a good deal – but not what you would think any thing of. He reads the Agricultural Reports and some other books, that lay in one of the window seats – but he reads all *them* to himself. But sometimes of an evening, before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the Elegant Extracts – very entertaining. And I know he has read the Vicar of Wakefield. He never read the Romance of the Forest, nor the Children of the Abbey. He had never

heard of such books before I mentioned them, but he is determined to get them now as soon as ever he can' (*Emma*, vol. 1, ch. 4). Gothic novels such as these appear also in *Northanger Abbey*, where both Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe are addicted to *The Castle of Udolpho*, and Isabella reels off a list of 'ten or twelve more of the same kind' (there are actually seven): '*Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries*'. They also propose to read *The Italian* together (*Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 6). It seems probable that Austen read Radcliffe and Roche's works as they came out in the 1790s, and re-read *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Children of the Abbey* just before or during the writing of *Emma*, as both are particularly relevant in terms of their plot. Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan point out: 'Both novels tell the story of young women of doubtful birth, Adeline and Amanda, who are, at the last, revealed to be heirs to noble titles and estates, discoveries which permit them to marry the well-bred young men that they love. They offer Harriet, the illegitimate "parlour boarder" at Mrs Goddard's school, precisely the kind of wish-fulfilling fantasy that she might be expected to crave' (*Emma*, Introduction, p. liii). Harriet is disappointed when Robert Martin forgets to get *The Romance of the Forest*, and Emma takes the opportunity to suggest that this demonstrates his unsuitability as a suitor.

Exhibit 14. Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote or, the Adventures of Arabella*. London: Printed for A. Millar, Over-against Catharine-street in the Strand. 1752. 2v. at the end of the dedication on page vi, under 'The Author', 'Charlotte Lennox' appears in an eighteenth-century hand. Vol. I, open at dedication.

Jane Austen read *The Female Quixote* at least twice, as shown by this letter to Cassandra: "'Alphonsine" [an 1806 novel by Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis; see below] did not do. We were disgusted in twenty pages, as, independent of a bad translation, it has indelicacies which disgrace a pen hitherto so pure; and we changed it for the "Female Quixotte", which now makes our evening amusement; to me a very high one, as I find the work quite equal to what I remembered it. Mrs F[rancis] A[usten], to whom it is new, enjoys it as one could wish; the other Mary [Mrs James Austen], I believe, has little pleasure from that or any other book' (*Letters*, 7 Jan, 1807 to Cassandra Austen). Its heroine, who takes literally the romances that she reads, seems to have influenced Austen's depiction of a number of characters, among them *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine Morland and *Emma's* Harriet Smith (see above). She may also have had the book in mind when writing 'Sanditon' in 1817, as in this fragment we find a heroine who forms a corrective to the female quixotes of her earlier novels, Charlotte Heywood, who is 'a very sober-minded young lady, sufficiently well-read in novels to supply her imagination with amusements, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them' ('Sanditon', ch. 6).

Exhibit 15. Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Adele et Théodore, ou Lettres sur L'Education, contenant tous les principes relatifs aux trois differens plans d'éducation des Princes, des jeunes personnes, & des homes*. Paris: chez les Libraires Associés. 1782. Open at title page.

Exhibit 16. Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Adelaide and Theodore or letters on education: containing all the principles relative to three different plans of education; to that of princes, and to those of young persons of both sexes translated from the French of*

Madame la Comtesse de Genlis. London: Printed for C. Bathurst, in Fleet-Street; and T. Cadell, in the Strand. 1783. Vol I, open at page with inscription (see below).

The Godmersham Park library catalogue of 1818 shows that there is a copy of the French edition of Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *Adèle et Théodore* in the library collection: the publication date is incorrectly given as 1772, perhaps owing to a misreading of the roman numerals on the title page – a not uncommon error in the 1818 catalogue. The French work was in fact first published ten years later, in 1782, and was a success across Western Europe, with Dutch, Italian, Polish, Spanish and Russian translations appearing in the late-eighteenth century, and throughout the nineteenth century. It is a hybrid epistolary novel/treatise on education, focusing on the education of the female child, and providing her with a lengthy reading list to follow through her education from childhood to marriage.

