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[More information](#)

*Introduction. The 'fall into a quotation': tracking the
canonical, Romantic and post-Romantic Austen*

In *Persuasion*, one of Anne Elliot's bittersweet pleasures is the pleasure of savouring quotation. It is a bittersweet pleasure because it is produced to some extent through its very interruption: 'Anne could not immediately fall into a quotation again. The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by – unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together, blessed her memory.'¹ Whilst this passage suggests the pleasure of quotation, it suggests too a peculiar banality associated with quotation. First a cliché, 'the sweet scenes of autumn'; then a generalization, 'some tender sonnet'. Any reading of Austen is necessarily an encounter with previous readings and with the larger cultural text that is 'Jane Austen'. The quotation of Austen is similarly marked by these previous readings. If the canon functions as a kind of quotation of literary history, Austen is in a sense 'hypercanonical' in that she is so often quoted and so often invoked purely by and as quotation. This hypercanonicity and its waning into cliché-effect could be described as canonical Austen's 'fall into a quotation'.

Within the past decade or so, Romanticism studies has opened up beyond the traditional lyric canon of the 'Big six' and its formalist preoccupations to become an interdisciplinary field reconfigured by new theories and methodologies. This book seeks to contextualize Austen in the light of these reconfigurations of Romanticism, by engaging the Austen novel as a specifically Romantic form of cultural production. *Romantic Austen* elaborates interimplicating arguments about Austen as a Romantic writer and Austen as a canonical British writer. It argues that it is only by considering the specific social, political, cultural and economic transformations of the Romantic period, and the ways in which Austen's fictions engage such transformations, that we can begin to account for Austen's centrality within the British literary canon, and as a popular classic within the formations of British heritage culture and global

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

popular culture. Developing from these assumptions, the project seeks to elaborate a genealogy of genre, national culture and canon-formation, which considers the ways in which Austen's fictions participate in the production of a specifically Romantic form of British national culture to anticipate the terms of their own canonization.

The book approaches the category of the canon not only as a set of texts, but as a set of practices of attributing value.² It foregrounds a number of specific canonical constructions of Austen in order to problematize Austen's interminable quotability and recyclability. This investigation of canonicity involves focusing on a variety of different canonical constructions or what I call 'canonicity effects' of Austen: the Augustan Austen apotheosized in Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*, identified with 'august spirit', 'style' and 'formal perfection';³ the Austen of the perfect realist novel, the Jane Austen who is, to quote F. R. Leavis' canon-forming claim and great solipsism, 'the inaugurator of the great tradition of the English novel – and by "great tradition" I mean the tradition to which what is great in English fiction belongs';⁴ the 'green' Austen identified with the organic social and natural forms of the English countryside; the Austen associated with the category of taste; and the Austen of the courtship novel or marriage plot or heterosexual romance. These canonicity effects are not unrelated, but are crucially interimplicated. They are modes of cultural affect which serve specific functions within and investments of literary culture.

Romantic Austen focuses on the canonically mediated Austen text in order to examine the relationship between Austen's Romantic moment of production and her later post-Romantic moments of canonical reception and reproduction. I am interested in relations of continuity and discontinuity, canny and uncanny repetition, with varying degrees of difference that inform the gesture of Austen quotation – within which I would incorporate reading, literary-critical interpretation, cultural quotation, rewriting, as well as the continuation, sequel and adaptation. The gesture of quotation removes Austen from the contingencies of a particular context. Canonicity breeds ahistoricity and an inescapable transhistoricity. By transhistoricity I mean the way in which canonical Austen has become transportable across and within conventional period designations.⁵ The enterprise of literary-critical history, on the other hand, is to fix the peculiarities and particularities of those contexts. It works against the transhistorical assumption of an unproblematic continuity between the present and the past. My approach is historicizing, but it does not stress the alterity, or absolute otherness, of the Romantic period. I am interested in the problem of overlap between the

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

Romantic-period Austen and the post-Romantic Austen, rather than assuming the possibility – or desirability – of complete separation.

The task I undertake is to read the history of the canonical production of Austen, whilst at the same time attempting to give a more or less chronological account of the career of Austen's novelistic *oeuvre*. I seek to track its Romantic-period moment of production and reception, and to read this against the story of Austen's canonical reproduction.

