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Jane Austen and a Biographical Study of the Historical Narrative Process

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JANE AUSTEN AND A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE PROCESS

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Jane Austen, beloved national literary icon of Great Britain is world-renowned for her fiction. Biographers have attempted to authentically piece together her life and often try to connect her narrative to when and how her fiction was written, as well as point out circumstances within her personal life and speculate their influence on her work. Literary analysts and critics that have examined the historical narrative process, Hayden White and Kevin Gilvary, have found that the way in which a historical account is presented plays a significant role in how history is understood and perpetuated. When examining Jane Austen's life, many overlook how much her fiction plays a role in the narrative her biographers write and what those implications do to how she is perceived and understood. In this work, I examine the different strategies biographers use to construct Jane Austen's personal narrative and how often they rely on biographical fallacy or their own ideologies in order to create her narrative. By questioning these methods of biographical structuring, I question how the discourse shapes the meaning-making process of non-fiction historical literature and figures like Jane Austen and extend the scholarly conversation to consider alternative ways for literary and historical inquiry.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my children in the hopes of reminding them, you're never too old to follow your dreams, explore, and play. Always be authentically you just as you are now.

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Introduction

As Jane Austen's *history* has become entwined with her fiction, the smallest details of her life have become laced with her motivations and reasoning and then read through the biographer's omniscient narration. Take for example the claim that Austen hated the name "Richard" (Kosmetatou). In the spring of 1803, Jane Austen sold a manuscript, *Susan*, (via her brother) to be published by Benjamin and Richard Crosby for £10. The Crosby brothers never published her book and after six years Jane Austen reached out, under the guise of a pseudonym, attempting to remind them of its existence and to offer them a new copy in case the old one had gone missing or been damaged, and signed the letter with the initials, M.A.D. Richard Crosby's boorish response insisted there had been no agreement of publication and further stated that if she made any attempt to publish it elsewhere, he would take steps to prevent it. Some years later when she was able, she purchased back the manuscript for the same £10 and reworked it into what is now known as *Northanger Abbey*. In the first paragraph of the novel as she begins introductions of characters, she makes mention of Catherine Morland's father who is named Richard, "...a very respectable man, though his name was Richard " (Austen 7). This simple aside seems innocuous, except for when it is followed by another Richard in *Persuasion*, written after *Northanger Abbey*, with brutal derogatory references to

the name. Austen refers to this dead character as having been “very troublesome,” “hopeless,” and the family had “the good fortune to lose him before he reached his twentieth year.” He was “stupid and unmanageable,” and “that he had been very little cared for at any time by his family, though quite as much as he deserved” (Austen 76). Some Austen enthusiasts see this detail as significant and have tried to puzzle out why she disparaged the name Richard; the conclusion many have come to is the reference to the publishing debacle with the Crosbys (Odiwe).

This puzzle raises questions about the degree to which we can posit historical claims about Austen at all. Jane Austen is widely regarded as a literary icon, though more is known about her novels than is known about her as an individual. That is, when the names “Mr. Darcy” or “Anne Elliot” are mentioned to readers intimate with Austen’s work, personality traits and attributes of those characters are immediately conjured to the mind. When Austen is mentioned, however, it is her words and work that often come to mind rather than her personal life. Biographers, historians, and fans have tried piecing together narratives of her life and literary critics and scholars have attempted to interpret or unravel connections and greater insight in her work. More often than not, whether someone is looking into Austen’s life or work, and whether or not it is a conscious choice, a historical biographical critical approach is used. Seeking an “authentic” Austen motivates many of these biographers and scholars but the search is somewhat problematic as interpretation will always influence and

hinder “authenticity”, especially when many of her biographers turn to Austen’s fiction to speculate about her personal life.

Historical biographical literary criticism undertakes the question of an author’s intent as well as reading about an author’s or poet’s life in order to gain insight and more fully contextualize their work. This kind of literary criticism can yield some fascinating interpretations, for example, making the connection between Austen personally hating Bath and writing Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* as also hating Bath, along with Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* having a dismal experience there, then using those fictional depictions as a way of defining Austen’s *personal* feelings and experience. It is an unreliable practice as there are often many unverifiable claims backed up with little or weak evidence, and the critical lens quickly becomes ensconced in biographical fallacy: the acknowledgement that we can never truly know the author’s intent, nor can we ever truly know an author by their work. Literary (heritage) tourism only complicates matters as it aims to connect the reader with the author through authentic meaningful experiences that build a sense of linkage with historical and physical context, however, that too relies on interpretation. In what follows, I examine Jane Austen’s biographical material against various biographies and interpretations of her, as well as looking at how sites associated with her attempt to create a sense of “authentic” heritage that employ specific narratives, revealing the Jane Austen we think we know is more a fictional character than a historical person.

Literature Review

To counter historical biographical literary criticism and biographical fallacy within Jane Austen studies, I look to literary critic Hayden White, author of *Metahistory*, and literary biographer Kevin Gilvary, author of *The Fictional Lives of Shakespeare*, as well as other scholars (Herbert, Alvarado-Sizzo) who deconstruct heritage and literary tourism. There is an assumption that "historical fact" is equally evident and accessible to all and that if it is written or tangible, it is certain and authentic. However, historical biographies and sites, though they offer valuable context and material, the information within these sources can become distorted as history can become fictional through its depictions, and an author's fiction somehow becomes autobiographical through a reader's interpretation. In order to separate fact from fiction, it is crucial to examine not just the biographical material and narrative of Austen, but *how* the material and narratives are written and presented. Especially useful to my project are White's and Gilvary's observations of the patterns within the *way* the literary biographical narrative is crafted and why.

White and Gilvary both claim that historical narratives are fundamentally shaped by storytelling in order to comprehensively connect events and anecdotes. White refers to the process of writing historical narrative as having many overlapping features as a novelist writing a piece of fiction, though the narrative is called a *historical* chronicle. He explains "The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance… considered as a

comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end" (White 7). Gilvary likewise notes that "Readers… look for order; they do not expect a chaotic presentation of data about a subject but a coherent account often using foreshadowing or flashback to indicate cause and effect" (Gilvary 14). White's theory suggests that the act of relating history contains both elements of historical fact and narrative framing, fact with the events, and narrative with the selection and arrangement of the events. Gilvary shrewdly calls biographical writing "biografiction," as the narratives become intertwined with each biased telling. With both "investigative operations on the one hand and [his] narrative operation on the other," (White 12) the process by which history is framed emerges.