It is not known whether Austen read the French originals of Genlis's work, or indeed those of any other French writers. However, her letter to James Stanier Clarke, claiming she is 'a Woman, who [...] knows only her Mother-tongue & has read very little in that' (*Letters*, 11 December 1815) belies the evidence of reading French literature in translation that can be found in Austen's letters. She writes to Cassandra from Steventon in November 1800 'having just finished the first volume of [Genlis's] *les Veillees de Chateau*, I think it a good opportunity for beginning a letter to you while my mind is stored with Ideas worth transmitting' (*Letters*, 8-9 November 1800 to Cassandra Austen), and almost 16 years later, in a letter to her niece Caroline from Chawton in March 1816, she writes of having lent 'Aunt Frank the 1st vol. of *Les Veillees du Chateau*, for Mary Jane to read' (*Letters*, 13 March 1816 to Caroline Austen). Both the French title of the work, and the use of the French names 'Olimpe et Theophile' for two of the characters in the novel, perhaps suggest that it was not Thomas Holcroft's 1785 translation, *The Tales of the Castle*, but rather the original French publication of *Les Veillees du Chateau*, published alongside *Adèle et Théodore* in 1782, and as a companion volume to the novel, that Austen read. In the case of *Adèle et Théodore*, however, the situation is less clear. Certainly it is the English title of the novel *Adelaide and Theodore*, that Austen quotes at the end of *Emma*, although she uses the French version of the names of the main characters: 'She has had the advantage, you know, of practicing on me,' she continued – 'like La Baronne d'Almane on La Comtesse d'Ostalis, in *Madame de Genlis's Adelaide and Theodore*, and we shall now see her own little Adelaide educated on a more perfect plan' (*Emma*, vol. 3, ch. 17). The first edition of the English translation on display here (there were four editions in total, in 1783, 1784, 1788 and 1796) is a recent acquisition for Chawton House Library, purchased in 2007. It identifies the unknown female translators for the first time. The inscription reads:

To the Rev.d Chr. Hunter from the *Editors and Translators who were assisted most kindly by him in this their labour 1783.

*Mrs Watson of Essex and her daughters (of Norman House, Stansted)

It was not uncommon for translation to be carried out as a group activity in the late eighteenth century: it was a suitable female accomplishment, and an important part of a young girl's education, as Austen's loan of *Les Veillees du Chateau* to her young niece suggests. Like the practice of taking extracts, it turned women's reading into an active,

rather than what was seen as a dangerously passive, occupation. In the case of *Adelaide and Theodore*, three women seemed to have divided the three volumes between them, and hidden behind the mask of anonymity: the preface to the 1784 edition identifies them only as

some Ladies, who through misfortunes, too common at this time, are reduced from ease and opulence, to the necessity of applying, to the support of life, those accomplishments which were given them in their youth, for the amusement and embellishment of it.

Exhibit 17. William Cowper, *The Task*. London: Printed for John Sharpe, Duke Street, Piccadilly; by C. and C. Whittingham, Chiswick. 1825. Montagu G Knight bookplate. Inscription in ink on fly-leaf: 'Adela Portal, from her affectionate Brother, Melville. April 7th 1830'. Adela Portal was Montagu G Knight's mother. Open at Montagu G. Knight's Bookplate.

According to her brother, Cowper was Jane Austen's 'favourite moral writer [...] in verse' ('Biographical Notice', 330), and he was a favourite poet of many British readers throughout the nineteenth century. This copy of *The Task* is too late an edition for Austen herself to have read, but it eventually ended up in Austen's great nephew's library at Godmersham and then finally in the library at Chawton. Austen quotes from or alludes to Cowper more frequently than any other poet in her novels and letters. Fanny Price quotes *The Task* in *Mansfield Park*: "'Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does not it make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen Avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited?'" (*Mansfield Park*, vol. 1, Ch. 6). *The Task* is also quoted in *Emma*: 'When he [Mr Knightley] was again in their company, he could not help remembering what he had seen; nor could he avoid observations which, unless it were like Cowper and his fire at twilight, "Myself creating what I saw", brought him yet stronger suspicion of there being a something of private liking, of private understanding even, between Frank Churchill and Jane' (*Emma*, vol 3, ch. 5). Jane Austen alludes to *The Task* in a letter of 8-9 February 1807 to Cassandra, '...at my own particular desire he procures us some Syringas. I could not do without a Syringa, for the sake of Cowper's Line'. The line in question is from 'The Winter Walk at Noon', VI, lines 149-50: '...Laburnum, rich/ In streaming gold; syringa, iv'ry pure'. There are at least four further references to Cowper in letters dating from 1798 to 1813. The Rev. George Austen read Cowper aloud to the family in the evenings, as we know from a letter of 1798, and there is little doubt that he was a poet who came constantly to Jane's mind.