AUGUSTAN AUSTEN

One of the key constructions in the narrative of the canonical Austen is the Augustan or neoclassical Austen. The idea of the 'Augustan Austen' has been a very influential model within Austen criticism, and one whose effects are still being played out.⁶ The Augustan Austen was the ritual invocation of the long high-Janeite period from the 1920s to the 1960s. It was a particularly important component of the Cambridge Leavisite consolidation of Austen as a representative of the 'organic' against the encroachments of industry and capitalism, and of 'civilization' against the encroachments of popular culture. The Augustan Austen was appropriated for the Leavisite project which Terry Eagleton has referred to as 'the buoyant, polemical onslaught against the most trivializing features of industrial capitalism' that characterized Cambridge in the 1930s.⁷

The Augustan-apprenticed Austen is the Austen of the juvenile parodies of sentimental excess: the satirical, rational, common-sense ironizer. As a female satirizer of the female quixote figure, Austen participates in the genre of the female-authored 'Johnsonian' counter-romance initiated by Charlotte Lennox in *The Female Quixote* (1752).⁸ Indeed, the Augustan Austen is a literary-critical breeding fiction which produces Austen as the daughter of Johnson. Whilst Frances Burney has traditionally been chastised for her clumsy, parvenu Johnsonese,⁹ Austen's appropriation of Johnson has been licensed as a graceful form of legitimate inheritance. Where Charlotte Lennox enjoyed authorization and patronage from Johnson himself for her inaugural 'female quixote' fiction,¹⁰ Austen's smooth accession occurs through sheer style, sublimated as a 'formal perfection . . . that can be appreciated only in terms of the moral preoccupations that characterize the novelist's peculiar interest in life', in F. R. Leavis' moral-formalist pronouncement (Leavis, *Great Tradition*, pp. 17–18). As this formulation suggests, the category of 'Augustan' is less a period designation than a style.

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Austenean satire is a bourgeois chastener and domesticator of aristocratic satire. Austen's superlatively dry, laconic style offers a chaser to the caustic vitriol of Augustan satire.¹¹ Johnson functions as the most appropriate Augustan model for Austen because he is the least scatological. Austen's chaste transmutation of Augustan satire is attested to by Knud Sørensen, who claims as evidence of Austen's Johnsonian style that 'Jane Austen exploits the three-member construction as a vehicle for her gentle satire.'¹² (Maria Edgeworth mockingly referred to Johnson's 'three-member construction' as 'tripod sentences'.¹³)

This transformation of Augustan satire in the canonical version of Austen operates as a leading example of what Nancy Armstrong has referred to as the cultural deployment of femininity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a mode emptied of the markers of status, region, religion and political faction and interest.¹⁴ These markers rendered masculine Augustans like Pope and Swift comparatively difficult and inaccessible for a largely uneducated female readership in the eighteenth century. As part of this cultural deployment of femininity, Austen's work can be seen to feminize, domesticate and democratize Augustan masculinist satire.

Austen started to be read and produced as a popular and canonical author from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, coinciding with the institutionalization of English studies in British universities. However, it was not until the 1940s that Austen's status as a canonical writer was fully established. Leavis promulgated her canonicity in the literary institution, at a time when Austen's wider cultural popularity was also gaining ground, so that it was at this point that Austen was being consolidated as the 'crossover phenomenon' of the literary and popular classic.¹⁵ Leavis' account undergoes transatlantic modulation (via I. A. Richards' 'practical criticism') in the crypto-formalism of American New Criticism, which produces Austen reified as Augustan style or simply 'style'. Here, the canonical function of Austen is to signify style. As D. A. Miller has recently put it, other writers have merely 'the honor of having *a* style, whereas to Austen goes the triumph of being able to conjure the fantasm of style *tout court*'.¹⁶ The strategy of empirical criticism and the elaboration of the Augustan but politically discreet Austen, which this criticism produces, are mutually supporting ideological constructs.¹⁷

Ian Watt's reading of Austen's 'august spirit' exemplifies this identification of Austen with an ahistorically constituted version of an implicitly aristocratic 'satire'. In the formalist readings that Watt initiated, 'satire'

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

is hypostatized, together with ‘wit’ or ‘irony’, as essentialized, formal features of the text. Similarly, ‘irony’ and ‘satire’ do not work to mediate specific social contexts and social locations, but attack a similarly essentialized and generalized sense of class as social ‘snobbery’. The wit is then comfortably positioned within the texts as a signifier of Austen’s transcendent value. The fetish of the Augustan Austen is critically implicated in that persistent construction of Austen as ‘style’, which in turn is implicated in a professional, middle-class intellectual construction of Austen as an aristocrat, of the landed estate as an agrarian and pre-capitalist economy, of the landed estate as England, and of England as Britain. F. R. Leavis argues that Austen offers a ‘comedy of a pre-eminently civilized life’ (Leavis, *Great Tradition*, p. 15).