This process of crafting historical narrative becomes complicated when the investigated historical facts and events are unverifiable but narrated by the biographer through biased methods (though the methods may be used unintentionally). In addition to emplotment, White also discusses the influences of methods of explanation and methods of ideologies and how they shape the historical narrative. White defines "emplotment" by naming four different "archetypal story forms," such as Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire; Gilvary adds to this definition by reminding us that "Biographers frequently follow the journey of a hero…" (Gilvary 15). White continues, explaining how these various storytelling structures, like emplotment, are the storytelling structures that provide the tools for "the relationship between continuity and change in a given

representation of the historical process as a whole" (White 13). White asserts here that the assembling of a string of events into a historical narrative must also heed the guidelines of a fictional narrative, where plot, characters, climax, and denouement are key elements within the narrative operation, and are highly influenced by the biographer's argument and ideologies. Gilvary's mention of the hero's journey encourages biographers and historians to inflate or diminish significant moments in an individual's life to serve the larger story. The complication within emplotment is it often does not make room for the unknown and many will profess a possibility to be a certainty. The reasoning or motivation of a historical person may indeed be *likely*, but if it is not verifiable; it can only ever be one interpretation and not fact.

One of the elements that complicate historical narrative structuring is the role played by what White calls "Synecdoche," where a piece of something is taken from a whole to represent or encapsulate the whole; for example: using the faces of Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle on the box set of *Pride and Prejudice*. These characters taken from the story are but an element or piece from the larger "whole" but represent the entire work, symbolizing and embodying the overarching themes within. This simplification, though helpful in some respects, can also be misleading due to its interpretive nature. When used in a historical narrative or biographical context, Synecdoche can also come to represent something a little more abstract, like Heritage. Ilia Alvarado-Sizzo's recent work "Spatial Representations, Heritage, and Territorial-Synecdoche in Contemporary

Tourism," builds on the notion of how simulating tangible encounters with the past plays a vital role in the creation of heritage. Historical representation and authenticity rest on the fulcrum of interpretation of re-creation of the past, as we have seen in Hayden White's historical narrative process. The same can be said of biography, which leverages what we might call "biographical Synecdoche," which takes an element of a person, and represents the entirety of their life by that one element. Together, these concepts highlight the problematic notion of an "authentic" past, heritage site, or biographical portrait.

Applying this critical approach to Austen's biographies and biographical anecdotes shared through numerous fan sites, blogs, and similar sources, I expose how the narrative of her life has been shaped by others since her death in 1817. The biographies I have chosen span the distance of over two-hundred years between Austen's death and now, and though there is relatively precious little actually known about her, the same biographical material available to everyone yields a curious pattern of contradictory claims within her biographical narratives. Her brother Henry Austen, and nephew Edward James Austen-Leigh, were her first biographers after her death, and though they might have had good intentions to paint Austen in sincere ways their respective ideologies and self-interest skew their interpretations of her. Similarly, historians Jon Spence and Lucy Worsley make some peculiar claims about a temperate Austen and contradict themselves by cherry picking or interpreting the biographical material to suit their claims, as well as contradict Austen's own letters. Spence is adamant

that Austen's fiction is not autobiographical, yet he leans on biographical fallacy. Worsley engages with heritage tourism in her biography of Austen, investigating sites where Austen lived and how they influenced her work. Lastly, biographers Helena Kelly and Devony Looser, in addition to leaning on interpretation of Austen's life and fiction to back up their claims, complicate her narrative by looking at the arc of her reputation and examining details we may have missed along the way. Kelly employs New Historicism as she looks at how Austen may be responding to her era in her novels, and Looser deconstructs the variety of representations of Austen's work over time and how they've influenced her legacy. The innumerable admirers, scholars, and devotees who publish content online about Austen similarly engage in an inadvertent narrative of her, parroting her life within her fiction. Taken together, these texts illustrate how White's and Gilvary's respective theories about historiography and biography shape how Austen is both seen and understood.

White, Gilvary, and Alvarado-Sizzo bring us right back to Austen's use of the name "Richard." Regardless of what Austen's intentions were when using the name Richard (or any name), it is here assumption takes on the cloak of truth and parades around as verifiable fact because the connection is *plausible*. A disharmonious chorus of voices, however, assert a wide variety of explanations that compete with each other for validity. Edward Knight says her unfavorable references were an inside family joke (Knight). MacAdam suggests "she may be alluding playfully to either Richard II or Richard III, protagonists in Shakespeare's

historical tragedies'' (MacAdam 237). Kelly, in her book, *Jane Austen the Secret Radical*, examines several times Austen's use of names in her fiction and how she clearly pulled names from her personal life or used historical ones to make political statements about the monarchy or church (Kelly 253). Jon Spence goes even further to claim there is evidence that Austen may have done this repeatedly as the names she used can be traced to actual people in her life and it is well documented that the Austen family regularly enjoyed the theater as well as putting on home theatricals (Spence). With this one example ("Richard") of numerous people blending narratives and blurring lines between fact and fiction whilst adding to the historical conversation, we find White's theory of historical construction through emplotment, explanation, and ideology, and instances of Gilvary's "biografiction" take shape. A pervasive pattern found within Austen's narrative ironically did not begin by her, but by the assumptions made *about* her, opinions and characterizations projected upon her and then built upon for over two-hundred years.

Ideological Drives in Early Austen Biographies

The foundation of what we know of Jane Austen and how we view her was not entirely laid by her own letters and novels. Additional *ex parte* details came into her historical narrative posthumously; the foundation of her legacy was laid after her death, and carefully crafted to enhance her piety and omit any hint of acrimony. Her brother and nephew laid the foundation with their hegemonic

depictions of her by framing her in a religious, ultra feminine, genteel way, disregarding all other possible elements of personality. By writing her narrative in such a way, they have crafted an uncomplicated woman within a pastoral plot to create a portrait that contradicts what Austen herself has written in her letters and novels.