Case 3 - Books from the Knight Collection

All the books exhibited in this case come from the Knight Collection. They are all also to be found in the Godmersham Library Catalogue of 1818, and thus are books that would have been available to Jane Austen when she visited her brother, Edward Knight.

Exhibit 18. 'Library Catalogue Godmersham Park 1818'. 2 vols. (Godmersham, c. 1818-c. 1842), open at final page.

This manuscript catalogue of the library at Godmersham Park, the main residence of Austen's brother Edward, was presumably started in 1818, as this is the date embossed on the cover. However, there are books listed which were published as late as the early 1840s, so clearly the catalogue was maintained and updated over a number of years. The library would have been built up by succeeding generations; Edward inherited it together with the property, but clearly he continued to acquire new works for the collection. Jane Austen made extended visits to her brother and his family at Godmersham, and certainly knew the library; on one such visit, she wrote:

The Comfort of the Billiard Table here is very great. – It draws all the Gentlemen to it whenever they are within, especially after dinner, so that my Br Fanny & I have the Library to ourselves in delightful quiet. (*Letters*, 14 October 1813 to Cassandra Austen)

The library was clearly central to life at Godmersham; earlier that year, she told Cassandra that 'we live in the Library except at Meals' (*Letters*, 23-24 September 1813).

As is to be expected, most works in the Godmersham Library date from 1700 onwards, when the number of books being published increased dramatically, but there are a number of seventeenth-century works included and even a handful of books produced in the 1500s: the oldest work listed is a 1523 edition of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*.

The library includes books in several languages as well as English. There are texts (usually in the original Greek or Latin) by classical Greek and Roman writers and philosophers, as would befit a gentleman's library at this time, including works by Plutarch, Plato, Homer, Sophocles, Epictetus, Euripides, Horace, Virgil, Ovid and so on. There are a substantial number of French books (including works by major figures in eighteenth-century French philosophy, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, and classic works of French fiction such as *Gil-Blas*), several books in Italian and at least one in German.

In terms of the subjects included, much of what is in the Godmersham library probably reflects the interests of many such country house libraries at the time. There are books on travel (not just around Britain and Europe but also much further afield, including journeys to Egypt, Syria, Africa, north America and India); history books (mainly English history but there are also histories of Europe more generally, and of specific countries or regions such as Greece, Russia and the Ottoman empire); many works on religion, including books of common prayer, several seventeenth-century bibles, and a significant number of collections of sermons by various authors; examples of conduct literature, such as works by Jane West, Hester Chapone and Hannah More; books about architecture and painting; parliamentary records (more than one owner of Godmersham Park was an MP); works on science and medicine; dictionaries (including two editions of Samuel Johnson's) and works on grammar (not just English but also Greek); and a selection of periodicals, such as a 1758-1791 run of *The Annual Register*. Unsurprisingly, given that this is the library of landed gentry, there are books on farming, agriculture and horsemanship, as well as gardening and landscape, and there are also a number of books on Kent and the local area. A glimpse into Godmersham leisure pursuits is offered by *A Short Treatise on the Game of Whist* (by Edmund Hoyle, 1746), and *Chess Analysed* (F. D. Philidor, 1773).

In terms of literature, as one would expect, there are works by many of the major figures, including Shakespeare (three editions of the complete works), Milton, Dryden, and Pope. There are also a significant number of novels in the library: Austen's favourite, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1810 edition); Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749); Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760), and Jonathan Swift's *Travels ... by Lemuel Gulliver* (1726). There are, in addition, many titles that are much less well-known today: for example, *Thinks-I-to-Myself* by Robert Nares (1812, 2nd ed.) and *The Placid Man: or, Memoirs of Sir Charles Beville*, by Charles Jenner (1770). The novel collection includes a number of novels by women – works by the well-known and popular writers Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, and others: Harriet and Sophia Lee's *Canterbury Tales* (1804, 4th ed.); Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) and *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766); Frances Brooke's *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763); Catherine Parry's *Eden Vale* (1784) and Jane Porter's *The Pastor's Fire-Side* (1817) are some examples. There are several novels by French women writers, testimony to the importance and popularity of these writers in eighteenth-century England. These works include *Letters written by a Peruvian Princess* by Françoise d'Issembourg d'Happoncourt de Grafigny (or Graffigny: both spellings are used and no less than two English editions of this hugely popular and influential novel appear in the catalogue, as well as one in the original French); *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby, à Milady Henriette Campley, son amie* by Marie Jeanne de Heurles Laboras de Mézières Riccoboni (1760, 4th ed.), and, as previously discussed, Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *Adèle et Théodore, ou, Lettres sur l'éducation* (1782). The implication is that the family at Godmersham (or at least some members) were not only novel-readers, but also valued their novels enough to retain them, accommodate them on the library shelves and document them in the catalogue along with the rest of the collection.