This ‘civilized life’ is implicitly understood by Leavis and a whole critical tradition to be the life of the landed gentry, or landed, untitled aristocracy.¹⁸ However, there is a way in which this assumption involves a *misunderstanding* or *misprision* of Austen’s historical class location. More specifically, this assumption involves the form of motivated or interested misunderstanding which the French cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu has formulated as ‘misrecognition’.¹⁹ One of the most pervasive misrecognitions of Austen by later twentieth-century readers is that she and her fictions are ‘aristocratic’. Misrecognition is a collective process of the disavowal of economic capital as symbolic capital. As I wish to suggest, in relation to the interpretation of Austen, misrecognition can also refer to the process by which the class-specificity of one form of cultural production – the bourgeois – is disavowed in favour of another – the aristocratic. Class-specific imperatives of emulation are disavowed and repressed in order to read the emulative fiction as the real thing. The canonical production of Austen produced an Augustan-effect whereby the Austen *oeuvre* – and Austen herself as a biographical persona – was identified as that real object of aristocratic high culture, rather than as the conflicted reproduction and recuperation of it. The canonical construction of the Augustan Austen served the mutually implicating functions of canonizing both the Austen text and through it a particular version of high culture. Leavis’ ‘civilized life’ was a version of high culture pitted against the encroachments of popular culture, but also one which could be made to appear classless, democratic, non-elitist and organic. Austen’s modes of wit, irony and satire offer both a vicarious bourgeois reproduction and recuperation of aristocratic culture, as well as a bourgeois critique of aristocratic culture. This vicarious reproduction of and conflicted investment in aristocratic culture on the part of the bourgeois

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

professional classes instantiates precisely that form of the collective social and symbolic practice which Bourdieu has formulated as misrecognition. The critical tradition of identifying Austen with an aristocratic ideal of ‘civilization’ she is ambivalently reproducing – the historical slippage by which Austen the Romantic becomes Austen the Augustan – enacts a leading example of the practice of misrecognition. This class misrecognition works alongside gender awareness. In liberal-feminist criticism, the Augustan Austen fetish of Janeite criticism becomes what Donna Landry has referred to as the ‘aristocratic foremother’.²⁰

For Austen’s contemporaries and later nineteenth-century readers, Austen was not associated with the upper reaches of society. Walter Scott, for example, argues that ‘the author of *Emma* confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society; her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred country gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard’.²¹ Scott’s reading clearly bears the marks of a desire to display his own class superiority. Nonetheless, it also demonstrates the anachronism of twentieth-century readings of Austen which naturalize Austen and her fictions as unproblematically aristocratic, reflecting a settled and superior class perspective, thereby misrecognizing an extremely socially insecure fiction for the real thing. In this way, then, the Augustan ‘aristocratic’ Austen is a specifically post-Romantic construction. The Augustan versus Romantic Austen is a staple of traditional literary criticism; and in arguing for a Romantic as against an Augustan Austen, I do not wish to reproduce the terms of this conventional opposition. Rather, in fact, I would suggest that these terms are less opposed than might seem to be the case: that the Augustan Austen is actually a *post*-Romantic construction, implicated within a Romantic-humanist tradition of literary criticism.

Marked by a tentative history, the commitment to a Romantic Austen nonetheless runs deep. Marilyn Butler’s pioneering *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975) was the first work not only decisively to locate Austen’s texts in their immediate historical contexts but also to politicize that historical positioning by identifying Austen’s texts within a counter-revolutionary context of the 1790s. By identifying Austen as an anti-Jacobin, counter-revolutionary writer, whose texts featured a superlative ‘discretion’ which worked to naturalize an hierarchical, ‘organic’ social order, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* clearly enabled the location of Austen’s writings within the terms of a particular culture of conservative Romanticism. Another significant work to read Austen as a Romantic writer is Clifford Siskin’s