Significantly, Austen's earliest biographical notice was written by her favorite brother, Henry Austen. As a clergyman for the Church of England, Henry Austen can be viewed as an exemplar of the hegemonic ideologies of the time, and the saintly way in which he paints his sister and family is a polished and at times hagiographic portrayal. The brief account was written six months after her death and included in her posthumously published work *Persuasion*. It is here for the first time Jane Austen's name is attributed to her work in print. Henry Austen describes his sister as being above reproach, naturally quiet and happy, and above all, "thoroughly religious" (Austen 33). He makes a few remarks on her countenance and height but remains vague and superficial, avoiding details. Curiously, he does specifically reveal she made a modest sum of £150 for publishing *Sense and Sensibility*, but is emphatically clear that she would never be so crass as to seek notoriety by putting her name on her work while she was alive. He labels her life as being one without "event," and spends most of his time offering condolences and comfort to family, friends, and admirers for their shared loss. He writes that her writing abilities were intuitive and "cost her nothing," and she "never dispatched a note or letter unworthy of publication" (Austen 33). This

short biographical notice ends somewhat abruptly but with one final emphatic point: she was a strict adherent to the “Established church.”

If we consider *who* Henry Austen was, the ideological orientation that he brings to his sister comes as no surprise. Having been a part of different foundational societal structures during his own life, i.e., son of a clergyman, joining the military, owning and running a bank, and later receiving his ordination for The Church of England, the philosophies and tenets by which he lived his life were clearly defined and deeply ingrained. Though it was commonly thought unbecoming to share too many details or show much emotion (other than pride in one’s nation and religion), the ambiguous nature of his description could reveal some feelings not explicitly stated but are couched in ideologies that shaped his beliefs. We could postulate he wrote this the way he did because his sister was an older, unmarried spinster, and though he clearly had affection for her, society deemed such women as being a burden to their families and were undeserving of much characterization. Though she was clearly loved by those who knew her and admired by those who read her books, the most important thing to know about her, from her clergyman brother’s point of view, was above all, that she was religious and saintly.

Henry Austen’s ideologically-driven portrait of his sister was expanded by her nephew some years later. This foundational depiction of her continued with a few more details but with fundamentally the same ideological impetus. Her first official biography was written over fifty years after her death by her nephew,

James Edward Austen-Leigh (J.E.A.-L.), and he reveals just as many vague details and the life of a woman many are still trying to figure out. The depictions he gives of his aunt, similar to Henry Austen's, don't match with her own sagacious writing found in her novels and letters. Her letters that have survived are filled with the minutiae of everyday life and give limited information, but they do give some insight into her observations, opinions, and wit, and her cheekiness is distinct. The earlier reference to the name "Richard" in her books and her manner of assertive communication with the Crosby's is one example that defies J.E.A.L's depiction of his aunt being a subdued woman. By the time Jane Austen's first biography was published in 1870, fifty-three years had passed since her death. Her works were becoming more and more popular, and many sought out her living descendants in order to know more about her, however, we at times learn more about her nephew than we do about Jane Austen in his account of her.

In the biography written by her nephew, some word choices Austen-Leigh uses stand out among others because of the ideological implications they carry. In the midst of his depiction of his aunt's life, as being passively happy and religiously devoted, he also states that her life was "barren." To some readers, this may seem a somewhat surprising adjective to use to describe someone who was creatively prolific like Jane Austen, however, examining J.E.A.-L.'s ideological attitudes can reveal biased blind spots. He was nineteen years old when his aunt died and seventy-two when he wrote her biography; the span of

fifty-three years sits between him knowing her and remembering her. The personal anecdotes Austen-Leigh shares of his aunt's life are scant and similar to his uncle Henry Austen's biographical depiction. The details he does share are likewise ideologically charged in addition to being compounded with the limiting attitudes toward women typical to an old Victorian man. Between the retelling of reminiscences and memories are pages and pages filled with reconstructions of the Regency era in which Austen lived to give his readers context, and at times he says more about the time period than he does about his aunt. Other times in the biography, he goes further back into their family's genealogy to highlight high-ranking connections, and at times, takes the opportunity to share some of his own poetry. These simple examples found throughout the biography in tandem with his word choices, reveal a pattern found in many Historicist approaches of retelling the past which lean heavily on contextualization with secondary sources and emplotment devices within the narrative structuring. Context is key for examining the past, but it can only ever be related through one filter at a time and heavily influenced by the assumptions of the narrator, and in this case, "prolific" is replaced with "barren" because that was his prerogative.

These two initial biographies, known among Austen scholars to be the bedrock of what is known about her, pose problematic issues in the foundation of her legacy. The paltry information these two men give describe her as being a modest person which is by no means a bad characterization, but it is their *only* characterization, and it is reductive and incomplete. Because it was the only

information available for so long, these biographies have become the touchstones that historians and interested persons turned to when conducting their own research on Jane Austen, and the ideas surrounding her have become entrenched and perpetuated over time.

One assumption that has led researchers over time to maintain Henry Austen and J.E.A. L's depictions of Jane Austen is due to the fact these two men were family and therefore surmised to have the firmest impressions of her, but their biographies were not critically examined or scrutinized until well after their own deaths. It is within questioning the historical narratives and at times pushing back against them when the complexities can become a little clearer. Hayden White suggests not only analyzing the historical narrative as it is given but analyzing it with an assumption of fallible authenticity and accuracy, as so many historical narratives were written with the shared inference of truth without inquiry. With "investigative operations on the one hand and [his] narrative operation on the other," (White 12) we find that these early biographers leaned heavily on *their* narrative of Austen and leaned not at all upon the investigative operations. Hayden White makes it clear that the emplotment or framing of a historical figure in such a way is more often than not done innocently as the biographer may be unaware of how their own views of a person or situation influence the narrative they give. White calls these unacknowledged assumptions "the *naive* element in historical thinking," and it often gets in the way of maintaining "a critical attitude with respect to itself" (White 376). When it comes

to Jane Austen's brother's and nephew's accounts of her life, it's probable they saw no need to *investigate* anything, yet that did not keep them from *interpreting* her life.