At the end of the Godmersham Library catalogue, underneath the entries for *Self-Control*, *Marmion* (see exhibits nineteen and twenty, below) and several other works Austen may have read, a small number of books are recorded as having been 'Removed to the Drawg. room' from the library. Presumably these were family favourites or those books which were to be given pride of place. Among these treasured books are the *History of Sir Charles Grandison* (see case four, exhibits twenty-five and twenty-six, below), works by Maria Edgeworth, Frances Burney, and Robert Southey: and, of course, all six novels by Austen herself.

Exhibit 19. Mary Brunton, *Self-control: a novel*. 3rd Edition. Edinburgh: Printed for George Ramsay & Co. For Manners and Miller, Edinburgh; and Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, London. 1811. Montagu G Knight bookplate. Vol. I, open at title page.

In April of 1811, Jane wrote to Cassandra that she had 'tried to get Self-controul, but in vain. – I *should* like to know what her [Mrs Knight's] Estimate is – but I am always half afraid of finding a novel *too clever* – & of finding my own story & my own people all forestalled' (Letters, 30 April 1811 to Cassandra Austen). On 11 October 1813, she wrote from Godmersham Park, 'I am looking over Self Control again, & my opinion is confirmed of its' being an excellently-meant, excellently-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does. – ' (Letters, 11-12 October 1813 to Cassandra Austen). The copy shown here is in all probability the very

copy that Austen was 'looking over' in 1813, listed in the 1818 Godmersham catalogue (see exhibit eighteen, above).

Exhibit 20. Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion a tale of Flodden Field*. 4th Edition. Edinburgh: Printed by J. Ballantyne and Co. For Archibald Constable and Company, Edinburgh; and William Miller, Albemarle-Street, and John Murray, London. 1808. Edward Knight bookplate. Open at title page.

Exhibit 21. Sir Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake, a poem*. Illustrated edition. London: Charles Tilt, Fleet Street. 1839. Montagu G Knight's bookplate. Inscription: on the coloured page, before the fly-leaf, is written in ink: 'Marianne Knight a new year gift from her very affect^{ate} sister Louisa Knight Jan 1 1845'. Nine engraved illustrations within the text. Open at title page and plate one, 'Ellen Douglas and Fitz-James'.

The Knight collection contains three separate editions of *The Lady of the Lake*, the third and fourth Ballantyne editions of 1810, both of which Austen may have read. We have chosen to display this later edition, the property of Austen's niece, for the charming illustrations. On 20 June 1808, Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra, 'Ought I to be very much pleased with *Marmion*? - as yet I am not. - James reads it aloud in the Eveng...'. (*Letters*, 20 Jun 1808 to Cassandra Austen). Although she was not at first impressed, she liked the work well enough to buy a copy for her brother Charles in January of 1809, and to appropriate some lines from it to her own purposes in a letter of 1813. Talking of the first edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, she writes: 'There are a few Typical errors - & a "said he" or a "said she" would sometimes make the Dialogue more immediately clear - but "I do not write for such dull Elves / As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves"' (*Letters*, 29 Jan, 1813 to Cassandra Austen). The actual lines are *Marmion*, VI. 38: 'I do not rhyme to that dull elf / Who cannot image to himself'. She alludes to the *Lady of the Lake* in June of 1811, writing: 'We began Pease on Sunday, but our gatherings are very small - not at all like the Gathering in the *Lady of the Lake*' (*Letters*, 6 June 1811 to Cassandra Austen). These works are also alluded to in *Persuasion* (see entry for exhibit 11, above).