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

7

The Historicity of Romantic Discourse (1988). Engaging an historicizing and genre-based approach, Siskin's reading identified Austen's 'lyricization' of the novel genre as a strategy critically implicated, as was Wordsworth's lyric poetry, within Romantic ideologies of depth, development and nature. Siskin identifies Wordsworth's 'lyric turn to Imagination' (p. 125) and Austen's novelistic form of '[t]he self made continuously deeper by interpretative revision' (p. 126) as lyric forms which feature 'development' as 'a formal strategy . . . for naturalizing the changing interrelations of social and literary forms' (*Romantic Discourse*, pp. 131–2). More recently, Siskin revises this identification of Romanticism with lyricism and in doing so reformulates the question of Austen's relation to Romanticism: 'Was Austen a Romantic?' becomes a newly compelling question [when] Fielding and Richardson are not the rise, and Romanticism is not simply lyrical.'²² In chapter 2, I engage and extend this interesting complication of Siskin's argument in a discussion of the lyricizing impulses and effects of Austen's refinement of the narrative technique of free indirect style.

LITERARY HISTORY AND LITERATURE AS HISTORY: THE
NOVEL GENRE, CLASS AND GENDER

For a variety of reasons, conventional literary history credits Austen with having elevated the high-cultural claims and capital of the novel genre in the early nineteenth century. This study takes that conventional literary history to some extent as its object, in its reading of the Austen novel as a canonical construct. However, it does not set out to naturalize or rehearse Austen's canonical positioning, nor to offer a merely iconoclasting account of Austen and the novel, in terms of which Austen's centrality within the canon of the novel is seen to be purely arbitrary. An example of an iconoclasting account is Terry Eagleton's reading of Austen in *The Rape of Clarissa* in the context of a critique of the category of 'formal realism': 'technically speaking, Richardson could no doubt have pulled off what Jane Austen did; but the ideological exigencies of his fiction demanded otherwise'.²³ Here, a somewhat essentialized opposition between 'technique' and 'ideology' renders Eagleton's reading strangely *a* historical. It seems counter-intuitive for any form of ideology critique to argue that Richardson could have done what Austen did in formal or technical terms, but did not because of ideology, as though technique and ideology were capable of being easily disentangled, and as though form exists prior to ideology and waits first for the green light of legitimization through ideology before being instantiated in practice. Eagleton's special

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

pleading for Richardson works to reinstate the evaluative terms which Eagleton's critique is directed against, thereby offering a leading example of the 'conspiratorial' form of canon critique which John Guillory has problematized.²⁴ My critique of Austen and the canon does not seek to claim that Austen's position within the canon is arbitrary. Rather, it seeks to offer an historical account as to why Austen occupies that position, by asking what are the conditions and functions of the novel that Austen is seen retrospectively to fulfil and perform which enable her to occupy that position.

This study develops out of the cultural-materialist revision of the narrative of the rise of the novel, and locates Austen's work within the generic struggle for cultural recognition of the female-identified novel in the late eighteenth century. At the same time, however, it seeks to shift the Austen novel genre away from its primary critical location within the eighteenth-century 'rise of the novel' narrative and to contextualize it as a specifically Romantic form of cultural production. I am interested in engaging the multigeneric strategies that constitute Austen's *oeuvre*, which has been homogenized as the exemplary domestic realist novel, country-house or courtship novel. I wish to articulate generic discontinuities within the *oeuvre*, and offer an account of genre which relates generic specificities to the historical contexts of gender and class.

During the 1790s, when Austen started writing, the novel genre was so strongly identified with the sentimental novel that the categories of novel and sentimental novel are to a large extent mutually definitional in this period. This is not to underplay the significance, particularly in the 1790s, of genres such as the Gothic novel, but rather to argue that it is the sentimental novel which worked most consistently throughout the eighteenth century as the paradigmatic form of the novel genre. The sentimental novel worked to signify most emphatically the particular excesses of the fictional genre as a whole. As Clifford Siskin points out, elaborating a claim made by Janet Todd, 'Austen's immediate target was not gender but genre.' And it attacked '[t]hose things [which] were features of the particular kind of fiction – the sentimental – which was most closely identified with the problem of the constitutive power of writing – its capacity, as Janet Todd describes the sentimental, to bypass the mimetic and "force" response by linking the "literary" experience with the "living one"''.²⁵

The story of sentiment and sensibility, genres which were for so long so forgotten, and of how Austen moved 'beyond' them, which is the story of how Austen became the pretext by which they were forgotten,