One example of interpreting her life refers to her nephew's account and his description that Jane's life was "barren" (Austen-Leigh, 1), and interpreting it based on *his* lived experience and ideologies, not hers. The use of the word "barren" for instance is a bleak one to use as it means desolate and incapable of producing. Also correlated with his use of the word is the common belief at the time in the Victorian Era, if a woman did not marry and have children, her life was bleak and unfulfilled, so it would be only natural or *likely* he would frame her in this way. However, another likely interpretation could be that Jane Austen herself did not feel her life was "barren": in one of her letters to her sister Cassandra, she tells her sister she is never too busy to think about *Sense and Sensibility*, that "I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child" (Spence 181). In another letter to Cassandra, after receiving a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* in the post upon publication, she refers to this second published novel of hers as her "own darling Child" (Spence 186); and, "'once told a new mum, 'As I wish very much to see your Jemina, I am sure you will like to see my *Emma…*'" (Worsley 89). From these statements, and seen from a different point of view, it could be interpreted that she cherished her work with a mother's love, one that is clearly not "barren." But, because her nephew held common Victorian ideologies, the notion that a woman might get any satisfaction in life without marriage and

children might have been a difficult one for him to grasp, even though Austen's own statement might appear obvious to someone else when piecing together a narrative from the same biographical material he had access to. And, to counter further, another interpretation could lead to a conclusion somewhere in between, where she viewed her books as her figurative children because she too saw that her life was physically barren; it is in the assumption of knowing with certainty one way or the other without critical inquiry, where one person's perception becomes locked in as historical narrative.

To sharpen the point of questioning that narrative as authentic history, it is critical to consider the narrator's unacknowledged axioms that influence how the account is laid out. The radical (at the time) concept of women finding satisfaction outside typical gender roles appears never to have occurred to J.E. A.-L, even if his limiting depiction of his aunt was unintentional and can be chalked up to what White calls a "naive element in historical thinking." Furthering this *naive* element, Gilvary observes that this kind of interpretation or framing "...tells us more about the interpreter, not the interpreted" (Gilvary 2). The evidence suggests that both Henry Austen and James Edward Austen-Leigh, in laying the foundational narrative of Jane Austen have done so with some deficiency by framing her in a way that contradicts what she herself has written. But therein lies one of the most perplexing fallacies surrounding Jane Austen as we understand her, the different interpretations of what she has written and assuming she intended her personal experiences to be read through her fiction

as many biographers do. Where her brother and nephew interpreted her life through their experiences as gentlemen of their time without considering how she expressed herself, even if through her fiction, other biographers attempt to interpret her life through a variety of methods that include her work. All of them hoping to find an authentic version of her but each method leans heavily on probability rather than certainty – without acknowledgement of that fact.

What we find in the early biographies is an idealization of Austen that ignores verifiable facts (though not narratives, since these are interpretive) in the interests of presenting a hagiographical celebration of an ideologically-driven model woman. These biographers offer the foundational material for later biographers of Austen, though there are some recent writers who reject the saintly portraits in favor of presentations of Austen that make her more audacious and bold. Nevertheless, the foundational biographies are at times considered gospel which can complicate different approaches. The alternative methods and strategies modern biographers adopt to ascertain an “authentic” Jane Austen pose new challenges that arrive at narratives that are just as problematic as Austen’s original biographers.

(New) Historicism, Austen’s Novels, and the Drive towards Biographical Fallacy

As biographers look to Austen’s own words to find her, the tendency to blur the lines between her lived experience and her fiction can be found everywhere in biographies about her. Many have linked her personal

experiences from letters and secondary anecdotes to moments and characters found in her books. Jon Spence, author of *Becoming Jane*, explicitly asserts that "Austen is never autobiographical" (Spence 64) but goes on to state multiple times different examples of where she has written herself or some situation from personal life into her novels. The number of examples is significant. Some are simple and subtle such as one referring to a tryst between Austen's brother Henry and their cousin Eliza de Feuillide. Spence states "Austen herself takes on the role of Mrs. Manwaring," one of her own characters from the unfinished novel *Lady Susan*, in which she reveals Susan's dissolute ways (Spence 81). Another subtle example revolves around an observation made by many (Spence 90) that the characters Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* mirror the roles and relationship between Cassandra and Jane, to which Spence says, "...it is probably closer to the truth to see them as conflicting sides of Jane Austen's own nature" (Spence 91). Though he insists Austen did not write autobiographically, his claim and explanation of self-portraiture is inconsistent. Later, he insists that Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is not and cannot be a self-portrait (single, old maid, used by her family for free childcare, lost love of Tom Lefroy/Captain Wentworth) but insists that Mary Musgrove (married, mother, hypochondriac, needy) definitely is. Spence's inconsistency doesn't end there as he also writes that Austen wrote Mary as someone she did *not* want to be (Spence 225). According to Spence's biography, there are an awful lot of self-portraits for someone who "never wrote autobiographically", as well as a

considerable amount of situational or even paradoxical connections he makes between her and her fiction. Perhaps Spence is attempting to paint Austen in a more complex way, but his efforts fall short due to his cluttered approach of making a claim and backing it up with evidence that *might* fit and passing it off as though it did fit.

A more overt example of Spence's messaging of his claims goes on for pages: he states that, after meeting and presumably falling in love with Tom Lefroy, "Jane's joy overflowed into her writing, indeed became her writing" as she began working on 'First Impressions', the initial version of *Pride and Prejudice*. This innocuous claim of being inspired to write is then succeeded by another which strips Austen of her ingenious creativity and turns the masterpiece into some kind of fantasy story about a crush. "The novel is closely linked to Tom Lefroy as some of Austen's early work is to Eliza de Feuillide [her cousin] and other members of the Austen family circle" (Spence 101). Spence pieces together a narrative around Austen's supposed drawn out love affair with Lefroy, but in relating an anecdote from Lefroy's old age, a nephew asked him about Jane Austen. Lefroy referred to the relationship as having been "a boyish love," but Spence pushes the narrative, insisting "In her own mind she had engaged herself to Tom Lefroy, and had believed their attachment had the same force in his mind" (Spence 112). Jane's own words in her letters to Cassandra dispute this speculation as she flippantly insists that Mr. Tom Lefroy is someone "...for whom I donot (*sic*) care a sixpence" (Spence 96). Whether Austen is being

facetious or sarcastic here is a detail many have taken to be open to interpretation to fit their desired narrative. Further evidence is lost and in Spence's interpretation, Austen's own words take a back seat to his, and he pushes further by saying *Pride and Prejudice* was "a gift of love for Tom Lefroy" and leads readers to believe that when she refers to her book as her "own darling child," she's saying the child is the result of the love between her and Lefroy (Spence 104). Spence claiming that Jane engaged herself to Tom Lefroy and wrote *Pride and Prejudice* as some kind of love letter to him is not only a bold claim without much supporting evidence, it is also a fiction and says more about Spence than it does about Austen, akin to when Austen's nephew called her life "barren".