Exhibit 22. William Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare, volume the second. Containing, Love's Labour Lost. A Midsummer-Night's Dream. The Merchant of Venice. As You Like It. The Taming of the Shrew. All's Well that Ends Well*. London: Printed for J. Tonson, and the rest of the proprietors. Two title pages giving different publication dates (1635 and 1735); actual date of publication 1725 [?]. Open at ink inscription which reads 'John Winder Lyon 1807' 'John Winder Lyon 1808'; in pencil 'John Winder Lyon 1810'. Also in pencil 'The gift of'; 'To Henry Austen Cr' [Commoner: a fee-paying pupil at Winchester School] 'July 1812'. The Henry Austen in question here is Austen's nephew, Edward (Austen) Knight's fourth child, born 1797, and at school in Winchester between 1810 and 1814.

Jane Austen frequently quotes or alludes to Shakespeare. As Henry Crawford says in *Mansfield Park*, Shakespeare is 'part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct' (*Mansfield Park*, vol. 3, ch. 3). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is quoted by Emma Woodhouse in *Emma*: 'There does seem to be something in the air of Hartfield

which gives love exactly the right direction, and sends it into the very channel where it ought to flow. "The course of true love never did run smooth - " A Hartfield edition of Shakespeare would have a long note on that passage' (*Emma*, vol. 1, ch. 9). Jocelyn Harris suggests that this play is a significant intertext in *Emma*: 'When Emma asserts in defiance of Shakespeare that the course of true love can run smooth at Hartfield, she reveals not only her enchanting hubris but a hint that Jane Austen had at least a scrap of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in her head when she wrote *Emma*. I believe one can say more. Just as predecessors provided her with controlling designs and inspiration in earlier works, so this comedy, even more thoroughly, lies behind *Emma*' (*Jane Austen's Art of Memory*, 169-187). There were several unidentified editions of Shakespeare in the library at Godmersham in 1818. We do not know which of them, she used, but it does not seem likely that Austen would have relied on this copy, a gift to her nephew in 1812, when structuring the plot of *Emma*. We have chosen to exhibit this copy here to demonstrate the ways in which books frequently passed between members of the Austen family as gifts.

Exhibit 23. *The New Baronetage of England: containing, as well as a concise genealogical history, as the present state and alliances of the English Baronets, and Baronets of Great Britain, from the institution of the order in 1611, to the union with Ireland, at the close of the year 1800; with their armorial bearings, correctly engraved; and a list of the Baronets of the United Kingdom since created.* Vol II. London: Printed for William Miller, Old Bond-Street, and Edmund Lloyd, Harley Street. June 1804. Montagu G Knight bookplate.

This copy has been annotated at the following entries: pp. 489-490, p. 498, pp. 621-622, p. 792, p. 864. Open at the entry for Bridges, pp. 566-567. This has been heavily annotated. Since the notes were made, the pages have been re-trimmed and possibly rebound. This has resulted in the loss of some of the annotations which refer to marriages, deaths and births within the Bridges family, baronets of Goodnestone Park, Goodnestone-next-Wingham, Kent. At the bottom of p. 567 it is possible to read the following: 'x married 1791, Edw^d. Austen Esq. [?] Godmersham Park, Kent'. The rest of the annotation has been damaged by cropping but it seems to refer to the births of Edward (Austen) Knight's children. Within the entry for Bridges the entry 'Elizabeth born May 23, 1773' has been highlighted by lines drawn above and below and what appears to be a cross (x) at the end. This neatly ties in with the cross (x) at the beginning of the annotated entry for Edward Austen at the foot of the page. It is likely that either Elizabeth Bridges or Edward (Austen) Knight annotated this book. Perhaps the book originally belonged to Elizabeth who then brought it to Godmersham on her marriage to Edward in 1791.

The *Baronetage* features in *Persuasion*: '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 [...] he could read his own history with an interest which never failed' (*Persuasion*, vol. 1, ch. 1). There are several copies of the *Baronetage* and the *Peerage* in the Knight Collection; Austen could have been familiar with any or all of them, including this copy. Although we cannot accurately date the annotations, it is possible that the interest in family history demonstrated by the annotations of the Bridges entry suggested Sir Walter's additions to the Elliot family's entry in the *Baronetage* in *Persuasion*.

Exhibit 24. James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women, in two volumes.* 8th Edition. London: Printed for T. Cadell in the Strand, and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall. 1775. Montagu G Knight bookplate. Marginalia on page 110. Open at vol. I, Sermon VII, p. 278: on young womens' reading.