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

9

is critical to the way in which I engage the canonical narrative of Austen. Siskin argues that 'Austen solved the threat of writing' (*Work of Writing*, p. 205) which was embodied most forcefully in the sentimental novel. Throughout this study, and in chapters 1 and 2 in particular, I also name that threat of writing as the threat of the sentimental novel, and identify the content of that threat with what could be called – after Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick – the sentimental novel's 'Muse of Masturbation'.²⁶ The threat that writing constituted in this period, in its identification with the sentimental genre and the female gender, was a specifically sexual threat. This threat was elaborated in an anxiety over the specifically sexual or corporeal nature of the response that is 'forced' by writing.

In *The Work of Writing*, Siskin's discussion of Austen engages the relations between market, genre and the professionalization and disciplining of writing during the Romantic period. He argues that 'categorizing Austen's beliefs about, and representations of, women remains an important task in considering her link to feminism, but this new context points to other work to be done. My focus here will be both on market and on genre' (*Work of Writing*, p. 198). For over two decades now, a predominantly Anglo-American and liberal-feminist critical interest in Austen *has* remembered gender, and has reinvigorated Austen studies by locating Austen firmly within the revisionary contexts of contemporary feminism. The high period of feminist literary canon-formation was the 1980s, which produced a number of significant works locating Austen within a female writing tradition.²⁷ In many of these feminist canon-forming works, however, the invocation of 'tradition' works to smooth over historical ruptures and ideological differences and to homogenize different forms of women's writing. This demonstrates that there is more work to be done in relation to Austen and gender. Part of this work has to do with being more critically aware of contemporary feminism's own investments. For the feminist investment in Austen is marked with its own Romanticizing impulses and tends to reproduce the terms of traditional canonizing narratives.

Contemporary feminist criticism has been more reluctant to situate Austen's feminism within the context of Austen's contemporary Enlightenment and Tory forms of feminism, and to interrogate the complex imbrications of class and gender in Austen's work. A notable exception here is Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, originally published in 1975, but which attributes to Austen a Tory feminism in its 1989 reissue, at the high point of the liberal-feminist rereading of Austen (see pp. xx–xxiii).

Cambridge University Press

0521808596 - Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon

Clara Tuite

Excerpt

[More information](#)

My account seeks to complicate Austen's feminism by exploring the relations among gender, class and genre: it focuses on how relations of class and gender are mediated through the cultural technology of the novel genre. My basic argument relates social mobility to cultural capital, to claim that Austen's novels are a complicated social and cultural technology which elevates the female-identified novel genre within the generic hierarchy and vindicates the upward social mobility of the lower-gentry or upper middle-class female within the marriage market. Both of these practices – the generic and the socio-historical – are inter-implicated. Throughout the study I seek to engage the conjunctions and disjunctions between the categories of class and gender which I see as structuring Austen's work. These contradictions between class and gender can be formulated as the conflicted effect of Austen's investment in a paternal, landed aristocratic culture and her commitment to upward social mobility for landless gentry or bourgeois women.

The book seeks to track the ways in which the novels' allegiance to the forms of a female-identified writing and reading culture, and to female upward social mobility, is mediated by an often contradictory investment in the mystique of a specifically aristocratic and paternal culture. The generic Austenean form of this complex investment is the marriage-plot of upward female mobility, where a bourgeois female subject is elevated into an aristocratic class which is at once the ultimate object of desire and reward for this exemplary form of bourgeois female subjectivity and desperately in need of reform and renovation through this exemplary bourgeois female subject. I argue for the constitutive cultural status of Austen's vindictory construction of a particular kind of sensible, moral, discriminating and aesthetically responsive bourgeois female subjectivity.

In his recent study of the novel and political economy, James Thompson argues that 'economic discourse and novelistic discourse are both forms of ideological expression . . . Both perform the main cultural work of the eighteenth century: reconceptualizing property relations.'²⁸ My study develops this argument to claim that Austen's novels are instrumental in this cultural labour of reconceptualizing property relations, and that this occurs across a particular axis of class and gender. Austen's labour of reconceptualization involves a counter-revolutionary vindication of hierarchical social and economic relations (negotiating social hierarchization and stratification with mobility), but it also involves the recommendation of a specifically bourgeois, cultured female subject and the vindication of her upward social mobility.