The methodology of biographical fallacy Spence leans on to understand Austen in an authentic way is inherently flawed because of his reliance on the narrator and characters in Austen's fictional novels and conflating it with her personal voice. Hayden White discusses the ways in which historians frame a historical narrative and their reliance on what "kind of story" (White 7) they're trying to tell. Whether it's a hero's journey as Gilvary mentioned, a Romance or Tragedy or something else entirely, these stories lean on motifs and patterns and Spence engages heavily on locating where Austen's life shows up in her fiction and interpreting those moments as being autobiographical. French literary theorist Roland Barthes asserts in his work on this very subject "Death of the Author" that this move to unite author and text as being a futile one because it

“impose[s] a limit on that text” (Barthes 7). Appointing a fixed and personal original meaning to a work, the destination, i.e., the reader and their interpretation, is then rendered unnecessary. By consistently calling attention to different “roles” Austen is playing in her books, or other kin playing the “roles” of certain characters and framing this action as having been intentional by her, Spence smudges the relationship between author and text which imposes problematic limits on both her work and her as an individual. This pattern of turning to Austen’s fiction to evaluate her personal life shows up in many historicist biographies of her because the historical context within her novels provides a frame of reference of how society interacted with their moment in history.

Spence’s use of historicism at times also poses problematic questions due to his interpretations based on putative narratives laid out by Henry Austen and J.E.A.L., without much critical inquiry to those contexts. His assumption that their portrayals of Jane were definitive *enough* influenced his own claims and portrayal of her to likewise be passive. When explaining how influential her family was to her, he remarks that it was customary in both British society and the Austen family to conceal their emotions and this custom appears in her writing as there is “...hardly a single feeling in her stories” (Spence 75). By contextualizing her behavior and writing (that he also interprets as appearing emotionless) within her familial and historical conditions, he simultaneously emplots her narrative within presumed beliefs and imposes his own ideologies into that historical narrative

with his interpretation. White expounds on this kind of historical explanation, granting that it is one thing to explain what happened and quite another to expound through narrative interpretation and "the process of development…by appeal to the general laws of causation" (White 12). Without critical inquiry into those "general laws of causation" and relying on accepted historical narrative, along with his engagement with biographical fallacy, Spence's historicist approach and interpretations leave many questions about Austen unanswered.

Another historicist biographer who attempts to answer or investigate these unanswered questions, Lucy Worsley, paints Austen similarly to Spence, but homes in – literally – on a specific aspect of Austen's life. In Worsley's biography, *Jane at Home*, Worsley considers actual physical places and locations Austen lived in as her starting point to gain a closer understanding of who Austen was. By examining Austen's homes, counties, and cities she lived in and trying to understand the time in which Austen resided there, another aspect and interpretation of her is added to the conversation. There are two different aspects that emerge in this approach of examining home, the first being how Worsley frames the information into a biography and how including historical context and information shapes Worsley's narrative of Austen; the second revolves around how tourism to these places also shapes Austen's narrative.

By providing the historical landscape, Worsley immerses the reader into the past by invoking details we often take for granted and though the imagery and incidentals can pull the reader into vivid visualization, some information

comes off as distracting and superfluous. She provides details from land records and farmers' weather almanacs, and though fascinating, knowing that a neighbor grew an enormous cabbage to "five feet in circumference in the solid part," (Worsley 9), it tells us nothing about Austen, especially since this happened before she was even born. Worsley's reconstructed timeline of Austen also follows the "hero's journey" mentioned earlier by Gilvary and used by Spence, the journey of a young budding author who observes everything in every place she visits or lives in and logs it away as inspiration for her art.

As Worsley walks her reader through Austen's birth and early years, Worsley reaches for more secondary and tertiary sources to provide content rather than context. When introducing Jane's first home as an infant and after describing advice from a popular nursery-maid book from the time and omitting the fact we do not know if Mrs. Austen ever read it, Worsley suggests the early childhood connection Jane didn't receive shows up later in her work as, "Her fiction is full of bad mothers…" (Worsley 22). Worsley then goes on with examples to back up this claim, leaning on biographical fallacy. "Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Bennet, who lack sense, Mrs. Price, who lacks attention, and the absent Mrs. Woodhouse and Mrs. Elliot, both dead when the story starts. Perhaps the trouble began right at the beginning" (Worsley 22). The connection here between Austen's fictional mothers and her own, though it can be backed up as maybe having some viability as there are indeed plenty of "bad" mothers in her fiction, seems like a strange connection to make simply because Worsley

found a popular baby book from the time that suggested laying a baby on a pillow and diverting it when it was sad, and assuming Mrs. Austen couldn't be bothered to do it. And why should Mrs. Woodhouse and Mrs. Elliot be pulled into the pool of bad mothers because they're dead? They're not absent because they abandoned their children. Mrs. Austen and Jane butted heads but Worsley's framing of Mrs. Austen in this context leads the reader to speculation about Jane's infancy without factual evidence and relies on those secondary (Austen's novels) and tertiary (nursery book) sources for situational context.

Scattered throughout Worsley's biography, similar to Spence's, are even more biographical fallacy connections, made between Austen's real-life experiences with places, and similar situations found in her novels remarking that "X" must have happened in her novel because "X" happened in her life. Within this framework, Gilvary's biografiction takes on a compounded meaning as Worsley begins to conflate fact and fiction and does so by taking a location Austen lived in or visited and finding some way to connect it to her fiction. Some connections to these places and Austen's fiction teeter on peculiar as some seem a bit of a reach. When talking about Jane's life in Steventon and her meeting Tom Lefroy as a young woman, Worsley then makes the claim, "Perhaps Tom's [Lefroy] five older sisters gave Jane the idea for the family circumstances of the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice*" (Worsley 113). Often, Jane and Cassandra would stay at one of her brother's homes. Godmersham was a grand house and has often been speculated to be an inspiration for Pemberley,