Didactic literature abounds in advice about what young women should and should not read. Novels are frequently execrated, while books like Fordyce's are recommended. Jane Austen, however, clearly considered Fordyce's *Sermons* to be a byword for dullness, neither useful nor entertaining. In *Pride and Prejudice*, she creates a vividly humorous scene where the lumpish Mr. Collins quite literally judges a book by its cover:

Mr Bennet was [...] glad to invite him to read aloud to the ladies. Mr Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library) he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels. Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed. – Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce's *Sermons*. Lydia gaped as he opened the volume, and before he had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, she interrupted him...' (*Pride and Prejudice*, vol. 1 ch. 14)

The Austen family were 'great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so' (Letters, 18-19 December 1798 to Cassandra Austen), and they often borrowed novels from the circulating libraries. The joke is therefore on Mr Collins; he is unable to appreciate that a novel might be both entertaining and instructive, and so bores the girls with a reading from Fordyce.

Case 4 *Sir Charles Grandison.*

Exhibit 25. Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison; in a series of letters.* London: Printed for T. Payne; G. Robinson; W. Lowndes; Wilkie and Robinson; J. Walker; R. Lea; J. Nunn; Lackington and Co.; C. Law; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; Cadell and Davies; J. K. Newman; Crosby and Co.; S. Bagster; J. Booker; J. Asperne; and Johnson and Co. 1810. 7v. Montagu G Knight bookplate. Open at vol. II, p. 76.

According to her brother, her nephew and other family tradition, *Sir Charles Grandison* was one of Jane Austen's very favourite novels. She read and re-read it many times. Henry Austen wrote that 'Richardson's power of creating, and preserving the consistency of his characters, as particularly exemplified in "Sir Charles Grandison", gratified the natural discrimination of her mind, whilst her taste secured her from the errors of his prolix style and tedious narrative' ('Biographical Notice', 330). James Edward went further in the *Memoir*, claiming that 'her knowledge of Richardson's works was such as no one is likely again to acquire [...] Every circumstance narrated in *Sir Charles Grandison*, all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her; and the wedding days of Lady L. and Lady G. were as well remembered as if they had been living friends' (*Memoir*, 79). Jane Austen certainly referred frequently and familiarly to *Sir Charles Grandison* and its characters. In September of 1813, she likened a cap of her own to one in the novel: 'It will

be white satin and lace, and a little white flower perking out of the left ear, like Harriot Byron's feather' (*Letters*, 15-16 September 1813 from London, to Cassandra Austen). A month later, she jokingly answered a letter of Cassandra's as follows: 'Dear me! What is to become of me! Such a long Letter! Two and forty Lines in the 2d Page. - Like Harriot Byron I ask, what am I to do with my Gratitude? I can do nothing but thank you and go on' (*Letters*, 11-12 Oct 1813 to Cassandra Austen). *Sir Charles Grandison* is a favourite with Mrs Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, though the vacuous Isabella Thorpe's friend Miss Andrews considers it heavy going:

"It is so odd to me, that you should never have read *Udolpho* before; but I suppose Mrs. Morland objects to novels."

"No, she does not. She very often reads *Sir Charles Grandison* herself; but new books do not fall in our way."

"*Sir Charles Grandison*! That is an amazing horrid book, is it not? I remember Miss Andrews could not get through the first volume."

"It is not like *Udolpho* at all; but yet I think it is very entertaining."
(*Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 6)

The book's influence can also be seen in a number of pieces from Jane Austen's juvenile writings, most notably in the character of Charles Adams in 'Jack and Alice'. The copy displayed here is from the Knight collection, although Austen knew the text before 1810, the date of this edition.

Exhibit 26. 'Sir Charles Grandison', manuscript play in five acts in Jane Austen's hand. Five sections of pages of varying sizes, forming five (perhaps originally four) small booklets.

In this manuscript, the five lengthy volumes of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54) become a very short five-act play. It was probably designed to be acted in private, in front of an audience who knew the source text well, and thus provides useful evidence of the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century vogue for private theatricals, both in the Austen household and more widely in Europe (see exhibit ten for a brief discussion of how selecting a play for private performance informs the plot of *Mansfield Park*). The playlet focuses on the Harriet Byron plot, omitting the sections of the original set in Italy.