but Worsley connects more detail to Austen's fiction, "As Jane's family did not, could not, employ a housekeeper, it was Mrs. Salkeld, and then her successor Mrs. Driver, who must have provided Jane with the inspiration for her own fictional housekeepers, Mrs. Whitaker at Sotherton, Mrs. Hill at Longbourn, Mrs. Hodges at Donwell Abbey and Mrs Reynolds at Pemberley" (Worsley 131). When talking about nearby locations to Steventon, Worsley introduces the reader to different neighbors Austen had and how they too might have inspired her fiction, "It is true that on 23 January, Jane was invited to dinner alongside William Digweed at Deane, and that an unexpected snowfall meant that the carriage was ordered to take her home. Perhaps he made an unwelcome proposal to her in the carriage as they jolted back to Steventon together through the snow, just as Mr. Elton does in *Emma*" (Worsley 148-9). When on holiday, the Austen's would visit and tour great houses, much like Elizabeth Bennet does with her aunt and uncle in *Pride and Prejudice*. Worsley takes this opportunity to connect this activity and the annoying idiosyncrasies of Austen's mother to another fictional character, "There is in Mrs. Austen something of Mr. Collins, who cannot refrain from telling Lizzy Bennet how many windows the house has, as they approach Rosings in *Pride and Prejudice,* and who fails to keep to himself 'what the glazing altogether had originally cost'" (Worsley 209). These are but a few of many examples provided in Worsley's biography about place and she often takes the opportunity to find a way to connect each of these locations not necessarily with Austen as a person, but with how they might have inspired her fiction. Worsley's

focus on home places an emphasis on the connection between what Austen wrote, not necessarily how Austen lived.

However, though Worsley too engages in a historicist/biographical fallacy approach like Spence, by interweaving Austen's fictional characters within Austen's actual life events and then connecting them to different homes and locations in her biography, Worsley's focus highlights some interesting aspects about how authenticity is presented in physical places; she opens up the conversation to include biographical spaces. There are some key elements about tourism to historical sites that may be overlooked or taken for granted, like assuming that if an author's house still exists and can be visited, it somehow equates with legitimate physical history. Historicism's strength lies in contextualizing the time period and lived experience, but a flaw can also be found through scrutiny of that contextualization because, as we've seen with Worsley and Spence, the lens used in framing the narrative will highly influence the story told. In considering locations associated with a specific historical person and including these places as an extension of their biographical material, these places too need to be examined in how they are presented to the public, and perhaps done so with a new approach to what "authenticity" is. Worsley's engagement with Austen's biographical places also highlights not just how these places are presented, but also how they are received and in so doing, demonstrates how the tourist is part of the historical narrative process and redefining "authenticity". Though these tangible objects and spaces could be

examined to shed light on more personal aspects of Jane Austen, Worsley keeps bringing the historical narrative back to the author's fiction and ultimately away from the author.

In furthering Worsley's study of biographical spaces by examining the tourism aspect of them, in addition to considering an authentic portrayal of Austen within that framework, I refer to David Herbert's work "Literary Places, Tourism, and the Heritage Experience'' for further commentary on how this phenomenon expounds on the interpretive work of the historical process. Herbert claims both heritage and authenticity begin to take shape in thought and intention with a decided measure of "premeditated significance" *before* visiting a place, even if the place has reconstructed or representative elements. He also asserts "Literary places are no longer accidents of history, sites of a writer's birth or death; *they are also social constructions, created, amplified, and promoted to attract visitors*'' (Herbert, 313, *emphasis added*). The significance of this biographical material, in this case tangible spaces and artifacts that Worsley looks to, is framed and presented to support the social construction of how *she* views what an authentic Austen looks like.

The tourist site, Chawton Cottage, still stands and is a museum dedicated to Austen that tourists can walk through. In Worsley's chapter of Chawton Cottage, notwithstanding the *few* descriptions of what daily life for Austen might have looked like, the anecdotal portraits Worsley focuses on fixate on how the cottage provided a backdrop and inspiration for Austen's writing, rather than

emphasizing how Austen lived or connected with the place. As a visitor to a historical site, a unique crossroad of sorts emerges as the visitor becomes a kind of biographer engaging with tangible biographical material; however, the notion of establishing authenticity becomes a joint effort between how the curator presents the material, and how the visitor interprets the material. In written biography, Worsley presents and interprets Chawton as being a place for Austen to write in and a launchpad for inspiration, whereas a curator for Chawton may choose to present the space with a different emphasis; the visitor or tourist may interpret that emphasis as presented or may have a different encounter altogether, based on their personal perspectives and interaction. The authenticity of both biographical narratives and biographical spaces is subjectively determined by their presentation and the reception of that presentation, due to varied interpretive methods of the past, rendering the historical process as mutable, and dependable on inconsistent criteria. For this reason, Worsley's turn to historical sites associated with Austen can come no closer to an "authentic" Jane Austen than Spence's work.

The historicist endeavors of both Worsley and Spence demonstrate approaches (with different focuses) to establish different stimuli within Austen's life and how, once inspired by the stimuli, she then wrote about it; Helena Kelly, author of *Jane Austen the Secret Radical*, has noted this trend and remarks that Austen's biographers all repeat the same facts but with contradictory claims in the hopes that something new will show itself. Kelly though, does something

other biographers shy away from as she openly admits we must engage in biographical fallacy in order to find Austen given that “We know so little about Jane’s life, and that little is so difficult to interpret accurately, that we can’t afford to dismiss what’s revealed in her fiction” (Kelly 20). Her claim that Austen (or any author) cannot write thousands of words without revealing something about themselves, their beliefs, their values, their feelings is problematic as each reader will interpret what they read differently, and no clear understanding of the author will come to fruition. All we’re left with after engaging in biographical fallacy is often what was *likely* or convoluted speculations based on the lens or theory used by the interpreter. Kelly’s attempt to fill in the gaps of understanding Austen and her work, again, strays from what many biographers like Spence and Worsley have attempted with their use of biographical fallacy, and she adds another theoretical lens: New Historicism. Though New Historicism relies on distinctive evidence, there is still a good deal of interpretation of that evidence and conjecture around what is revealed.

Where traditional Historicism used by Spence and Worsley places Austen within a historical timeline of cause and effect which might look something like, “Austen met and fell in love with Tom Lefroy and wrote *Pride and Prejudice* because she was inspired by him,” Kelly employs the interpretive means outlined in New Historicism which zeroes in on the cultural and specific contexts - with an equal emphasis on non-literary cotexts (Mambrol) - within a given moment in history providing a very different narrative: “*Pride and Prejudice* shows social

anxieties of the time surrounding cultural assumptions, remodeling society during the French Revolution, and pushes back against parliamentary orator Edmund Burke's ultra-conservative views about the status quo, which reveals Austen's views were radical..." Stephen Greenblatt, primary theorist of New Historicism, laid out the interpretive means in the 1980's for a more focused lens of literary criticism and analysis, one that examines the tensions between what happened, why, and what the negotiations within those tensions reveal. With a more specific view of the historical cultural process, the lines between history and literature converge, similar to Hayden White's *Metahistory* mentioned earlier, and with Kelly's use of it in her biography of Austen, she claims to find hidden and deeper meaning about Austen *within* Austen's work in conjunction with specific contexts of the time. In order to illustrate why Kelly's approach is significant, I've chosen to focus on her chapter discussing *Pride and Prejudice*.

Within each chapter of *The Secret Radical*, Kelly takes a nearly microscopic look at each of Austen's six published novels alongside overlooked cultural contexts from the era, in order to find what she believes were Austen's true feelings about various subjects. At the opening of each of these chapters, Kelly sets the scene with a small fictional portrayal of Austen. This alone hearkens back to White's emplotment device found in both literature and history, blurring the lines of storytelling with historical events. Kelly then moves on to the personal context of the given novel of the chapter by relating what Austen had written in her letters about her work but brings attention to details often missed by

readers. Here, Kelly picks up on quotes Austen inserts within her letters that come from other sources like books, poetry, pertinent social happenings of the time, political commentary, or even local gossip. In the chapter for *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Kelly brings our attention to a subtle reference Austen makes to a poem by Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*, as she writes to her sister Cassandra about her novel, "I do not write for such dull Elves As (*sic*) have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves" (Kelly 114). Kelly follows this thread by investigating *Marmion*, an epic poem by famous Scottish poet Sir Walter Scott, as well as famous critiques and criticism of the epic poem published in *The Edinburgh Review* that discuss the political radicalism within *Marmion*. Kelly then puts the poem and critiques in conversation with what else Austen is saying in her letters about composing *Pride and Prejudice* "it" (*P&P*) was "rather too light & bright & sparkling" (Kelly 113). From these details, Kelly deduces that Austen is hoping her contemporaneous readers will see through the sparkly and delightful bits, use their "great deal of ingenuity" because her readers would naturally be familiar with *Marmion* as they connect the dots, "follow the implications and allusion through to their own natural conclusions" (Kelly 115), and somehow know what Austen *really* means. But Kelly doesn't stop there.

Kelly turns from Austen's personal letters to *Pride and Prejudice* to continue down the rabbit hole of connecting dots, dots that would be obvious to readers at the time the book was written but overlooked by modern readers. Kelly reminds us that Britain and France were at war and the threat of invasion spurred

many to join their local militia; the war is pivotal to *Pride and Prejudice* and Austen refers to it more than we may realize, according to Kelly. War often aroused rebellion and unrest among the locals, and the presence of a militia in a town or village wasn't always a good thing; to some it would be a sign of protection, to another, a sign of oppression and control. Through Kelly's interpretation of *Pride and Prejudice*, we find that the presence of the militia in Meryton is more sinister than simply being a plot device to provide handsome soldiers for the Bennet daughters to dance with. As one example of subtly showing how social anxieties are implicated in the novel, Kelly draws a connection between the decrease in walks that Elizabeth takes alone to the "large numbers of strange men" (Kelly 124) who have shown up in uniform, roaming the village and countryside. Once Kelly has set the scene of wartime at home within *Pride and Prejudice*, she brings a contemporary non-fiction text into the conversation, one by Edmund Burke, a lawyer in Parliament who was famously radical and outspoken; however, when the French Revolution erupted, his pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France* left many in shock because of his dramatic shift in ideologies. In his work which is littered with discriminatory language against progressive rationalists and the rights of citizens to voice outrage against governments, he talks about cherishing irrational "prejudices" rather than casting them away because they stem from a system that keeps society and class distinction in check. Kelly links the word "prejudice" in the 1790's to being unquestioningly associated with long held cultural assumptions

that some, like Burke, thought should stay the same, and others believed they needed to be challenged. Kelly claims Austen's use of the word "prejudice" in the title of her novel was meant to be a direct reference to Burke as well as indicating that the current social status quo ought to be "cast aside." Kelly returns to *Pride and Prejudice* marking notable connections to France, names like "Darcy" and "de Bourgh", but keeps Burke nearby while continuing to point out Austen's use of real nobles living at the time who would invoke a sense of class injustice in her readers. The militia parading about was meant to remind people they were under obligation to the Crown and its systems, systems that thrived on class, title, and money.

As Kelly continues with more examples, like Austen's depiction of an absurd clergyman, Mr. Collins, as well as witnessing Elizabeth Bennet stand up to an ironically ill-bred aristocrat Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Kelly labels these moments revolutionary. "What Jane is offering her readers here is a potent and, for some, terrifying cocktail – a dash of personal and class resentment, a measure of clear-eyed judgement" (Kelly 133). Austen's representations of these roles, clergy and a person in a position of money and power, aren't just ridiculous for the sake of being ridiculous: they show where Burke's and others' faith in such established systems is misplaced. A clergyman who "hardly seems to think about religion" (Kelly 133), and a wealthy landowner who disparages and scolds her tenets and cottagers for being "'poor' and 'discontented'" (Kelly 134), do not, in Austen's opinion according to Kelly, deserve respect simply because of their

position or title, nor does the working class like Elizabeth's Uncle Gardiner deserve to be derided because he unashamedly works in trade rather than having inherited his wealth. With these two texts in conversation together, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* Kelly shows how Austen has set her stage as a wartime story, one that Kelly believes is to be and was read as a thumbing of the nose to class disparity, and the likes of Edmund Burke. Somewhat shockingly, Kelly's examples don't stop there, but for the sake of argument of this work, let us stop and consider for a moment what these details and this interpretation tell us about Jane Austen.

With the approach of employing New Historicism, Kelly presents a rich and meaningful significance within *Pride and Prejudice* that goes unseen by many and she highlights Austen's response to the political climate she was very aware of; however, what is revealed in the act of deducing Austen's political and social class views in this way has more to do with Kelly than it does Austen. Though we may think we've gained some insight into Austen's inner workings or motivations behind her depictions of class structure or her familiarity with Burke, Austen is not her fiction, nor is she Elizabeth Bennet standing up to Lady Catherine and laughing in Mr. Collin's face. One of the frustrating difficulties with New Historicism that Stephen Greenblatt discovered through his own research of Shakespeare is that we can only ever see the past through our current moment which will always inform and skew our understanding of how things happened, even if they were nuanced. Immersing ourselves in all the details of the past will

never fully transport us away from our present nor can we truly claim to know Austen more definitively because of Kelly's truly captivating biography because, simply put, she has engaged with another means of interpretation, and the very nature of interpretation is subjective. An authentic Austen becomes obscured by another lens of interpretation as information or images are superimposed upon her, and it's the filter and framing we see most clearly, not Austen.