Austen family tradition suggested that the adaptation was dictated to Austen by her niece, Jane-Anna-Elizabeth ('Anna', 1793-1872) the daughter of her eldest brother James (1765-1843), and a member of the most literary branch of Austen's immediate family. Like the family, scholars are united in agreeing that the handwriting is Austen's own, although the heavy corrections and crossings-out are unlike those to be found in Austen's other manuscripts. In 1977, Brian Southam first made the suggestion that the work was likely to have been written by Austen herself, and published his findings in 1980 as 'not "a complete new novel", but something equally unexpected, 'Sir Charles Grandison', a new play'. Southam dates the bulk of the composition at around 1800, when Austen would have been twenty-four, and argues that the play was probably started in her youth, and picked up at this later date. Since his publication, leading Austen scholars

have expressed both agreement and scepticism. The evidence provided by both the watermarks (undated paper is used for Act one, and later sections are watermarked 1796 and 1799) and by other works that Austen was composing in her teenage years and by 1800, is in itself open to interpretation. Many scholars have relied on the textual evidence, which is simply that 'Sir Charles Grandison' is a poorly-written minor work, incompatible with the achievements of a highly accomplished writer who writes better in her teenage years. Linda Bree and Janet Todd, the editors of the *Later Manuscripts* volume of the Cambridge University Press edition of Austen's work see 'no compelling reason' to challenge the family tradition's attribution of the play to Anna.

This is not the place to challenge or confirm attribution, or indeed to rehearse the lively critical debate of recent decades. As a piece of work that Austen was involved with, regardless of how big a role she played in the composition, 'Sir Charles Grandison' is an important manuscript for Chawton House Library – one of the jewels of the collection – and a charming material object in its own right. Its existence provides concrete evidence of the collective nature of the extended Austen family's reading, and says much too about the enjoyment that several generations of this family obtained from reading, rereading, discussing, adapting, lampooning, quoting from and laughing about canonical eighteenth-century novels.

The play was performed, by undergraduate students at the University of Southampton in full costume and with a drawing-room set, in the Great Hall at Chawton House Library in December 2007 as part of the bicentennial celebrations of Austen's arrival in Southampton. Cast and audience alike were amused by the entertainment, although it is clear that comprehension was impeded by a lack of familiarity with Richardson's novel: few twenty-first century readers can claim that Richardson's characters are for them 'living friends'. This is a useful reminder of how different our horizon of expectations is from Austen's own, and of that of her contemporary readers, and of how important an understanding of Austen's reading is to an understanding of her novels. Austen frequently alludes elliptically to the literary works, characters or authors that she, her family and her friends knew well, drawing on the powerful potential of shared reading to create a bond between author and reader. Katherine Mansfield once wrote of Jane Austen that 'every admirer of the novels' feels that he or she has become the 'secret friend' of the author (Mansfield, 304). Our 'friendship' with Austen, or in other words, our better comprehension of her novels, can only be strengthened and deepened when we properly understand her references to the books she read.

Knight Family Bookplates

The following are some examples of bookplates used by members of the Knight family at Godmersham and Chawton in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and still to be found in the Knight collection today.

Thomas Knight I (1701 -1781)

Thomas Knight's family name was Brodnax, and he was the first member of the family to link the Chawton and Godmersham estates. In 1727, he changed his name to May in order to inherit the Godmersham Estate, changing it again to Knight in 1738 to inherit the

Chawton estate. His son, also called Thomas Knight, made Edward Austen (later Knight) his heir to the Godmersham, Chawton and Steventon estates.

Edward Knight (1794 - 1879)

It is unclear if this bookplate relates to Edward (Austen) Knight (1767-1852), Jane Austen's brother, or his eldest son who was also called Edward (and whose dates are given above: like all of Edward (Austen) Knight's children, Edward was born Austen and took the name Knight only when his father did so in 1812). Looking at the inscriptions in the Knight collection copy of Byron's poetry, it is possible that the bookplate shown here was Edward Knight junior's bookplate as the inscriptions in the book are his.

Montagu G Knight (1844 - 1914)

Montagu Knight was the son of Jane Austen's nephew, Edward Knight. Montagu Knight was the first of this branch of the family to make Chawton his main home (Edward Knight junior sold Godmersham in 1874 and Montagu inherited Chawton on his father's death in 1879). In 1911 Montagu co-wrote a history of the house and estate called *Chawton Manor and its Owners*. A copy of this book is in the Chawton House Library collection. Montagu used three different bookplates and shown here are examples of two of them.

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