Dismantling the Mythologies of Jane Austen

My argument about problematic reliance on biographical places and New Historicist analysis does not mean that alternative approaches to the study of Austen are entirely flawed; different approaches provide an opportunity to engage with biographical material in a more complex way rather than just "historical facts" to memorize. Devony Looser, author of *The Making of Jane Austen*, has taken a unique angle in her biography by unfurling layers of depictions of Austen and her work over time by examining the history behind illustrations and adaptations, and the impact they've had on our evolving understanding of Austen. Looser's angle, though compelling, also engages heavily with biographical fallacy by looking at Austen's work to find and describe the author. When publishers began to produce illustrated editions of Austen's novels in the 1820's and 30's, Looser notes, "The artists and publishers who made choices about what, where, and how much to depict in Austen may not have even read her novels!" (Looser 15). The illustrators and publishers were

also men of the time with different perspectives and understandings of the themes within Austen's novels, some of them (Gilbert) were notably chauvinistic, and their illustrations focus on perpetuating meekness in women with downcast eyes and passive femininity (Looser 46). Not only were these illustrations emphasizing specific motifs that may have misrepresented the scene they were depicting, they were also drawn with "...then-contemporary hairstyles and costuming, rather than historically accurate Regency fashions" (Looser 28). This detail, fairly harmless in some respects, "...helped her novels seem more fresh and timely," (Looser 28) similar to our modern-day adaptations of Austen's work from *Emma* to *Clueless*, or *Pride and Prejudice* to *Bride and Prejudice.* However, Looser points out that by repositioning Austen's work within the Victorian era and noting that these editions were "...reissued… for some sixty years, set the stage for generations of readers to associate Austen's fiction with the 1830's. It's an interesting factor to consider when seeking to explain why, in the late nineteenth-century, Austen was so often grouped with the likes of Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, all of them judged as Victorian novelists" (Looser 29). Within these earlier years of illustrations in Austen's work, portrayed in ultra-feminine and submissive ways within the context of a completely different era, her work was framed as being conservative, upholding traditional gender roles and values, and they were framed by men who may not have even bothered to read her books. As her work was framed as conservative, she too was viewed by the general public to be conservative and meek as well. However, when women were finally

given the opportunity to illustrate Austen's work for printing, their focus was entirely different because they interpreted her work in other ways. Illustrator Christiana Mary Demain Hammond (1860 – 1900), provided her commissions focused more on Austen's humor, irony, social criticism, and strong female expression, something that resonated with women who believed their role in society and home had more to offer than passivity.

However, because men had the monopoly for so long in building that foundational narrative of Austen, a lot of the themes and misrepresentations stuck – so much so that when the Hollywood film studio MGM adapted *Pride and Prejudice* into a film in 1940, over a hundred years later, Victorian fashions rather than Regency were used, and the voices of women were dampened and mellowed. Austen's work was and is still assumed by many to be nothing more than stories about the domestic life of the privileged set in the wrong era because that has been a prominent narrative in the discourse of her and her work for an extended period of time. Similarly, textbooks and classroom curriculum too were monopolized by men, and often when modern biographers do research about Austen most of what they find reinforces those established narratives. Similar to Hayden White's explanation of the emergence of the novel and historical writing being cultivated at the same time creating an overlap of descriptive devices and establishing narratives that have endured, Looser points out that the narrative of Austen simultaneously arose and stuck because her work was caught up in an educational shift in society: "The novel and Austen both became part of the

emerging category of classroom-appropriate English literature at almost precisely the same moment that opportunities in the education of girls of many backgrounds began to expand" (Looser 202). Though female voices and perspectives began to slowly come into the representative conversation of Austen around the turn of the century and Austen became an icon for independent thought and suffragist progressive ideologies to some, the pervasiveness of the "male gaze" in the historical process has largely commandeered Austen's narrative. Looser's examination of *how* Austen's narrative has evolved is crucial to furthering authentic engagement with the historical process as it asks us to consider the conditions of the narrative and the negotiations of what is being preserved and what is being sacrificed.

Conclusion

Jane Austen graces the £10 note on British currency sitting opposite the late Queen Elizabeth II and representing many different things to many different people. To some she is a sovereign voice of women who believe life and love can both be fulfilling without conforming to societal pressures because of her personal life; to others she symbolizes "happily ever after" unions found during a simpler time because of her fiction. Some love her, some don't – Mark Twain and Charlotte Bronte were both famously unimpressed. Each biography chosen for this research was one written from a place of deep admiration of her: her brother Henry and nephew James Edward both coming from their respective places in

history with their ideological values; Jon Spence's Historicist framing of her narrative to give context; Lucy Worsley considering heritage tourism to places Austen lived in; Helena Kelly looking deeper into the historical context with a New Historicism approach; and lastly Devony Looser considering art and adaptations and the evolution of how Austen has been represented over time. These biographers have all approached Austen's historical narrative from a slightly different point of view and in so doing highlight flaws and strengths in the historical process described by White and Gilvary; flaws with subjective interpretation, and strength in engaging the past within a present narrative. This work's aim has been to contribute to that discourse by examining how we narrate the past and identifying inherent assumptions we have cultivated individually and as a society surrounding one of the most iconic and influential writers in English literature. With an aim to explore an "authentic" understanding of Jane Austen with this research, I have come to discover that "authenticity" and "history" are both part of a much larger meaning-making and collaborative process, a process that reveals historical narrative is continuous and unfinished.

What, then, should our goals be in proposing biographies for figures such as Austen, Shakespeare, and about whom we have such a paucity of information. Recognizing that biographical material and narratives are vulnerable to subjective manipulation, one key to avoiding pitfalls might be found in considering the way in which the information we do have, has come to us. By examining how historical narratives are phrased and presented with a focus on

how it contributes to the ongoing discourse, rather than simply trying to define the past. Going forward, there is still so much more to explore despite the seemingly limited biographical material about Jane Austen; there is a wealth of information to be gleaned in analyzing heritage and literary tourism in Bath, alone. Looking at Austen's historical and fictional narratives through the lens of Adaptation Theory would surely present added layers of interpretation to the historical process. Examining the methods and patterns used to structure historical narrative is only just the beginning.

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